

Secretary's year in review



In what has been an unprecedented year, it has been a humbling experience to witness how courageously the employees of NSW Health continued to deliver high quality healthcare while responding to the impact of drought, devastating bushfires and floods, followed by a global pandemic.

The bushfire crisis decimated many parts of the east coast of NSW, impacting local communities, including our patients and staff. This was followed by the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic which saw every part of our health system rise in response, working collaboratively to deliver a comprehensive and multi-pronged solution to an extraordinary situation. Our ability to pivot and respond to the year's emerging challenges can largely be attributed to the strength in operating cohesiveness across the whole of the NSW health system. Due to the immense system-wide response to these crises, we have included special reports outlining our efforts during the bushfires on page viii and the COVID-19 pandemic on page xi.

The skill and agility of our people, supported by a comprehensive health system governance framework enabled us to progress our vital work to provide high quality clinical, mental and community healthcare to the people of NSW. NSW Health made significant progress across all of our Strategic Priorities, despite the challenges that the year presented. These challenges however, showcased the outstanding commitment, dedication and passion of our incredible staff and I thank them for all that they have achieved this year.

As a health system that cares for and serves the citizens of NSW, we are guided by the NSW Health Strategic Priorities, which focus on eight key areas to improve results for patients and the community. NSW Health is the lead for three Premier's Priorities; to improve service levels in hospitals, improve outpatient and community care, and reduce the rate of suicide deaths in NSW. Our achievements demonstrate our commitment to deliver the best of health to the citizens of NSW and our progress towards realising a sustainable health system that delivers outcomes that matter to patients; is personalised, invests in wellness, and is digitally enabled.

An enhanced focus on value based healthcare to deliver results that matter

In NSW, value based healthcare means continually striving to deliver care that improves the experience of receiving and providing care, and the effectiveness and efficiency of that care. This year we continued our focus on value based healthcare, patient experience and healthcare in the community.

Our approach to implementing value based healthcare involved scaling and embedding statewide programs, while supporting change through a range of system-wide enablers. Programs link patients to evidence-based care, allowing them to self-manage through allied health and community care programs, improving quality of life and in some instances negating the need for surgery.

We published the conceptual framework for value based healthcare to support shared understanding, and our leadership in value based healthcare has helped shape a range of national work including key reforms in the 2020-2025 National Health Reform Agreement.

Innovative technology solutions for remote and virtual care

Unprecedented growth in demand for web and mobile-based videoconferencing software and associated support was a feature of this year, with a ten-fold increase in virtual clinics and virtual meetings peaking at 303,824 across NSW Health in May 2020. The virtual clinical waiting room, myVirtualCare, moved from pilot to production, connecting patients and clinicians online and enhancing videoconferencing infrastructure to embed virtual care as an effective and safe option. We also built telehealth capability across NSW via the Telehealth Strategic Advisory Group, Telehealth Collaborative and clinical networks, with all districts and networks experiencing a surge in use of telehealth during the pandemic.

To improve access for patients in rural areas, we finalised the telestroke model of care in January, enabling patients in rural and regional NSW to have access to the same life-saving treatment as those in metropolitan areas.

Major health infrastructure investment supports high quality healthcare

This year, we delivered more than \$2 billion in infrastructure planning and construction, and completed 23 projects across NSW, our biggest year to date. This represents a 75 per cent increase over the past two years, and was achieved despite the challenges of bushfires, floods and the pandemic.

Some major infrastructure projects were fast-tracked by the pandemic, including the 14-storey Westmead Redevelopment Central Acute Services Building. See page 51 for more.

We planned for the \$700 million Statewide Mental Health Infrastructure Program, which follows a co-design process and strong engagement with mental health facility users, and completed 86 projects under the \$20 million Therapeutic Environment Minor Capital Works Program to support the delivery of mental health care in NSW.

Improving the patient experience

In October 2019, we expanded our award-winning Emergency Department Patient Experience initiative to an additional 17 emergency departments. The initiative aims to improve each person's experience by creating an environment that helps patients, carers and their families feel welcome, safe, cared for and empowered. In April 2020 we received funding to recruit an additional 86 patient experience officers in emergency departments and COVID-19 clinics across the state, to combat the additional stress and pressure on patients and their families during the pandemic.

Improving delivery of healthcare within the community

This year saw us strengthen healthcare in the community, deliver specialist healthcare services in community settings, and invest in health technology and new models of care to improve the delivery of care.

Provision of around \$68 million to our districts and networks enabled implementation of five integrated care initiatives to support vulnerable and at risk populations, and people with complex health and social needs receive appropriate care at home and in their communities. As a result, 52,241 people were given the opportunity to live healthier lives for longer, manage their own care in more appropriate settings such as primary and community care, and reduce unnecessary hospital visits.

A further \$27.9 million was invested in Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services and 42 health-related organisations to deliver culturally safe and tailored health services to Aboriginal people, including support for healthy lifestyles, prevention and management of chronic disease, oral health services and support for drug and alcohol prevention and treatment.

Towards Zero Suicides

NSW Health worked in partnership with other government agencies and non-government organisations to progress the 15 initiatives of the Towards Zero Suicides program, to help achieve the Premier's Priority of reducing the suicide rate by 20 per cent by 2023. All 15 initiatives, including Suicide Prevention Outreach Teams, Zero Suicides in Care, Enhancement to Rural Counselling and Building on Resilience in Aboriginal Communities, progressed towards implementation phase. Youth Aftercare is being piloted over the next three years and is providing a community-based crisis support and aftercare service for young people. See page 28 for more.

Additional support for mental health to alleviate the impact of the bushfires and the pandemic

The mental health impact on fire-ravaged communities was significant this year and in response, the NSW Government announced a recovery package that included \$14.8 million to recruit 30 new Bushfire Recovery Mental Health Clinicians in fire-affected districts. Similarly, to support mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic, the NSW Government invested an extra \$80 million in mental health support, including \$6 million to support Lifeline, to improve community wellbeing.

Supporting our workforce to care for citizens

We continued to invest in our people, increasing our workforce to 164,000 people (122,538 full-time equivalent staff) and placed a record 1029 medical interns, awarded 50 scholarships to rural generalist trainees, and filled 145 rural preferential intern positions to support the rural medical workforce.

In addition, we awarded 224 enrolled nurse scholarships at 24 campuses across NSW, and 93 cadetships for Aboriginal nursing and midwifery students, up 40 per cent from 2018-19. We also made 2600 nursing and midwifery positions available; an increase of more than 40 per cent since 2015. Planning for the expected demand on the healthcare system due to the pandemic was critical to support our frontline workers, and a dedicated online portal facilitated companies and individuals to register their interest, with more than 1200 clinical and non-clinical applications screened to support NSW Health during the pandemic.

The ongoing work to keep the community healthy and safe has been constant, both on the front line and hidden behind the scenes. The Pandemic Kindness Movement supported clinicians through the pandemic with peer-reviewed resources, and in June 2020 we launched COVID Connexion — an independent and professional wellbeing advice line for health workers.

It has been inspiring and uplifting to witness the way our staff across the health system have managed enormous challenges throughout the year, while continuing to improve care for our patients and communities across NSW.

I would like to thank all NSW Health staff for their unwavering commitment, dedication, compassion and kindness that they show every day to our patients and each other, and in particular, thank every frontline employee who has, and continues to provide, the best care to the citizens of NSW.



Elizabeth Koff
Secretary, NSW Health