

**Submission  
No 164**

**INQUIRY INTO OPERATION AND MANAGEMENT OF  
THE NORTHERN BEACHES HOSPITAL**

**Name:** Mr Ryan Park

**Date Received:** 30 July 2019

---



July 21, 2019

The Director  
Portfolio Committee 2-Health  
Parliament House  
SYDNEY 2000

Dear Director

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the inquiry examining the operation and management of Northern Beaches Hospital.

It is quite apparent that despite the Government's attempt to assert that problems faced by patients and staff at the hospital were nothing more than "hiccups and teething issues" there are major issues both with the operation of this hospital and the privatisation of health care and hospitals in NSW.

Having officially opened in November 2018 this privately run 488 bed facility has seen a litany of problems in that short period of time. The facility has seen mass resignations of staff including the CEO, the Head of Medical Services, and two anaesthetists along with other medical staff.

In addition to these significant staffing issues there have also been problems in the operation of the hospital and the standard of care that has been provided to patients.

The issues that highlight this failure include:

- Reports of a shortage of basic medical supplies including slings, bandages and insulin;
- Cancellations of elective surgery as well as problems with maternity services in the hospital;
- Reports of preference given to private patients over public patients;
- An inadequate blood bank with an insufficient supply of blood;
- Inadequate supervision and support especially for junior doctors an issue directly highlighted in the Health Education and Training Institute (HETI) reports;
- Complex medical cases not getting performed at the hospital and in turn been sent to Royal North Shore Hospital.

An investigation by HETI highlighted the fact that there were inadequate staffing levels, delays in delivering abnormal test results and unreliable electronic records and paging systems. The report stated "the current situation is unsustainable and only working because of the significant commitment of JMO (Junior Medical Officers) to continue to provide a service under adverse conditions".

One of the most concerning issues about this new facility is there is a complete cloak of secrecy regarding its financial and operational performance despite the fact that taxpayers will allocate approximately \$2.64 billion over the course of the contract.

This matter has actually been raised by the NSW Auditor General in her report on the Health Cluster dated 12 December 2018 where she said:

The *Public Finance and Audit Act 1983* does not provide the Auditor General with a mandate to provide independent assurance about service delivery outcomes and financial accountability in these arrangements ("follow the money" powers). As such, our audits can only consider the project management processes of the Ministry and the relevant health entities. We are unable to comment on any aspect of the performance or operations of that hospital. Put simply, the Auditor-General wants the power to lift the cloak of secrecy surrounding the Northern Beaches Hospital. Due to the hospital's status as a public private partnership the Auditor-General is unable to deliver a full and proper financial audit of it. That denies the northern beaches community and New South Wales taxpayers the transparency that they deserve and which the communities expect. That is despite the New South Wales Government and the New South Wales taxpayer providing \$600 million to construct the hospital, and a further \$2.14 billion to its private operators over the life of the contract to operate the hospital until 2038. We are talking about \$2.64 billion in taxpayers' funds and the Auditor-General is unable to look at any of that. The privatised Northern Beaches Hospital must be subject to the same scrutiny and held to the same standards as all other New South Wales hospitals.

As a result of this lack of transparency the NSW Opposition has introduced special legislation allowing the Auditor General to conduct a performance audit on this hospital going forward.

In addition to the lack of transparency it is also quite apparent that the new hospital is also having a significant impact on the broad range of health services that are provided on the northern beaches, in particular Mona Vale Hospital.

I have been inundated with correspondence over the last few weeks about the cuts to health services at Mona Vale Hospital and the detrimental impact this is having on local residents' right across the northern beaches.

In particular residents have raised with me the following concerns specifically in relation to Mona Vale:

- The loss of the Emergency Department.
- The closure of the refurbished Maternity Unit.
- The loss of the Paediatric Unit.
- The loss of operating theatres resulting in longer waiting periods for northern beaches residents for elective surgery.

Mona Vale Hospital is quite clearly under an enormous pressure with more than 80 presentations a day rather than the 30 presentations that was originally predicted.

It is quite apparent that the ongoing ideology of the NSW Government to try and save money through the privatisation of hospitals across NSW is failing to deliver the health services that the community deserve and expect. In late 2016 a number of hospitals were attempted to be privatised by the NSW Government. It took an enormous campaign led by local communities and health workers across NSW to shelve these plans in under 12 months.

I have grave concerns that this hospital will go the same way as what occurred over two decades ago at Port Macquarie where the taxpayer essentially paid for the hospital twice due to problems that plagued the facility many of which we are now seeing at Northern Beaches Hospital.

Finally I would like to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues the Hon Walt Secord and the Hon Greg Donnelly for their advocacy and persistence in ensuring that this inquiry was able to be established and the concerns such as those that I have outlined have been able to be made public and considered.

Yours ~~sincerely~~

**Ryan Park MP**  
**Member for Keira**  
**Shadow Minister for Health**