

**Submission  
No 200**

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

**Organisation:** Australian Paramedics Association (NSW)

**Date Received:** 20 May 2025

Australian Paramedics Association (NSW)  
15 Bourke Rd  
Mascot, NSW 2020

May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Coda Danu-Asmara, Industrial Officer, on behalf of the Australian Paramedics Association (NSW), as authorised by Assistant Secretary Gary Wilson.

For further questions related to this submission, please contact the general address at [admin@apansw.com.au](mailto:admin@apansw.com.au)

## Submission for the Public Accounts Committee's Inquiry into the Safety and Quality of Health Services Provided by Northern Beaches Hospital

The Australian Paramedics Association (NSW) (APA (NSW)) is a registered trade union representing the paramedics employed by NSW Ambulance. APA (NSW) is grateful for the opportunity to give a response on the safety and quality of health services provided by the Northern Beaches Hospital. Our observations and recommendations are informed by on the ground feedback from paramedics who have brought patients to or from the Northern Beaches Hospital as well as attended to patients there.

It must first be noted that paramedics have a relatively limited view into the background procedures and systems management of the Northern Beaches Hospital, or any hospital for that matter. However, paramedics who are located at ambulance stations near the hospital, particularly in stations like Narrabeen, Mona Vale, or Avalon, will frequently if not nearly every shift visit the emergency department of the Northern Beaches Hospital. With that in mind, this submission will revolve around our paramedics' experience with the emergency department at Northern Beaches Hospital and therefore be limited mostly to terms 2(a) and 2(f) of the terms of reference.

Paramedics who frequented the Northern Beaches Hospital Emergency Department generally reported positive experiences with staff, who were considered to be attentive and understanding.

Notably, this group of paramedics asserted that ‘ramping’ and ‘bedblock’ occurred significantly less at the Northern Beaches Hospital compared to other Sydney Hospitals. These are terminologies used to describe the occurrence where paramedics are forced to wait in the emergency department with their patient while they are being triaged, sometimes in excess of several hours, due to lack of hospital staff or open beds to take the patient. Bedblock is a serious problem in hospitals in New South Wales at large, as it both significantly slows down patient care and ties up the resources of New South Wales Ambulance that could be used to serve their communities. While the Northern Beaches Hospital is not free of this issue, paramedics appear to believe, particularly in the last twelve months, that the Northern Beaches Hospital is better than most other Sydney hospitals for the ramping issue.

However, Paramedics all agreed that the Northern Beaches Hospital’s emergency department suffers from an overabundance of low acuity work flowing in from the nursing homes in the local area. These include simple tasks such as catheter changes or wound dressings that do not necessarily need to be done in hospital. However, as the local nursing homes lack the resources, these patients flood the emergency department and tie up resources, which will force paramedics to transport patients further south to North Shore Hospital and may cause negative patient outcomes when time is of the essence. While paramedics agree that these patients should be seen and that low acuity work remains vital in the community, they assert that it is a failure of the health district as a whole that these patients are not receiving the necessary care at the facilities in which they are located.

Paramedics generally agreed that the staff at Northern Beaches, which includes nursing, medical, and allied health, is very experienced and of high quality.

Paramedics generally agreed that the staff at Northern Beaches would listen to their concerns regarding patients. If paramedics believed that a patient should be placed at a higher triage

and therefore would be seen sooner, the triage nurses would usually agree and have the patient be seen earlier. However, this was not a universal opinion, with one paramedic asserting that staff at the hospital had ignored his concerns about a seriously ill patient. Nonetheless, there was a consensus that the Northern Beaches Hospital provided, on average, no worse care or support than any other hospital in Sydney.

All paramedics agreed that quality of care and systems had improved within the last six to twelve months. Patients are now seen more quickly and are handed off more efficiently than before. Paramedics specifically noted that paediatric patients are now consistently be triaged one step above their ordinary triage level, i.e. seen sooner than an adult patient with the same symptoms. Additionally, the parents of paediatric patients now receive a small brochure that reminds them of their rights as caregivers and gives them multiple ways to escalate care if they think their child's care is suboptimal.

The paramedics interviewed heavily criticised the profit-motive referral pathways practiced by Northern Beaches Hospital. Paramedics noted that their patients would frequently be referred to private hospitals for further expensive procedures. Paramedics believe that these referrals would not occur at state-run hospitals and may not be optimal for patient care. Paramedics also noted that they would frequently transfer patients out of the Northern Beaches Hospital purely because they did not have private health insurance and therefore could not afford some of the procedures on offer.

Finally, paramedics did note that, in casual conversation with the staff at the Northern Beaches, that staff were generally unhappy with the processes and procedures put in place by Healthscope and the governance of Northern Beaches Hospital. Paramedics also all agreed that the Northern Beaches Hospital has a reputation in the healthcare community for poor healthcare outcomes and administrative mismanagement. However, APA (NSW) would like to request that the Committee not place too much weight on this evidence due to its hearsay nature. It has been included out of the principle to include all relevant facts, as it was an

undercurrent in nearly every interview. In terms of actual service output, as noted above, the paramedics generally agreed that the emergency department of the hospital was of the same quality as or better quality than any other in Sydney.

We thank the Committee for the chance to provide a submission to this inquiry and will always welcome the chance to provide further oral or written submissions if required.