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## Nurses and midwives are angry and hurting without ratios

Thousands of nurses and midwives walked off the job for 24-hours today, the fourth statewide strike this year, desperate to have their voices heard by the NSW government and for widespread staffing concerns to be urgently addressed.

NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) members from metropolitan and regional public hospitals chanted as they marched up Macquarie Street in Sydney's CBD. Their cries for safe staffing ratios, better working conditions and fair pay were echoed at over 30 regional rallies and actions [from Albury to Tweed Heads and Broken Hill](#) in the far west.

NSWNMA General Secretary, Shaye Candish, said the sea of nurses in Martin Place was angrier than ever, and it was time for the NSW government to do better and scrap its public sector wage cap.

"Nursing and midwifery in NSW is shamefully being destroyed. Health care as we know it is deteriorating in front of our eyes and NSW is being left behind. Left behind other states, as other state governments capitalise on our falling wages and conditions here in NSW, by enticing nurses and midwives to work interstate where ratios and better pay are on offer," said Ms Candish.

"The government's wages will hurt nurses and midwives into their retirement. This policy is deeply discriminatory towards women who are the majority of public sector workers, and its designed by politicians who have no understanding of the value that we bring to our communities."

NSWNMA Assistant General Secretary, Michael Whaites said the NSW government's staffing and wages policies were pushing nurses and midwives out of the state and out of the professions.

"Our members are hurting from cost of living pressures and having their wages suppressed for such an extended period. They're fed up and they're over it," said Mr Whaites.

"Since our first statewide strike back in February, the staffing shortages have only got worse. The longer this government fails to introduce shift by shift nursing and midwifery ratios, the greater the burden on our health workforce. The government must sit down with us tomorrow and make an offer."

NSWNMA Liverpool Hospital Branch President and emergency nurse, Melissa Mansell, described the physical and mental toll bearing down on overworked nurses and midwives.

"How can the job I love hurt me this much? How can fighting for my patients be this difficult? How can being a nurse make me feel so sick I don't want to do it anymore?" asked Ms Mansell.

NSWNMA Cooma Hospital Branch President and theatre nurse, Bob Lloyd, told the Sydney crowd how poor staffing was rife in regional areas.

"Half our ward nurses are agency on short term contracts to fill a huge amount of vacancies – just like a lot of other regional hospitals across the state. We need a better permanent skill mix and the resources to make that happen. Our community deserves better care. Our staff deserve better care. It's time that rural health gets a better deal," said Mr Lloyd.

NSWNMA Macquarie Hospital Branch Secretary and mental health nurse, Sarah Ellyard said having ratios would make a world of difference in mental health nursing.



“We’re told that mental health care is a priority. If we are really to prioritise mental health, then we need minimum ratios in all areas of mental health nursing. No area can be left behind in our fight for safe staffing and ratios across our public health system,” said Ms Ellyard.

NSWNMA Wollongong Hospital Branch President and ICU nurse, Bianca Vergouw outlined how tired, stressed, and frustrated nurses and midwives were because of the government’s failure to act.

“I’ve been nursing for 30 years and I’ve never ever seen the public health system as bad as it is now. We need nurse-to-patient ratios now and a system in maternity where babies count. 1:4 on the wards, 1:3 in ED and on maternity wards; and 1:1 in ICU and birthing units,” said Ms Vergouw.

Life-preserving services will be maintained in all public hospitals and health services until the statewide strike concludes at 7am Thursday, 24 November (the end of night shift).

The NSWNMA called on the NSW government to discuss nurses and midwives’ demands for safe staffing ratios, improved working conditions and fair pay without a wage cap.

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