



# Jillian Skinner MP

## Minister for Health Minister for Medical Research

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### MEDIA RELEASE

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#### **AMBULANCE TURNAROUND TIMES IMPROVING IN NSW HOSPITALS**

Health Minister Jillian Skinner has welcomed the release today of a report by Auditor-General Peter Achterstraat into ambulance turnaround times in NSW hospitals.

The *Reducing Ambulance Turnaround Time At Hospital* report shows 83 per cent of ambulance patients are transferred into a hospital's care within the target 30 minutes, with 33 per cent transferred within 10 minutes.

Mrs Skinner said Mr Achterstraat's report aligns with the objectives of current reform programs in NSW Health, including the *Reform Plan for NSW Ambulance*, which she released in December.

"The Auditor-General acknowledges that NSW Health has put in place initiatives to reduce waiting times for ambulance crews at hospitals, which he says is encouraging in the face of rising demand," Mrs Skinner said.

"His report confirms some of NSW's largest hospitals have improved patient flow and reduced blockages in emergency departments.

"This is pleasing. Timely access to public hospitals is a critical focus of NSW Health and one that requires a whole of hospital response. This Auditor-General's report demonstrates we're heading in the right direction, while confirming there's more work to be done," Mrs Skinner said.

NSW Health requires paramedics to transfer care of patients to emergency department staff within 30 minutes in 90 per cent of cases.

The Auditor-General report shows in the 11 months from April 2012 to February 2013, 83% of patients were transferred into hospital care within 30 minutes of arrival.

The Auditor-General notes ambulance arrivals have increased at over four times the population growth in recent years.

"The demands on our paramedics and emergency department staff are enormous and I thank these dedicated professionals for the remarkable work they do," Mrs Skinner said.

"I note the Auditor-General states: 'Unrealistic public expectations about the role of the Ambulance Service results in inappropriate calls and transport'

"I would urge anyone who calls an ambulance or attends an emergency department to do so in the belief that hospital treatment is required.

"In a health emergency, dial Triple Zero (000). But if it is not an emergency, please consider if a visit to a GP or a call to telephone advice line *healthdirect Australia* would be more appropriate," Mrs Skinner said.

One of the Auditor-General's 11 recommendations is, by December 2014, to reduce unnecessary ambulance responses by increasing the proportion of eligible calls referred to the telephone advice line *healthdirect Australia*, which is staffed by registered nurses. (Free call from landlines on 1800 022 222 or visit [www.healthdirect.org.au](http://www.healthdirect.org.au))

The Auditor-General's report notes some hospitals have shown recent improvements in meeting targets but there needs to be greater improvement state-wide.

Mrs Skinner said she is pleased the Auditor-General's 11 recommendations for faster turnaround times are being addressed in three major reform initiatives already underway in NSW - *Reform Plan for NSW Ambulance, Whole of Hospital Program and Hospital Avoidance Initiatives*.

"I have asked Dr Mary Foley, the Director-General of NSW Health, to consider and implement recommendations made by the Auditor-General," Mrs Skinner said.

"The Ministry of Health will continue to work closely with NSW Ambulance and the state's Local Health Districts to reduce the time paramedics have to wait with their patients at emergency departments.

"If the community can assist us - by avoiding unnecessary calls to ambulance or unnecessary presentation to emergency departments - we will free up our paramedics to get back on the road more quickly to save lives," she said.