

Secretary's year in review



I continue to be impressed by the strength, resilience and personal commitment of NSW Health staff as they have ensured our health system continues to deliver healthcare to the people of NSW and also protect and vaccinate them through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Delivery of health services to the people of NSW has remained of utmost importance. As the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to impact our state, the unwavering dedication of NSW Health employees has ensured healthcare and health protection have been delivered across the whole of the state.

Continuing our COVID-19 response

In our second year of responding to the pandemic, the many teams and services of NSW Health have worked together to ensure our system remained strong, responsive and resilient. We continued to modify our service delivery, including prioritising our testing and vaccination services while also managing to address delays in elective surgery created in 2020 due to the pandemic.

In 2020-21, we conducted 6.15 million COVID-19 tests; had more than 2.4 million people register for the COVID-19 SMS Results Service; conducted more than 500,000 saliva screen tests for hotel quarantine workers; and improved testing capabilities by increasing operating hours and dedicated health workers at testing facilities and laboratories.

Our digital system to fast-track frontline worker vaccinations was made available for public bookings, and by mid-2021 was being used by 64 clinics across 14 local health districts and specialty networks, capturing more than 675,000 registrations.

In parallel, our Vaccination Administration Management system was launched to manage the entire vaccination administration process for staff and the public. By mid-2021 it had been used to book more than 21,000 appointments and vaccinate 3646 people.

Working closely with the Australian Government to plan and implement a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccination program in NSW, health workers administered 851,400 vaccines from 22 February 2021 to end June 2021. We also opened the first mass vaccination centre in NSW at Sydney Olympic Park on 10 May 2021. By end June 2021, the centre had administered over 278,000 vaccinations. The success of the centre along with the need to rapidly vaccinate the adult population led to the planning of further mass vaccination centres to open in July and August 2021 at Belmont, near Newcastle, Macquarie Fields in south western Sydney, Wollongong, Qudos Bank Arena and a large centre in Sydney's central business district.

Under enacted public health orders, we supported the NSW Government operation to facilitate COVID-19 testing and contact tracing on returned traveller transmissions within quarantine facilities.

Our introduction of the quarantine worker surveillance and testing program assisted in the early detection of COVID-19 in patient transport workers and staff at quarantine facilities. In addition, our collaboration with Sydney Water to implement a world-first sewage surveillance program has provided further assistance in the fight against COVID-19 in the community.

Throughout the year, we continued to work closely with the NSW Multicultural Health Communication Services, to ensure the dissemination of COVID-19 vaccination information in 57 languages to help increase vaccination rates in culturally and linguistically diverse communities. A special report further outlining our efforts in response to the COVID-19 pandemic is on page vii.

Advancing our priorities

Despite the year's extraordinary challenges, we have made significant advances across all areas, guided by the NSW Health Strategic Priorities, which focus on eight key areas to improve results for patients and the community. Together, we enhanced our focus on new and innovative ways of delivering care which evolved in response to COVID-19.

We also supported our workforce whose professional agility and inspiring dedication to our patients has been central to our success. We continued to refine our approach to value based healthcare and its direct link with patient experience.

Our future strategy planning promises to build on the success of our strategic priorities to date and this year we made significant progress in developing our strategy for the next 10 years. We will continue to demonstrate our commitment to deliver the best healthcare to the citizens of NSW and a sustainable health system that delivers outcomes that matter to patients, is personalised, invests in wellness and is digitally enabled.

Enhancing the health of NSW citizens

NSW Health is the lead for three Premier's Priorities: to improve service levels in hospitals, improve outpatient and community care, and reduce NSW rates of suicide by 20 per cent by 2023.

Improving service levels in hospitals

Our reporting shows that 100 per cent of all triage category 1 in public hospitals commenced treatment on time along with 79 per cent and 75 per cent for triage category 2 and 3 respectively.

Meanwhile we also expanded our Patient Experience Officer program. There are now 100 Patient Experience Officers in 52 emergency departments helping patients and their families with an enhanced public hospital experience.

In addition we expanded the GoShare patient education tool which provides information in 20 languages to support patients and their families to better understand the care they will receive.

Improving outpatient and community care

Outpatient services are critical to NSW Health's delivery of care across the state. This care is an important and ongoing part of a patient's pathway.

Reducing preventable visits to hospitals by five per cent through to 2023 by caring for people in the community remains a focus.

Integrated Care launched the statewide initiative Planned Care for Better Health in April to identify people at risk of hospitalisation early, strengthen their care and avoid hospitalisation. This approach and other integrated care initiatives saw the proportion of total days spent in hospital by people with conditions where hospitalisation is potentially preventable improve by 1.6 percentage points over the past three years to 21.4 per cent. These saved visits to hospital contributed to a reduction of 200,000 bed days in the first half of 2021.

NSW Health established a collaboration with eHealth NSW and local health district clinicians to create a statewide digital system which ensures general practitioner referrals to outpatient clinics are created, delivered and managed effectively to improve the patient experience of care, whether at a hospital or within the community.

Towards Zero Suicides

The Towards Zero Suicides program progressed with the expansion of statewide suicide prevention services, training and recruitment of counsellors. Highlights included the opening of seven Safe Havens which provide calm, quiet spaces for people in crisis as an alternative to presenting to an emergency department; the launch of 12 Suicide Prevention Outreach teams across NSW; and the delivery of suicide prevention training for more than 3700 community members, 1100 Service NSW staff and 475 NSW Health staff.

The NSW Government invested an additional \$80 million in mental health services as a response to COVID-19, including \$16.4 million to enhance the Mental Health Line which now has the capacity to respond on average to 18,000 calls per month.

Providing world-class care centred around patient experience

Value based healthcare strives to deliver care that improves outcomes that matter to patients, the experience of receiving care, the experience of providing care, and the effectiveness and efficiency of care. This year we launched the Commissioning for Better Value Strategy 2021-2024 to support better patient care and experiences by shifting the focus from outputs to outcomes.

The launch of *Elevating the Human Experience: Our guide to action for patient, family, carer volunteer and caregiver experiences* elevates our ambition to ensure patients, families and carers have the best possible experience and clinical outcomes when they interact with the NSW Health system. We can also be proud that almost 18,000 patients who responded to an Emergency Department Patient survey were positive about their experiences with around 88 per cent rating their emergency care as either very good or good. In small, rural hospitals, the overwhelming majority (95 per cent) of the 4487 patients surveyed about their overall care rated their experience as very good or good.

An inclusive workplace for our people

As the largest public health system in Australia, with about 170,000 staff across the state, our workforce represents the community we serve. The launch of our Diversity Inclusion Belonging Resource Hub welcomes people from diverse backgrounds and provides direction for NSW Health organisations to meet the diversity and inclusion targets set under the Premier's Priorities. Already we have exceeded one of those targets by doubling the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in senior leadership roles.

Increasing our focus on innovation to solve tomorrow's problems

We have continued to be at the forefront of innovation with the ongoing implementation of our large-scale Solar Power Program, which to date has helped provide 20MW of solar power across the network to generate cost savings of around \$4 million per year. There are now solar panel systems either installed or planned for 10 of our major hospitals, including John Hunter Hospital in Newcastle, which hosts the largest roof-mounted hospital solar panel system in the world. The program leads NSW Health's commitment to the state's goal of net zero emissions by 2050.

Enabling a digitally enabled healthcare system to meet our patients' needs

Our staff's dedication to provide safe and accessible care to all patients across NSW has been critical to accelerate virtual care during the pandemic. Our goal to expand and enhance virtual care capabilities has progressed significantly in the last year following endorsement of the NSW Virtual Care Strategy. The strategy provides a coordinated and consistent approach to sustainably scale virtual care, by integrating it as an appropriate care delivery option across our health services at a local and state level.

The establishment of our Virtual Care Accelerator, a multiagency and clinically focused unit ensuring patients have access to the best telehealth-enabled models of care and remote monitoring have to offer, supported the rapid development and uptake of virtual care, first in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and then as part of our long-term strategy to focus on digital solutions to improve patient experiences and outcomes and enhance our continuum of care to all citizens of NSW.

Creating a sustainable health system into the future

We have made significant progress on the development of our Future Health Strategy, which will guide the next decade of care in NSW. Our ability to continue to perform well into the future will be underpinned by our ability to adapt. Many of the improvements our health system needs to address are in fact already underway. The strategy will bring together the collective experience and wisdom of users of our health services, the people who work in our systems, as well as that of our partners in providing care.

I would like to thank all NSW Health employees, and in particular our frontline staff who continue to show compassion, kindness and empathy while providing the best care to the people of NSW every day. In what has been another year of challenges, I feel privileged to lead such committed people across NSW Health.

And, to Health Minister Brad Hazzard, thank you for your unwavering support and leadership in what has been an incredibly busy year for the health system.



Elizabeth Koff
Secretary, NSW Health