

Get NSW Back in Front



BOOSTING FRONTLINE HEALTH SERVICES

UNBLOCKING EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS
REDUCING ELECTIVE SURGERY WAITING LISTS
SUPPORTING NURSES ON THE FRONTLINE



THE NATIONALS

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After twelve years of Labor the NSW health system is failing to cope with the needs of families.

Labor's most critical failure has been in the provision of frontline health services – Emergency Departments struggle to cope with demand, and despite Labor's manipulation of elective surgery waiting lists too many people are still waiting too long for surgery.

When illness or injury affects us or our loved ones we expect professional, compassionate care in well staffed hospitals. The people of New South Wales contribute vast amounts to the Labor Government through taxes and charges – money that should be funding world-class healthcare. It's not.

Everyone knows the public hospital system is broken. Indeed, that it continues to function at all is due solely to the dedication of exceptional people - doctors, nurses and other health workers willing to endure conditions that are frankly unacceptable by modern standards.

With insufficient nurses, hospital beds are closed and fewer patients are admitted to hospital for treatment. This means longer waiting lists, jammed Emergency Departments, more ambulance delays, frustration, anger and disenchantment.

Those nurses who remain are run off their feet, regularly work double shifts, struggle for resources, treat sicker patients and are frustrated by being unable to provide the kind of quality care that first attracted them to nursing.

If a government cannot guarantee the health of its citizens, of our children, the elderly, the critically ill and the injured, If it cannot support the people trained and willing to care for the rest of us when we're in need – then it has failed some fundamental tests.

NSW deserves better.

THE NSW LIBERAL/NATIONALS COALITION PLAN TO BOOST FRONTLINE HEALTH SERVICES

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition has developed a \$543 million plan to boost frontline health services that will unblock Emergency Departments and reduce elective surgery waiting lists.

Specifically we will:

- Commit \$200 million towards the provision of an additional 200 hospital ward beds to facilitate quicker admission for patients through Emergency Departments and into wards.
- Commit \$50 million towards six dedicated 'After Hours' elective surgery operating theatres. These will be established at Westmead, St George, Royal North Shore, John Hunter, Tamworth and Orange Hospitals.
- Commit \$40 million to provide additional incentives for doctors and hospital staff to keep these 'After Hours' Theatres open and operating.
- Commit \$45 million towards an additional 20,000 elective surgery procedures.
- Invest \$208 million to recruit 500 more nurses, fill existing nursing vacancies, and retain more nurses by improving their working conditions.

UNBLOCKING EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS

Providing timely access to high quality emergency treatment for people who are critically sick or injured is the most important task for any health care system.

After twelve years of Labor, patients are waiting too long to be seen in our public hospital Emergency Departments.

'Access block' – where very sick emergency patients who need to be admitted wait longer than eight hours for a bed in the wards – causes jammed Emergency Departments and holds up ambulance officers who must wait with their patients until there is room and staff are free.

At present thousands of patients wait longer than they should in Emergency Departments, many of them in life-threatening condition and opening more ward beds will enable quicker movement through the Emergency Department.

We will commit an additional \$200 million to unblock Emergency Departments to ensure patients can access high quality care when they are sick or injured. We will ensure patients are treated within times considered appropriate for the urgency of their condition and admitted to hospital without lengthy delays.

To unblock emergency departments we will:

- Commit an additional \$200 million towards the provision of 200 extra hospital ward beds¹. More available ward beds will help move patients through Emergency Departments and address 'access block'.
- Develop and introduce Patient Information Protocols in consultation with emergency staff, patients and their families to address issues such as the need to provide patients with information about:
 - Expected waiting times and why waiting is necessary
 - Updates on waiting times at regular intervals while patients are waiting
 - The treatment process the waiting patient is likely to go through - triage, attention by nurses, specialists, counselors and others on the team
 - Treatment options - including referral to another service or practitioner if appropriate
 - Expected waiting time for admission to hospital if necessary
- Appoint Emergency Patient Support Volunteers in busy hospitals to help patients and their families understand what is happening when they attend Emergency Departments, provide support for them and keep them abreast of developments.

REDUCING ELECTIVE SURGERY WAITING LISTS

Labor has failed to reduce waiting times for elective surgery. Instead Labor has resorted to manipulating waiting lists to produce results that fail to acknowledge the disruption and personal trauma experienced by those left waiting for months for surgery, or those who experience a sudden cancellation to their surgery.

A 2006 review of just one Sydney Area Health Service found that if it worked at full capacity it could perform more than double the number of operations it performed the previous year.

The Surgical Services Issues Paper, commissioned by Sydney West Area Health Service, estimated that an extra 1,470 elective cases could have been completed if key hospitals such as Westmead, Nepean and Blacktown had not closed elective surgery lists.

¹ Opening 300 hospital beds = \$279 million based on information in Bob Carr Media Release, December 8 2004, 'Additional 200 beds to be opened for public hospitals' stating an additional 200 permanent beds for public hospitals, costing \$186 million over the next four years.
<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/news/2006/index.html#>

According to the review, "This lost time represents more than 9,300 procedures [that] could have been performed if this time was utilised," noting that this was more than the number of cases on the local waiting list last September.²

Besides the routine closure of operating theatres for evening elective surgery, many hospitals restrict access over extended holiday periods – for weeks over the Christmas summer period, at Easter and other school holidays.

A NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition Government will commit \$135 million over four years to establish six 'After Hours' elective surgery operating theatres to reduce waiting times for elective surgery to ensure patients do not wait longer than benchmarks for the urgency of their condition.

Our 'After Hours' elective surgery operating theatres will reduce elective surgery waiting times, provide greater certainty for patients by avoiding last minute cancellation of surgery, and increase efficiency through better use of resources.

Specifically we will;

- Commit \$50 million towards the establishment of 23-hour wards and dedicated elective surgery operating theatres at six public hospitals. These arrangements will be piloted at six major hospitals - Westmead, St George, Royal North Shore, John Hunter, Tamworth and Orange Hospitals.
- Commit \$40 million towards extra incentive payments for hospital staff to enable these operating theatres to remain open overnight and during holiday periods.
- Commit \$45 million to enable doctors to perform an additional 20,000 procedures across a range of specialties, with priority based on clinical urgency and those who have waited longest.

Our 'After Hours' elective surgery operating theatres will end the 'part-time hospital' approach where major hospitals shut down for extended holiday periods. Instead doctors will be able to book their elective patients for treatment over the summer, Easter and school holidays.

Wherever possible these 'After Hours' elective surgery operating theatres will also function overnight, allowing elective surgery patients undergoing minor procedures to be booked into '23-hour' hospital beds in the evening, have surgery overnight and then be discharged the following morning.

We will commit \$40 million to enable these hospitals to offer medical staff generous incentives to work overnight and during holiday periods in elective surgery theatres and 23-hour bed wards. Hospital staff will be able to volunteer to work after hours and receive the related available incentives that will be provided.

We will establish benchmark utilisation rates for operating theatres, taking into account the need for theatres to be cleaned and for safety requirements to be met.

² 'Why our hospitals operate at a snail's pace' SMH 31 March 2006 <http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/why-our-hospitals-operate-at-a-snails-pace/2006/03/30/1143441281178.html>

SUPPORTING NURSES ON THE FRONTLINE

The Liberal/Nationals Coalition understands that nurses are the backbone of the public hospital system. In government, we will attract more nurses, better recognise their worth, build vital skills and provide their profession with the support they deserve and importantly, a say in how things are done.

Despite the scare campaign being waged by the union movement, nurses in our public hospitals will remain covered by the NSW industrial relations system.

The NSW Liberal/Nationals will commit \$207.8 million in our first term to:

- **Improve nursing degree courses** by ensuring a greater amount of time is spent in clinical practice in hospitals or other health settings and investigating the opportunities for accelerated degrees to be off-set by nursing internships (\$28.3 million);
- **Increase retraining opportunities** for registered and enrolled nurses wishing to re-enter the workforce (\$4 million)
- **Appoint an extra 50 clinical nurse educators over our first term** to enable recent nursing graduates to receive a greater degree of mentoring (\$8.8 million)
- **Provide funding for 500 more nurses** in our first term of Government. The promise to fund an additional 500 nurse positions is a commitment above and on top of the existing vacant full-time nursing positions (totaling around 1,800 extra nurses) (\$85.3 million);
- **Establish an additional quarantined fund** to enable individual hospitals to negotiate benefits to meet the particular needs of nurses at that workplace. (\$81.4 million) and;
- **Give nurses more recognition and control** by maintaining senior nursing management positions, ensuring they are underpinned by strong support positions; establishing Nursing Staff Councils to give nurses the same clout and direct access to the Minister as doctors' Medical Staff Councils; and ensuring nurse representation on each local hospital board.

COSTING AND FUNDING

In government we will commit \$543 million in our first term towards these initiatives.

This new funding will be provided by cutting expenditure on waste and duplication within the bureaucracy, including a reduction in expenditure on advertising and consultants, a recruitment freeze on Sydney bureaucrats and a reduction in State Government Departments from around 33 to 9.

We will transfer resources from the backroom to the frontline to boost services and start fixing NSW.