



15 February 2022

Demand for safe staffing ratios echoes across NSW

Around 5,000 nurses and midwives dressed in scrubs and face masks [marched on NSW parliament](#) today, as thousands more participated in a statewide strike to demand nurse-to-patient ratios on every shift across the public health system.

Burnout from the COVID-19 pandemic and fed up with the NSW government's refusal to prioritise safe staffing in public hospitals and health services, NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) members stood in solidarity and declared to the NSW Premier their goodwill was over.

Across the day, nurses and midwives turned out at regional rallies in Albury, Armidale, Bathurst, Bega, Canowindra, Coffs Harbour, Cooma, Corowa, Cowra, Dubbo, Gilgandra, Griffith, Gunnedah, Inverell, Kempsey, Lismore, Newcastle, Orange, Port Macquarie, Shoalhaven, Tamworth, Taree, Finley, Wagga Wagga, and Yass.

NSWNMA General Secretary, Brett Holmes, told the crowd of nurses, midwives and supporters sprawled along Macquarie Street it was an historic day, and commended more than 13,000 members who voted to strike, for standing up for their patients and themselves.

"This staffing crisis in our health system should never have happened and could have been avoided if those sitting in that building had listened to us," Mr Holmes said.

"For over 10 years we have campaigned for shift by shift ratios for nurses and better staffing for midwives because we know ratios work, they save lives and save money. Our role is not to simply stay at the bedside keeping patients alive – we have a duty to everyone in our care to stand up and speak out, especially those unable to do so for themselves."

NSWNMA Assistant General Secretary, Shaye Candish, said it was disgraceful how quick the NSW government had been to praise nurses and midwives, yet ignore the need for safe staffing or better pay and conditions to support the health workforce.

"Unless you want to see us here again, Premier, listen to all of us and meet our demands," said Ms Candish.

"We want you to implement our shift by shift nursing and midwifery staffing claims for safe patient care; commit to a fair pay rise above 2.5% and introduce a COVID-19 allowance; and withdraw the amendment to the Workers' Compensation Act that would force health workers to prove they contracted COVID-19 at work."

NSWNMA President, O'Bray Smith, encouraged the Health Minister to take a closer look at the dire situation across the public health system.

"Minister! Ratios – while saving lives decrease the morbidity and mortality – reduce the health budget, research has shown that," said Ms Smith.

Wyong Hospital branch president, Kelly Falconer, a clinical nurse specialist in emergency, described current staffing levels as similar to a war zone.

"As a frontline worker, I am the face you see at your worst – injured; can't breathe; chest pain; suicidal – there is no limit to what we see and deal with or the numbers. And, it's 24/7. We are



humans, and it's draining and soul destroying. Our job is much harder when we don't have adequate staffing."

Wollongong Hospital branch delegate and midwife, Sarah Morton, described how many colleagues were past breaking point.

"Midwives are unable to provide the minimum standard of care women and babies deserve. The pride we used to feel in where we work, and serving our community, is dwindling because we are embarrassed by how broken the system is. Rosters are being published with 150 shifts unfilled. We cannot meet the reasonable expectations of the community with these excessive workloads."

Steadfast in their determination to be heard, the crowd of NSWNMA members raised their hands in support of further strike action and signalled to the Premier they would not give in until all demands were met to achieve nurse-to-patient ratios, better pay and conditions for nurses and midwives.

The strike action across 150 public hospitals and health services was staggered across the morning, with nurses and midwives walking off the job for up to 24 hours at over a dozen facilities.

The NSWNMA confirmed it would continue talks with the government and reiterated calls for urgent action by the Premier.

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