



NSW NURSES AND MIDWIVES' ASSOCIATION

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## Cough or spit on frontline workers: you will cop it

The NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) has welcomed tough new laws, including on-the-spot fines, for individuals who assault nurses, midwives, police, paramedics and other frontline staff who are working tirelessly to keep our communities safe in the current pandemic.

NSW Health Minister, Brad Hazzard, today announced a new public health order, approved by the NSW Governor, allowing NSW Police the power to issue a \$5,000 on-the-spot fine and possible imprisonment for breaches of the regulation.

NSWNMA General Secretary, Brett Holmes, said the level of verbal abuse and aggression towards frontline health workers in uniform was abhorrent and had to stop.

"We've had dozens of reports from our members who have been abused in recent weeks, often while wearing their scrubs in the community and also in COVID-19 screening clinics," said Mr Holmes.

"From nurses and midwives in hospital settings to aged care – all health workers deserve to feel safe in their uniform. It's appalling behaviour by members of the public, especially when these assaults are happening against highly skilled, trained professionals.

"Nurses and midwives are leaders when it comes to infection control protocols, hand hygiene and public safety. They are at the frontline in tackling this pandemic and must be applauded for the work they're doing to keep patients and our broader community safe.

"In the past day, we've heard that a nurse had another customer kick her trolley in a supermarket and hurl abuse, yelling: *'I don't want your f..... viruses, stay the f..... away from me!'*, leaving the nurse in tears.

"We've also heard of a nurse who was discriminated against at a petrol station, while wearing her clean uniform on her way to work. The store attendant told her: *'You are disgusting wearing your uniform – you know I can refuse to serve you'*.

"It's extremely disappointing frontline workers, who are trying to save lives, are being treated in this way.

"Today's announcement is very welcome and we do hope it encourages people to stop and think before acting so hideously."

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