

**Submission
No 20**

**THE SAFETY AND QUALITY OF HEALTH SERVICES PROVIDED BY NORTHERN
BEACHES HOSPITAL**

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Partially
Confidential

Submission to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into the Operation and Management of Northern Beaches Hospital

Re: Inquiry into the safety and quality of services at Northern Beaches Hospital (NBH)

As a concerned community member, I have watched with increasing dismay the tragic and predictable failings of the public-private partnership (PPP) model at Northern Beaches Hospital. The death of two-year-old Joe Massa was not an isolated event—it was the most tragic example yet of a structural failure that began the day our public hospitals were handed over to a private, profit-driven operator.

A private equity firm owns Healthscope reportedly saddled the organisation with over \$1 billion in debt. As a result, decisions are driven not by public health needs but by financial engineering. In any system where cost-cutting, reduced staffing, and returns to offshore shareholders outweigh the mission of care, tragedies are inevitable.

When nurses and midwives take to the streets—as they did on March 24, 2025—pleading for safe staffing ratios, breaks during 12-hour shifts, and parity with public-sector colleagues, the system is already broken

We've heard from staff about being "pushed beyond what is manageable" and working shifts without a moment to use the bathroom. This is not an issue of individual error. It is a feature of the system: a private model that underpays its staff, under-resources critical services, and overburdens frontline workers while extracting profit from the public health purse.

[REDACTED]

Joe's Rule is a welcome reform. But rules mean nothing without a system designed to uphold them. When Healthscope admitted there were "unacceptable failing" and promised changes, it was reacting to media pressure—not proactively safeguarding our children.

Accountability, Transparency and the 2019 Inquiry Ignored

This is not the first time these concerns have been raised. The 2019 parliamentary inquiry into NBH's operations made a series of recommendations. What did Healthscope do in response? Their 2019 submission offers polished language about "patient experience" and "commitment to quality", but independent audits show those same concerns have continued.

If the past six years prove anything, it is that private operators do not respond to polite suggestions or moral obligation—they respond to legal mandates and public pressure. That is why Joe's Law, banning the PPP model for acute hospitals in NSW, is an essential and overdue step.

The False Promise of Efficiency

We were told the PPP model would deliver “state-of-the-art healthcare at a lower cost to taxpayers.” But when private insurers like Teachers Health and Police Health threatened to pull out due to pricing disputes, it became clear that the cost efficiencies were a mirage

Healthscope's mounting financial problems threaten NBH's long-term viability. What happens if Healthscope collapses or sells to another equity firm? Do we, the public, have to rescue our hospital again?

A Public Hospital in Disguise

Make no mistake: NBH treats thousands of public patients, is funded by the taxpayer, and is run by a private firm with no electoral accountability. Even the emergency department is part of this arrangement. Yet staffing levels, service priorities, and access to protocols like REACH are all dictated by a private entity whose obligation is to shareholders, not citizens.

We would never accept this model for the police or fire brigade. Why should we do this for hospitals?

Recommendations

End the PPP model for acute hospitals statewide. Joe's Law must pass and be permanent.

Bring NBH fully into public hands through acquisition or by terminating the operator contract before its 2038 end date.

Implement pay and staffing parity for all health workers at NBH with NSW Health equivalents.

Publish all Serious Adverse Event Reviews and require annual public reporting of staffing ratios and clinical outcomes.

Ensure complete independence of any audits or reviews, free from influence by the operator or government department.

Northern Beaches Hospital has shown us what happens when we outsource care to a private enterprise: the care becomes secondary. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

We cannot wait for another child to die, another nurse to burn out, or another audit to be buried.

This is our hospital. It's time we took it back.