

# Ratios



## RATIOS ROLLOUT: PHASE ONE

# Frequently Asked Questions

### What is the Safe Staffing Levels Taskforce?

Following the March 2023 state election, the NSW government established the Safe Staffing Levels Taskforce. The Taskforce is comprised of senior officials at the NSW Ministry of Health, Local Health Districts (LHDs) and officers of the NSWNMA, including your General Secretary and Assistant General Secretary.

The Taskforce is required to develop plans to implement the government's Safe Staffing Levels policy. To date, this process has seen agreement reached on much of the NSWNMA's Ratios Claim within five clinical areas however, the Ministry has sought some alternatives. These are the Taskforce recommendations you are being asked to consider.

### Why is the proposed implementation different from our Ratios Claim? Didn't Labor commit to our claim in five key areas?

There are some differences between our 2023 Ratios Claim and the recommendations from the Taskforce. The government allocated funding for 2480 new FTE positions in the state budget. Throughout the Taskforce discussions it became clear 2480 FTE will not cover the full claim, therefore the Taskforce is recommending variations. This is intended to ensure more areas receive the benefit of ratios staffing.

Public sector members will decide if these variations are acceptable. Your NSWNMA Council has reviewed the recommendations and is asking you to vote 'Yes'. This will allow the first phase of shift by shift ratios to be implemented, and the NSWNMA remains committed to continue fighting for increased funding.

### Why should AiNs be included in the ratios staffing numbers?

The proposal to include Assistant in Nursing (AiNs) in the ratios count includes a maximum number of AiNs per shift, where under the current system there is no limit. For the first time, NSWNMA members will have certainty about skill mix, and AiNs will be able to contribute to their wards safely and effectively with appropriate support, rather than just to fill rostering gaps.

Through the Taskforce discussions, the Ministry was transparent about the lack of funding for AiNs currently employed in NSW Health to be utilised in addition (supernumerary) to the ratio numbers. This means the ongoing employment of AiNs (our fellow NSWNMA members) would be at risk. Additionally, replacing all current AiN positions with ENs or RNs would reduce the 2480 FTE enhancement significantly, thereby reducing the ratios rollout.

The NSWNMA remains supportive of undergraduate nursing students being able to gain experience in the health system as AiNs. Any removal of AiNs would place this pathway at risk.

### Will every shift on every ward have an AiN counted in numbers?

The maximum number of AiNs, as outlined in tables inside the **Ratios Rollout: Phase One** document, is a limit on AiNs being counted within the relevant ratio numbers. Where the limit is one per shift, that shift may have one AiN counted in numbers, or zero. If a shift already has one AiN counted in the numbers, any additional AiNs will need to be in addition to the ratio numbers to be compliant.

## When will ratios commence on my ward or unit?

The implementation schedule is still in discussion within the Taskforce however, the Ministry has advised the first facilities to convert to shift by shift ratios will be in March 2024.

The implementation will be phased in, with 2480 FTE to be employed over the next three years. Further details of the implementation schedule will be shared with members as soon as possible. This transition model is similar to the ongoing approach utilised in other states.

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## Will non-compliance with ratios need to be raised at the Reasonable Workload Committee?

The RWC will not be where ratios Award breaches are resolved. It's acknowledged the RWC process is not suitable for compliance with a shift by shift ratios system, where matters must be addressed within 24 to 48 hours.

Compliance with ratios will be on a shift by shift basis, with clear escalation pathways when there are patterns of non-compliance, through hospital and LHD management and including the Ministry, if required. This is an improvement to current practice and should ensure the steps taken to resolve staffing shortages occur quickly.

Reasonable Workload Committees will continue to exist for those areas which are yet to have ratios implemented, and to seek staffing enhancements which are over the minimum ratios, or for other workload matters.

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## How do the proposed ratios compare to those in other states?

A summary of ratios arrangements in other jurisdictions is available in the **State by State comparison** document. The picture across Australia is mixed. In some specialties, the ratios being implemented in NSW will be significantly better than those in other states.

If members vote 'Yes' to the Taskforce recommendations, shift by shift ratios will commence in NSW for the very first time. Victoria commenced its ratios rollout over 20 years ago, with a phased approach into many specialties, however NSW will equal or surpass many of Victoria's ratios within the next three years.

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## What if my ward/unit staffing is currently better than the ratio being introduced?

Ward staffing and skill mix that is currently above the minimum ratio numbers will be maintained. Any proposed reduction in staff numbers or skill mix must be subject to a review that considers clinical need. If the NSWNMA does not agree with the outcome, the decision can be the subject of a Dispute under Award procedures (including escalation to the IRC). The new ratios are a minimum, and do not prevent management from providing increased staff at any time.

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## What about pay and other improvements?

This vote does not include any offers or recommendations about pay or any conditions except for those staffing arrangements in the **Ratios Rollout: Phase One** document.

There is significant work ahead to secure a major increase to nurses and midwives' pay, and to remedy 12 years of wage suppression. This will require all public sector members committing to campaigning for a significant wage increase in 2024. The Association is undertaking the preparation for this in the lead up to our Log of Claims processes.

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## What exactly are we voting on?

This vote is for your public sector branch to endorse the Taskforce recommendations, as outlined in the **Ratios Rollout: Phase One** document.

If a majority of branches vote 'Yes' to the recommendations, work will commence to implement ratios in NSW, on an agreed timetable, as well as necessary changes to your Award to ensure enforceability.

**The NSWNMA Council is recommending members vote 'Yes' to these recommendations, so the work of implementing desperately needed ratios can begin.**

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