



NSW NURSES AND MIDWIVES' ASSOCIATION **MEDIA RELEASE**

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Health privatisation is damaging the nursing profession

The widespread practice of privatising public hospitals and health services across Australia is putting nurses' professional obligations at risk; has had a detrimental impact on the quality of our healthcare system and has blown out taxpayer-related costs, according to a major public inquiry.

The People's Inquiry into Privatisation will today launch its report, *Taking Back Control: A Community Response to Privatisation*, after visiting cities and towns in every state and territory over the past year to speak with affected community members.

Key issues identified as a result of health and disability privatisation outlined in the report include:

- Reductions in care hours for patients/clients
- A lack of government accountability
- Reductions in nurse staffing numbers and appropriate skill mix
- Profit motives outweighing the delivery of quality care
- Erosion of pay and working conditions for staff
- Cost blow-outs
- A decline in quality of services accessible to the public

Submissions from nurses to the inquiry also raised concerns regarding risks to the nursing profession and their professional obligations, such as duty of care, if health and disability privatisations continued to occur.

Registered Nurse, Robyn Brown stated to the panel: *"Our public award includes staff-to-patient ratios. So, as public nurses, we enjoy a better staff capacity than a private hospital would and we have a bigger registered nurse ratio to the AIN [Assistants in Nursing] ratio than the private hospitals. We are concerned that patients are not going to be treated the same"*

The NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA), a partner of the People's Inquiry, is well aware of the impact privatisation is having on its nursing and midwifery members.

"In a concerted effort, we've managed to prevent three of six hospital privatisations in NSW over the past three years, but the secrecy that's surrounded the new public-private partnership for Northern Beaches Hospital is alarming," NSWNMA General Secretary, Mr Holmes said.

"To be now less than a year from its planned opening and staff at nearby Manly and Mona Vale Hospitals still don't know what their conditions are, or even if they'll have a job to go to, is outrageous policy-making on the run by the NSW Government."

The deterioration of ageing and disability services under a privately operated model was raised by Chairperson of the Hunter Disability Support group, Graham Burgess at the NSW hearing: *"No other country in the world can hold a candle to the superior quality of ageing and disability care services that are in New South Wales...[but] once you dismantle an organisation that took over 35 years of concentrated effort, of taxpayers money, to build it to the near perfect model that exists throughout Australia today, or certainly throughout New South Wales. That cannot ever be rebuilt."*



Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation Northern Territory Branch Secretary, Yvonne Falckh, echoed concerns of the damage privatisation is having on the health sector and in particular, the decline of quality care in Justice Health.

“The nurse-to-patient ratio under private management meant there was at least half the number of nurses employed than what was urgently needed. The fact that the prison guards had to give out the medication is a whole gamut of problems. There were times where nurses were expected to deliver care with scripts written on pieces of paper. No right protocols, no policies. They were putting their registration at risk numerous times.”

“Under government control, at least there are protocols, policies, procedures. When you’re with a private employer, the risk of losing your job is a major thing, so they put up with what’s been happening because they’re too frightened that they’re going to lose their positions.”

The report makes 12 recommendations, including greater regulatory mechanisms and policy frameworks around the delivery of public services, an independent body to oversee privatised assets to ensure accountability and a moratorium on privatisation, until these conditions are put in place.

The [People’s Inquiry into Privatisation](#) report will be officially launched this evening from 6pm at the State Library Victoria.

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