

Inquiry into impact that ambulance ramping and access block is having on the operation of hospital emergency departments in New South Wales

Hearing – 7/10/2022

Questions on Notice

QUESTION 1 – page 36

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Could I just explore something, Secretary, in terms of the department's awareness of, I suppose to put it in crude terms, bang for buck? My understanding is that about one-third of the State budget is directed towards health, and then we heard this morning on evidence and we've seen in submissions that 55 per cent of health is contributed to by the Federal Government—NDIS, aged care—and then 45 per cent by the State. Has there been any jurisdictional comparisons of the amount of percentages of budgets that get spent on the New South Wales system compared to elsewhere? Because it seems to me like if you've got such a large proportion of budget dedicated to one sector—and rightly so; health is the most important thing we've got—then are we getting value for money compared to other jurisdictions. For example, you made the statement that you thought we were world leading. **Are there comparisons in terms of what we're getting for our money? Is one-third of the budget unusually high for a jurisdictional comparison or is it an acceptable standard? Do we have any analysis on that?**

ANSWER

The Australian Bureau of Statistics publication *Government Finance Statistics* includes data on Government expenses by purpose across jurisdictions.

QUESTION 2 – page 37

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Ms Pearce mentioned there was an increase in advertising, and Dr Morgan was able to give quite a specific number of applicants. Some of the evidence that we've heard in this inquiry is that it's just so difficult to fill some of those senior roles once people have left. Are you still seeing that that increase in advertising is able to actually recruit some of those senior roles—particularly in some of the hospitals where we're hearing that it's even more difficult, such as western Sydney and other places like that? Are we seeing an outcome from that increase in advertisements?

ANSWER

Advertising for vacant roles is one aspect of NSW Health's recruitment strategy.

QUESTION 3 – page 39

SUSAN PEARCE: Yes. I couldn't agree more about alternatives to emergency departments for people with mental health issues. Really, they are not great environments for mental health. But, of course, there are circumstances where for people, absolutely that is the right place for them to be. There is quite a significant amount of investment in alternatives. One of those is—and I don't mean to continue to reflect back on estimates but it was pretty recent—the Safe Haven models. We have 15 of those. There's been an investment of around \$90 million in those. There's a

further \$5 million to come. We're seeing some positive results from those as an alternative to emergency departments.

We did establish some years ago now the PACER model, which you may have also heard about, between ambulance, police and our mental health services. We've continued to expand those models. Going back to the last report that I can put my hands on in terms of how we compare to other States on this measure, the New South Wales emergency departments have the highest proportion of mental health patients seen on time within triage categories compared to other States. It is something that we've also worked with our clinicians on. We've got some fantastic models in our emergency departments.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I'll just throw this out quickly because it was one issue that came up, and a brief answer would be appreciated. One young person came in and said that they weren't even aware of what any of these services were. Is there any money going into advertising for those services so that when people need to find them, they can?

ANSWER

Each local health district and specialty health network use local arrangements and channels to publicise the location and operating hours of their Safe Havens, including webpages and social media.

QUESTION 4 – page 45

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I just have one question. You did an ED patient survey in 2021. Is there one available for 2022? I only say that because you said they rated their care as very good, which was unchanged from the year before. Also, of the percentage of people who present, what percentage actually completed the survey?

ANSWER

The relevant Bureau of Health Information (BHI) results reflect the experiences of 20,728 patients who attended one of 77 large emergency departments (EDs) in NSW public hospitals from July 2020 to June 2021.

Overall, almost 9 in 10 (89%) patients rated their care as 'very good' (62%) or 'good' (27%). The percentage of patients rating their care as 'very good' was unchanged from the 2019–20 survey.

Detailed results of the Emergency Department Patient Survey 2020–21 are available on the BHI website at: https://www.bhi.nsw.gov.au/BHI_reports/patient_survey_results/emergency_department_patient_survey_2020-21

BHI will release the results of the Emergency Department Patient Survey 2021-22 in the first half of 2023.

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Supplementary questions

QUESTION 1

Does the NSW Government acknowledge that ramping is a common occurrence in NSW?

ANSWER

Transfer of care performance of the NSW Health system is not static and can vary on a day-to-day basis. The NSW Government is committed to increasing the capacity of NSW Ambulance and public hospitals having built or upgraded more than 180 health facilities since 2011, with more than 130 projects currently underway. This includes 73 ambulance stations which have been delivered or are being delivered as part of the Rural Ambulance Infrastructure Reconfiguration (RAIR) program and the Sydney Ambulance Metropolitan Infrastructure Strategy (SAMIS). The NSW Government has also allocated \$1.76 billion to boost frontline emergency care, which will support an additional 2,128 paramedics and control centre staff.

QUESTION 2

Does the NSW Government acknowledge that increasing the number of Extended Care Paramedics (ECP) would help to reduce bedblock in NSW?

ANSWER

All NSW Ambulance paramedics are highly trained and equipped to safely provide a range of interventions and treatment to patients. All paramedics regardless of skill set form part of the integrated clinical services model of NSW Health.

The 2022-23 NSW Budget allocated \$1.76 billion to boost the capacity of NSW Ambulance, funding 2,128 paramedics and control centre staff across the state, including 1,858 frontline staff, 210 support staff, 52 nurses and eight doctors for the Virtual Clinical Care Centre (VCCC).

QUESTION 3

How many Extended Care Paramedics are currently working in regional NSW?

a. Can you break this down by local health district?

ANSWER

NSW Ambulance does not deploy its workforce on the basis of local health district boundaries.

QUESTION 4

On average what is the cost saving per patient diverted by an ECP from the Emergency Department?

ANSWER

NSW Health does not collect this data.

QUESTION 5

Of the 10,148 full-time health worker that the NSW Government has committed to;

- a. What percentage will be going to areas outside of metropolitan Sydney, Illawarra, Central Coast and Newcastle?
- b. What percentage will be going to the Illawarra, Central Coast and Newcastle?
- c. How many new Paramedics are being sent to areas outside of metropolitan Sydney, Illawarra, Central Coast and Newcastle?
- d. Can you provide a list of new health staff broken down by local health district?
- e. How many new Paramedics are being hired in total?
- f. How was the number of new healthcare workers determined?

ANSWER

a. - f.

The 10,148 FTE staff are yet to be distributed across the system for all 4 years, as distribution is based on service needs and models of care, which may alter over time. The number was determined using standard workforce modelling processes.

NSW Ambulance Service Planning conducts regular analysis to identify areas of growing demand for the prioritisation of resources. The 2022-23 NSW Budget allocated \$1.76 billion to boost the capacity of NSW Ambulance, funding 2,128 paramedics and control centre staff across the state, including 1,858 frontline staff, 210 support staff, 52 nurses and eight doctors.

NSW Ambulance does not deploy its workforce on the basis of local health district boundaries.

QUESTION 6

Does the NSW Government routinely monitor the accuracy of the triaging system?

Triage is a critical component of emergency department practice, which affects patient safety and access to care.

In NSW emergency departments, triage is an autonomous role performed by trained and highly skilled emergency nurses. In undertaking this role, emergency department registered nurses must demonstrate and maintain clinical training and expertise, consistent with the NSW Health policy PD2013_047 *Triage of Patients in NSW Emergency Department*. Under the policy, hospitals are required to routinely review and analyse triage accuracy and clinical practice to identify opportunities for improvement.

QUESTION 7

How does the NSW Government monitor errors in the current triaging system?

ANSWER

See response to Question 6.

QUESTION 8

Why has the NSW Government removed Paramedic safety trailers from hospitals across NSW this week?

ANSWER

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, NSW Ambulance implemented a range of initiatives to support the frontline paramedic workforce, including the provision of temporary amenities trailers to designated emergency departments across NSW.

In line with NSW Health's continued downgrade of the NSW Risk Matrix alert levels, NSW Ambulance is gradually transitioning out of its COVID-19 response measures.

QUESTION 9

Does the NSW Government track/monitor adverse outcomes resulting from;

- a. Extended response times?
 - i. If not, why not?
- b. Lack of response due to lack of ambulance resources?
 - i. If not, why not?
- c. Extended patient handover?
 - i. If not, why not?

ANSWER

a – c.

NSW Health monitors adverse outcomes and manages clinical incidents in compliance with the NSW Health Incident Management Policy.