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Delta disruption hurts an already strained health system

New data shows emergency department (ED) clinicians have continued to persevere through demanding circumstances inside the state's public hospitals, after facing one of the busiest quarters for life-threatening 'Emergency' (triage category 2) presentations on record.

The latest [Bureau of Health Information](#) (BHI) report has revealed more category 2 patients arrived at EDs, and also waited longer for their treatment, than during any other July to September quarter since the BHI began reporting 11 years ago.

As a result, the NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) has repeated calls for the NSW government to introduce mandated nurse-to-patient ratios, which would ensure safe patient care inside a health system already strained by record patient numbers and fatigued workers.

NSWNMA General Secretary, Brett Holmes, said the July to September figures gave further insight into the precarious situation health staff, including nurses and midwives, were constantly in.

"The data speaks volumes regarding the urgent need to resolve ongoing staff shortages inside our public hospitals. Health staff have gone to extraordinary lengths to deliver care, particularly in challenging circumstances due to the Delta outbreak," said Mr Holmes.

"It should ring alarm bells when a record number of patients, who are increasingly unwell, are not able to be treated urgently in an ED. The workplace pressures this situation puts on nurses, and other health staff, is immense and unsustainable.

"The number of positive COVID-19 patients admitted to hospital rose noticeably during July and August and continued until hitting a peak in the second half of September, when there were also more patients requiring intensive care and ventilation.

"This is in addition to the longest average length of stay recorded for patients admitted to hospital.

"The NSW government has a responsibility to take action to support nurses and midwives, and make sure our community receives the highest quality care in the appropriate amount of time.

"Nurses and midwives have been pleading with the NSW government to introduce minimum nurses-to-patient ratios for years, and this latest data reinforces the need to address this urgent staffing crisis."

Mr Holmes said it was important to acknowledge the efforts and professional skills of nursing staff who managed the care of community patients inside Special Health Accommodation (SHA) during the Delta peak. The number of SHA patients increased ten-fold during the July-September quarter.

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