

**Submission
No 223**

INQUIRY INTO OPERATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE NORTHERN BEACHES HOSPITAL

Name: Mr Mark Horton

Date Received: 1 August 2019

NORTHERN BEACHES HOSPITAL & LOCAL HEALTH SERVICES

Thank you for the opportunity to raise my concerns about the new Northern Beaches Hospital. In so doing I wish to also raise concerns about the importance of Mona Vale Hospital and the impact that the closure of Surgical and Emergency services has had for the Northern Peninsula and coastal strip suburbs from Palm Beach to Manly.

I have number of concerns arising from recent media reports and my own personal concerns about the change to our local hospital services but especially the services provided for public patients by the privately operated, for profit, business that operates the Northern Beaches Hospital.

I am particularly concerned about:

- Surgical and medical services offered by the Northern Beaches Hospital as opposed to what was previously offered at the Mona Vale and Manly Hospitals
- Inaccuracies about public bed numbers
- Operation of the district's major hospital as privately-run business - not duplicated anywhere else in Metropolitan Sydney or Regional NSW
- The need for a guaranteed public hospital which accommodates the general community - assumption that as around 60% of Northern Beaches residents have private health cover and that they can therefore afford private hospital fees. Most people only hold private health cover to avoid the expensive taxation surcharge.

Surgical and medical services offered by the Northern Beaches Hospital

There is insufficient information available about exactly what surgical and medical services are actually available for public and private patients at the Northern Beaches Hospital. Media reports and word of mouth and social media comments indicate that the range of services available to private as opposed to public patients differ significantly. Two years prior to the opening of the Northern Beaches Hospital I sought to obtain information about exactly what services would be offered at the Northern Beaches Hospital. I was not offered the information but only given a general statement of services. I was also afforded a personal guided tour of the hospital by a senior public relation and a surgical staff member, arranged by Rob Stokes MP, Member for Pittwater

For this reason, I framed the following questions and in June 2019, sent an email message to my local MP, Rob Stokes, Member for Pittwater, in the hope that I would receive a timely response:

- 1. Can you confirm that every child who presents to the new Northern Beaches Hospital with an injury or illness requiring surgery will be transferred to one of the two Children's Hospitals being Sydney Children's Hospital at Randwick or Westmead Hospital. What if that child has private health cover? Is it true that the child with private health cover will be afforded the services of a specialist paediatric surgeon and treated at the Northern Beaches Hospital instead of being transferred?*
- 2. If a person from say Narrabeen was to have a heart attack, I understand that they would be taken by ambulance directly to the Northern Beaches Hospital as the closest schedule 5 hospital with an Emergency Department. Can you give me an unequivocal yes that if this person requires the insertion of a stent, that they will they be treated in one of the two catheter laboratories at the Northern Beaches Hospital regardless of whether they have private health cover or not?*
- 3. In the case of patients requiring transport from the Northern Beaches Hospital to a specialist Children's Hospital or to the Royal North Shore Hospital, will they be transported by NSW Ambulance. I have heard that NSW Ambulance vehicles are only permitted to transport to the Northern Beaches Hospital but not away from that hospital to another health facility.*
- 4. Are patients, especially public patients, able to access the Patient Transport arrangement provided by the NSW Ambulance Service?*
- 5. I understand that a number of public outpatient clinics including cardiology and neurology, which operated at the former Mona Vale and Many Hospitals are not now available at the new Northern Beaches Hospital. Can you explain why and advise whether there are any plans to return these public health services to the Northern Beaches?*
- 6. I note your claim, reported in the local media, that "we are bringing services to the Northern Beaches that we have never had before". Can you assure me that these additional services are available to all patients transported to the Northern Beaches Hospital regardless of whether they are public or private patients, have private health cover or do not?*

7. Bearing in mind the status and limited range of services available at Mona Vale Hospital, why have Hospital direction signs not been removed from Pittwater Road at Mona Vale and North Narrabeen? I and I am sure most thinking members of the public see these signs as an indication that a fully operational hospital with emergency medical services is nearby. I also note that there are no signs on the Pittwater Road/Wakehurst Parkway intersection at North Narrabeen directing towards the new Northern Beaches Hospital at Frenchs Forest where emergency.

I am yet to hear from Mr Stokes because the questions are in the too hard basket.

Prior to communicating with Mr Stokes I used the My Hospitals website (<https://www.myhospitals.gov.au/>) to undertake a comparison of services that were offered at Manly and Mona Vale, Northern Beaches and the Royal North Shore hospitals, and two regional hospitals that are close by each other. What detail I can officially gather about the new Northern Beaches Hospital is sketchy to the say the least. I also made an enquiry nearly two years back seeking the actual list of services at the new Northern Beaches Hospital. This has never been officially made available and is not available on the My Hospitals site because, the Northern Beaches Hospital is a private hospital. My comparison is set out below.

Surgical and medical services

| Hospitals | Mona Vale | Manly | Northern Beaches | Royal North Shore | Hornsby Kuring-Gai | Bathurst | Orange |
|--|-----------|-------|------------------|-------------------|--------------------|----------|--------|
| Acute renal dialysis unit | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Maintenance renal dialysis unit | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Acute spinal cord injury unit | | | | ✓ | | | |
| AIDS unit | | | | ✓ | | | |
| Alcohol and drug unit | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Bone marrow transplantation unit | | | | ✓ | | | |
| Burns unit | | | | ✓ | | | |
| Cardiac surgery unit/catheter laboratories | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Clinical genetics unit | | | | ✓ | | | |

| Hospitals | Mona Vale | Manly | Northern Beaches | Royal North Shore | Hornsby Kuring-Gai | Bathurst | Orange |
|--|-----------|-------|------------------|-------------------|--------------------|----------|--------|
| Coronary care unit | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Diabetes unit | | | | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Domiciliary care unit | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Emergency department | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| GP clinic | | | ✓ | | | | |
| Geriatric assessment unit | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Hospice care unit | | | | | | | ✓ |
| Infectious diseases unit | | | | ✓ | | | |
| Intensive care unit | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Major plastic or reconstructive surgery unit | | | | ✓ | | | |
| Neonatal intensive care unit | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Neurosurgical unit | | | | ✓ | | | |
| Obstetrics services (Maternity & Special care nursery) | | | ✓ | | | | |
| Obstetric services | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Oncology unit | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Paediatric service | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Psychiatric unit | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Rehabilitation unit | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Renal transplantation unit | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Sleep centre | | | | ✓ | | | |

Bed numbers at the Northern Beaches Hospital

According to its website, the Northern Beaches Hospital operates on a 60/40 public/private basis (see <http://www.northernbeacheshospital.com.au/>). The site refers to a total of 488 beds at that hospital. The 60/40 split should mean which means approximately 293 beds will be allocated for the public and 195 for

private patients. The previous Mona Vale and Manly combined bed numbers varied between 300 and 373 depending on the source of information. In 2014 there were 156 beds at Mona Vale and 217 at Manly making a total of 373 beds. The Department and successive Ministers for Health have been careful to avoid providing correct figures and have skirted around the truth for years to, I believe, cover up the truth. If there are to be 293 based on the 60/40 split as explained in the Northern Beaches Hospital website then the number of public beds is still less between 7 and 73 less than the original number of Public beds in the combined former hospitals. Currently only around 250 and not 488 beds are open at the Northern Beaches Hospital but the mix of public and private beds is being kept 'secret'.

In his letter dated 30 January 2017, Rob Stokes MP, advised me as follows:

"Once the new hospital at Frenchs Forest is opened in late 2018, the Northern Beaches will have approximately 564 hospital beds (488 at Frenchs Forest and at least 76 at Mona Vale). This is a significant increase in the approximately 344 hospital beds currently provided across Mona Vale and Manly Hospitals. The number was approximately 300 when the government changed in 2011."

"As has been repeatedly stated over recent years, there will no minimum number of beds for public patients at the new hospital at Frenchs Forest. The hospital operator will be required to provide health services for however many public patients present at the hospital. As is the case at Mona Vale Hospital, public patients will have their treatment covered by the government, while patients who elect to use their private health insurance will have their treatment covered by their insurance providers. It may interest you to learn that approximately 40% of patients admitted to Mona Vale Hospital in 2015/16 were treated and funded as private patients."

The Department of Planning has projected a Northern Beaches population growth of 45,550 in the period 2016 to 2031. With our local public school populations growing at a rate that the Department of Education cannot cope with how accurate then are the population projections and how can we accept a deliberate reduction in the number of public hospital beds?

Access from Northern Beaches Suburbs to the Northern Beaches Hospital at Frenchs Forest

The NSW Government seems to be blind to the concern of residents living in the beaches strip and especially those living north of the Wakehurst Parkway.

The road distance and serious potential for travel delays in the journey to Frenchs Forest is matter for concern when locals seek to travel to Frenchs Forest. Mona Vale is approximately 18.6 km from Manly and Palm Beach is approximately 13 km from Mona Vale making Mona Vale more or less central on the coastline. The new hospital at Frenchs Forest is 15.5 km from Mona Vale and 28 km from Palm Beach. Travel and transport times by car and ambulance to the Emergency Department at Frenchs Forest have added a further 15 to 30 minutes for many residents living from Narrabeen to Palm Beach.

While distance from suburbs North of Mona Vale to the Northern Beaches Hospital at Frenchs Forest is a major concern so also is the fact that the NSW Government has not given any priority to upgrading or at least flood proofing the Wakehurst Parkway as the most direct road route from Narrabeen to Frenchs Forest. There are no undertakings, no funding, no planning and not even a promise that this road will receive some attention. It is as if the road does not exist. It did not even rate a mention in the Greater Sydney Commission's North District report. A sum of \$5M has been allocated to the Northern Beaches Council to investigate the flooding. Rob Stokes, Member for Pittwater, has informed me in writing that the main cause of road closure is flooding of the creek and that this is a Northern Beaches Council responsibility. The shifting of responsibility from the State Government and the RMS to Council is shameful.

Will access from the North via the Wakehurst Parkway ever be improved? Why is the planned new bus service via the Wakehurst Parkway to the Northern Beaches Hospital taking so long to introduce?

Retention of existing road signage pointing to Mona Vale Hospital

Apparently, the blue hospital directional signs on Pittwater Road will remain and direct people to a Mona Vale Hospital which will not have an emergency department and a diminished post-acute roll? It will remain providing health services mainly under the 'Community Service' and 'Rehabilitation' banners but is that a hospital in the real sense? Could lives be lost if strangers, especially, seeking help and drive to Mona Vale rather than Frenchs Forest? Information on a web page and any number of short-term advertising about the role of the two hospitals will not remove the confusion.

Northern Beaches Population Growth and Access to a Public Hospital

The NSW Government is ignoring the population boom and its own projections for a Northern Beaches population of approximately 306,000 by 2036 (a few years ago projected to be 297,950) a projected 45,550 increase in the current population of around 264,000. The Northern Beaches Council has forecast a significant increase in new dwellings not only in Ingleside and Elanora with around 3,400 amounting to at least 10,000 residents and also new residents in Warriewood where land continues to be released for more housing. This is all to meet a housing formula set by the NSW Government. The NSW Government is also pursuing a policy of denser housing in the Northern Beaches including the Mona Vale business district and so even more population growth and all within a few kilometres of the now downgraded Mona Vale Hospital. The planned housing growth and with it a population explosion in suburbs close to Mona Vale Hospital including, Warriewood, Elanora Heights and Ingleside, suggests a need for the retention and not the removal of emergency and surgical services.

Why is it that while, prior to the opening of the Northern Beaches Hospital, 60% of urgent cases were taken by ambulance directly to the Royal North Shore or other hospitals, but the other 40% who remained at Mona Vale Hospital did not count? If on average around 35,000 patients a year were being processed through the Mona Vale Emergency Department then these numbers were surely sufficient to keep that hospital and its staff very busy.

Transferring the potential patients and workload up the road to Frenchs Forest a 15-minute drive in good road and traffic conditions means a 15 minutes delay in their treatment. In number terms, these patients are the equivalent of at least 50% of the Pittwater Electorate population. Don't these numbers count?

Again, looking at the 'official' sums about admissions to the ED at Mona Vale Hospital, or what should be considered as 'serious and irrefutable facts that can never be ignored, especially for those living 30 or more minutes away from the new Northern Beaches Hospital at Frenchs Forest,

In 2016/2017:

- 144 or 0.4% of 35,033 patients were admitted to the ED requiring immediate (life-threatening) treatment.
- 17,461 or 40.15% of 35,033 were admitted to the ED with urgent to serious conditions requiring treatment within 30 minutes.

Return Surgical and Emergency Services to Mona Vale Hospital as a Public Hospital

I am concerned about the closure of Mona Vale Hospital including the Emergency Department (ED) and all surgical services and its impact on the local community. Mona Vale Hospital has been our local hospital since 1964 but was downgraded to nothing more than a rehabilitation facility at the end of October, 2018. Members of the local community all have their own personal memories of how the hospital has impacted on their lives and that of family and friends. I am especially concerned that the NSW Government has not only closed the Emergency Department and all surgical departments of Mona Vale Hospital but to also intends to demolish the main building as well as the chapel and other outer buildings including what was once the Nurses Quarters with a large number of bedrooms.

While I can see the benefit of having the nearby level 5 hospital, located at Frenchs Forest this hospital it does not negate the need for Mona Vale Hospital for residents of the Pittwater area or for that matter those who live on the coastal or beaches strip between Palm Beach and Manly. The case for retention of Mona Vale Hospital as a Schedule 3 or 4 acute care hospital is being ignored as the NSW Government has chosen to allow a private sector operator, Healthscope, to run our local hospital system as a business.

Thankfully, it has been decided to keep the remaining Mona Vale Hospital services including post-acute care, Community Health, Urgent Care and the Rehabilitation Unit in NSW Government hands, to be overseen by the Northern Sydney Local Health District. The announcement of the provision of 10 palliative care and 10 geriatric assessment beds is of course welcome but unlikely to keep pace with the projected population growth and the massive influx of aging residents into our retirement villages and nursing homes. There are six large retirement villages within a few kilometres of Mona Vale Hospital. Adding to this is Arcadia which has just recently opened in Warriewood a kilometre from the Mona Vale Hospital. Nowhere in the Frenchs Forest area is there any similar density of retirement villages. Mona Vale's Urgent Care arrangement is nothing but a first aid station and will not fill the gap left after departure of the ED.

What Remains for Mona Vale Hospital?

Mona Vale Hospital has been part of the Northern Beaches community since the early 1960s and is part of our modern heritage. The decision to knock down the main building after 2018 is also opposed by the local community. The hospital is

the largest piece of infrastructure in the Pittwater ward and adjacent suburbs and still has value even if put to other uses. My fear is that the Government is demolishing the main building to reduce confusion and this has nothing to do with an ageing or an allegedly run-down buildings with 'problematic' (as stated by Rob Stokes) asbestos. It is the "out of sight, out of mind" political approach. In Australia, there are plenty of older hospital buildings and overseas there are hospitals that are well over a century old and still in operation. Already asbestos has been removed from two hospital floors and no action has been taken to close the hospital down so the argument about the building's health seems far from credible. The Port Kembla Hospital main building is the same design and age as Mona Vale Hospital's main building but there are no plans to demolish that building. Why the inconsistency in Government policy?

The fact that the Government has deliberately called for expressions of interest on the use of the Mona Vale Hospital site from private sector health providers is further evidence that the NSW coalition does not want to operate the public health system in this State. The health interest of people in the Pittwater electorate, especially, are being ignored in favour, it seems, of private sector business mates of the coalition. Why should the public see this any other way? We have State Government that has openly stated that they know what is good for us.

It is understood the buildings to the east of Mona Vale Hospital's main building are to also be demolished. This includes the chapel and former nurse's quarters that once housed young trainee nurses. These buildings were used for staff training and development but with the closure of Mona Vale Hospital there is no reason why they could not be used to provide affordable housing. There has been a big push in recent years for the provision of affordable housing for key or essential emergency services employees who work on the Northern Beaches. The Northern Beaches Council is one body that cares enough to consider the need for affordable housing for our key workers so here is the place and all that is needed is refurbishment.

A number of options have been put forward for use of the remaining Mona Vale Hospital site including the housing of the many community and charity groups that provide aid to the less fortunate in the way of counselling, respite care and accommodation for women and families and drug and alcohol counselling and rehabilitation. There is plenty of room for facilities like Burdekin, the Royal for West Children's Health Scheme or similar. In fact, Northern Beaches Councillors are being approached seeking their support for such an arrangement.

Mona Vale Hospital belongs to the local community and must not be demolished in the hope that we will forget it. The building can be seen from many parts of Mona Vale. Once demolished it will be gone forever. So much of our heritage has been lost in Sydney with the destruction of large buildings that could have been refurbished at a lesser cost than a new structure. Save Mona Vale Hospital from wasteful destruction. Waste not want not.

The community has called on the Premier and Ministers Stokes and Hazzard to save Mona Vale Hospital and to rethink the closure of Emergency and Surgical services. If the NSW Government was prepared to listen to the voices of the 5 other NSW communities that will not now have public/private partnership, why then cannot the Government not listen to the people of the Pittwater area and adjacent suburbs?

Conclusion - what does the future hold for Hospital and Medical Services on the Northern Beaches?

The NSW Government has chosen a formula of a public/private partnership that is doomed to failure especially as is the segregation of public from private in all but the Emergency Department at the Northern Beaches Hospital. The State should never have become involved in allowing a private for-profit company to operate a public hospital. The Port Macquarie Hospital exercise failed; the current private operation of prisons is nothing but a business operation. The sale of electricity operations to the private sector has also failed and cost the community dearly.

Why cannot the Government acknowledge that some services should be run by the State? In a country the size of Australia, Government has role in ensuring that certain essential services are maintained by the State. When profit making is removed, the services run at cost only. The selloff of public services, even the building of a water desalination plant for the benefit of a private operator has cost the State and its citizens severely.

Listen to the people of Pittwater and the Northern Beaches and save Mona Vale Hospital otherwise lives will be lost in transit to the new hospital at Frenchs Forest.

I am still convinced that with the projected population growth of the Northern Beaches of at minimum 40,000 by 2036 and with a significant influx of patients, public and private from nearby Lower North Shore suburbs, the new Northern Beaches Hospital will be turning away patients. More likely though, I fear that

public patients will be sent directly to the Royal North Shore Hospital and an upgraded Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Hospital. Overtime there is likely to be an increase in demand for elective surgery at the Northern Beaches Hospital with significant business attracted away from the Mater, North Shore Private and the SAN. So, after all this, I can still confirm my view that Mona Vale Hospital's emergency and surgical functions must be returned.

We the Northern Beaches are the only NSW residents stuck with a public/private health services partnership. We are the subjects of a NSW Government experiment that is doomed to failure. Health services must remain in the hands of Government and not be seen as for profit initiative of the private sector and subject to the whims of shareholders, especially when they are not Australia-based.

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For more community insight refer to the following of my Facebook community pages

<https://www.facebook.com/makenorthernbeacheshospitalpublic/>

<https://www.facebook.com/monavalehospital/>

Mark Horton

