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## Understaffed EDs prompt walk out by Western Sydney nurses

After weeks of battling rising patient presentations and no reprieve from chronic short staffing, a group of emergency department nurses staged a walk out, in their own time, from Blacktown and Westmead hospitals this morning.

Severe understaffing and a lack of support from the NSW government prompted the nursing staff to walk out at the end of their night shift, supported by other nurses from ICU, operating theatres, general wards and midwives from maternity.

NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) members braved the winter morning to call on the NSW Premier Dominic Perrottet to increase staffing in their emergency departments, and to raise community awareness of how the staffing crisis is impacting the delivery of safe patient care.

NSWNMA General Secretary, Brett Holmes, said patients were waiting for extended periods in overcrowded emergency departments and a lack of safe nurse-to-patient ratios was contributing to the strain.

"With flu and COVID-19 presentations on the rise, these emergency departments are regularly overwhelmed and there has been little to no reprieve for our members because urgent measures are not being taken to help combat the issues," said Mr Holmes.

"Our members are reporting high rates of burnout and fatigue, due to the regular requests for overtime work and constant double shifts. This has prompted many senior ED nurses to reduce their hours, while others are leaving the profession altogether.

"The NSW government cannot continue asking exhausted nurses and midwives to do more with less staff. The number of staff currently off sick or isolation themselves is climbing daily and the return of school this week could see those rates rise further.

"We need the NSW Premier to acknowledge the staffing crisis and to stop taking nurses and midwives for granted, expecting them to continue working until they drop – it's unsafe for the staff and the patients in their care."

NSWNMA members reported between 50 and 100 unfunded beds were opened recently to help with demand at Blacktown and Westmead hospitals, but warned there were not enough nurses rostered per shift to care for patients in the extra beds.

NSWNMA Blacktown Hospital branch delegate, Jess, said nurses were sacrificing their own health and wellbeing while trying to care for their communities.

"We are constantly short staffed, and the overcrowding is rife. We've had upwards of 40 or 50-plus people stuck in our ED waiting rooms during the night, sometimes more. We're really worried about non-COVID patients having to wait alongside positive COVID-19 patients," Jess said.

"Bed block is a real issue. Patients are presenting more unwell, meaning they're staying in hospital longer, which is disrupting the flow from the emergency department. We want to provide safe care to all patients, but the overcrowding conditions are an enormous challenge."



NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association

## Media Release

NSWNMA Westmead Hospital branch delegate, Denny Anderson, said members felt compelled to speak up and highlight current conditions inside their emergency departments.

“We’re on the cusp of yet another wave of the pandemic, coupled with increased cases of flu and other viruses, but already we are treating too many patients in corridors, while others are sleeping on the floor,” Denny said.

“During the night shift, there are delays of between seven and ten hours for patients waiting to be seen and there’s been no let up. We all want to give patients the best possible care, but these challenges are making it increasingly difficult.”

The NSWNMA said it was continuing to call on the NSW government to introduce safe staffing ratios into emergency departments, as well as other specialty areas where understaffing was occurring, including in intensive care units, paediatrics and maternity.

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### **MEDIA CONTACTS:**

Brett Holmes, NSWNMA General Secretary - 0414 550 324

Shaye Candish, NSWNMA Assistant General Secretary - 0427 550 194

Gia Hayne, NSWNMA Media Advisor - 0488 015 317