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Hospital data reinforces need for staffing ratios in NSW

The NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) has escalated calls for nurse-to-patient ratios to be introduced statewide, off the back of new data showing more patients sought emergency treatment in public hospitals towards the end of 2022 than prior to the pandemic.

According to the latest [Bureau of Health Information](#) (BHI) report, over 790,300 people attended emergency departments (ED) during October to December last year, up 13,758 from the same quarter in 2019.

NSWNMA General Secretary, Shaye Candish, said the need was evident for a reliable and enforceable nurse-to-patient ratios system to better manage demand on the hospital system.

"The NSW government's complete lack of minimum ED staffing is not sustainable, and interventions are needed to ensure patients are treated promptly. Having a ratio of one nurse to every three treatment spaces in our EDs would both assist patients and staff," said Ms Candish.

"The BHI data shows almost 68,000 ED patients left without, or before, completing treatment during October to December, while one in 10 patients who were treated and admitted still spent almost 20 hours waiting in the ED over the same quarter.

"To improve these figures, urgent investment is needed in our skilled nursing workforce which has suffered widespread burnout and fatigue. NSW patients deserve better, they deserve ratios."

NSWNMA Assistant General Secretary, Michael Whaites, said the pressure on EDs was apparent across major metropolitan hospitals but was also felt in regional settings.

"John Hunter Hospital continues to be one of the busiest sites in the state, while Tweed Hospital in the north had a 13.9 per cent jump in ED attendances for October to December compared to the same quarter the previous year," said Mr Whaites.

"There was also a rise in ED patients for the quarter at Broken Hill Hospital (up 18%), Kurri Kurri (up 26.3%), Young (up 30.3%) and Moruya (up 30.3%) compared to 2021 levels. While wait times inside EDs suffered at Maitland, Blacktown and Westmead hospitals.

"We call on the Perrottet government to acknowledge its own hospital data. This shows how much nurses and midwives are battling on, juggling workloads, and feeling unsupported. Shift by shift ratios are a safe, evidence-based solution to these workforce pressures."

In the lead up to the March state election, NSWNMA members are urging candidates from all political persuasions to support minimum and enforceable nurse-to-patient ratios, improved maternity staffing and fair pay.

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