



NSW NURSES AND MIDWIVES' ASSOCIATION

MEDIA RELEASE

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NSW Health Minister confirms more privatisations and deserts our elderly

NSW Minister for Health, Jillian Skinner, confirmed there would be more privatisations of hospitals, claimed there was no evidence nursing home residents were better off with a registered nurse and conceded more funding was needed for public services at today's NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association's (NSWNMA) 71st Annual Conference in Sydney.

During question time, nurses confronted the Minister about issues of serious concern, such as the lack of appropriate funding for safe staffing at new regional hospitals; the removal of security staff at smaller sites, despite increasing problems with drugs and violence; allowing AiNs to work in mental health intensive care units; removing the requirement for registered nurses in nursing homes; privatising public health assets; and mandating nursing hours per patient day.

Minister Skinner washed her hands of the responsibility to ensure safe and appropriate staffing in nursing homes, referring the issue to the federal government, despite a clear indication from the Commonwealth that it is an issue for the states.

"What we did was look right across Australia. No other state or territory has this revision. They all left it to the Commonwealth. There's absolutely no evidence that any other nursing home residents are better off or worse off than in NSW. That's the reality. That's what's been found," Ms Skinner said.

The Minister also fielded a question from the Manly District Hospital branch referencing a Commission of Audit report from the Newman Queensland government a few years ago that showed public hospitals were more efficiently run under the public sector than the private.

"I can assure you that the contract we have signed with Healthscope for the Northern Beaches Hospital indicated a tremendous financial and quality advantage. We will look at involvement of the private sector and the not-for-profit sector in other places, such as Maitland. We've always said that. Watch this space for news about that in the future," Ms Skinner said.

NSWNMA members from the Wagga Wagga Rural Referral Hospital branch raised the issue of understaffing at the new facility and other new regional hospitals in NSW, such as Bega, Byron Bay and Tamworth. There has been a significant increase in presentations at the Wagga Wagga hospital since opening, which has resulted in nurses averaging 700 hours of overtime a week. The branch questioned the logic in providing capital works for new builds without the funding for staffing to cover the enormous footprint.

In her response, Minister Skinner said, "Sometimes these things take time to work their way through. There are trade offs. I acknowledge the importance of making sure we have the right number of nurses. I give you my commitment that I will continue to raise this with the Ministry through to the districts".

General Secretary of the NSWNMA, Brett Holmes thanked the Minister for attending and responded by saying the Association would continue to campaign here in NSW and across the country around the important issues.



“Clearly there is a widely felt message you received today about our concerns around aged care here in NSW. There is a shortfall in the provision of expert care in aged care right across the country. We are concerned about the cost shifting that will occur from aged care into the public health system,” Mr Holmes said.

“Aged care has a review underway around the Poisons Act and how that will impact nursing homes. If the protections are taken away there, that will be another reason the operators will say, ‘beauty, I can go to the bottom line, I can ask unqualified people to do more in relation to the administration of poisons’. We remain concerned for the welfare of those people in aged care facilities if that goes ahead.

“We want to progress nursing hours per patient day or ratios beyond where they’re currently stalled by the government’s wages policy. The battle continues around enforceability of nursing hours per patient day. The view that they are maximums, not minimums will continue to be an issue for us.

“There are many issues we want to continue to discuss with you. We would like to be in a situation where we can have those meaningful discussions at the bargaining table. We would urge your government to review its wages policy and reconstruct its thinking about how it negotiates with its workforce. We welcome all of the new capital works. As you’ve been told, it is causing enormous challenges. We understand \$40 million was put in this budget but it was around 12 months too late for our members who have suffered the consequences of the shortfalls.”

Mr Holmes went on to deliver the General Secretary Report, referencing the many campaigns the NSWNMA has been involved in over the past year, from RN 24/7, Save Medicare, Hands Off our Disability Services and Build a Better Future with the ACTU to the federal election campaign, Save Our Weekend penalty rates, paid parental leave and trade and tax justice.

Federal Secretary of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF), Lee Thomas and Assistant Federal Secretary, Annie Butler also spoke to delegates about ongoing issues facing nurses across the country.

The NSWNMA 71st Annual Conference concludes tomorrow, 22 July.

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