About this report

This annual report describes the performance and operation of NSW Health during 2021–22. It has been prepared according to parliamentary reporting and legislative requirements and is arranged in six sections.

Section 1: Overview

Introduces NSW Health values and priorities, organisational structure and the NSW Health executive.

Section 2: Performance

Summarises performance against the Future Health strategy.

Section 3: Management and accountability

Reports on governance, public accountability, information management, people management, environmental sustainability, funding for research and development, and equity and diversity.

Section 4: Finances

Details key financial management reporting.

Section 5: Financial reports

Presents NSW Health's audited financial statements for 2021–22.

Section 6: NSW Health organisations

Presents the year in review with reports provided by the NSW Ministry of Health, statutory health corporations, specialty health networks, the Health Administration Corporation and local health districts.

Appendix

Provides additional information and data to supplement the report.

Letter to the Minister

The Hon. Brad Hazzard MP
Minister for Health
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Minister

In compliance with the terms of the *Annual Reports (Departments) Act 1985,* the *Annual Reports (Departments) Regulation 2015,* the G*overnment Sector Finance Act 2018*, and the *Government Sector Finance Regulation 2018,* I submit the annual report and financial statements of NSW Health organisations for the financial year ended 30 June 2022, for presentation to Parliament.

The financial statements of these organisations are presented in separate volumes as Financial Statements of Public Health Organisations under the control of NSW Health 2021–22. I am also sending a copy of the report to the Treasurer.

Yours sincerely

Susan Pearce
Secretary, NSW Health

Contents

Snapshot

The NSW public health system is the largest public health system in Australia, providing world-class healthcare to the citizens of NSW.

- **8 million** residents on 809,444 km²
- **228** public hospitals
- **290,167** surgeries performed, including **20,463** in private hospitals

- **$33.5 billion** in funding for healthcare services in 2022–23*
- **15** local health districts
- **1.8 million** inpatient episodes

- Approximately **178,000** people (131,866 full-time equivalent staff)
- **1 million** emergency and non-emergency incidents responded to by NSW Ambulance
- **3 million** emergency department attendances

The NSW community

- People aged **65 and over**: 28%
- People identify as **Aboriginal** or **Torres Strait Islander**: 3.4%
- People **born overseas**: 30%
- **Regional Australia** grew by: 11%
- People aged **14 and under**: 18.5%
- Households where a **non-English language is spoken**: 26.5%
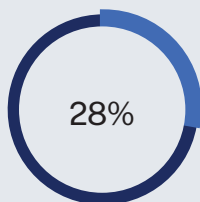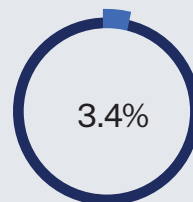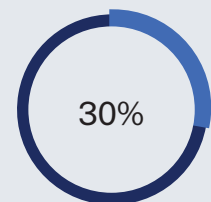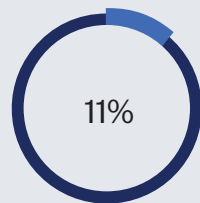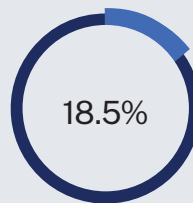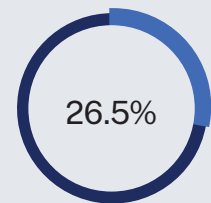
In 2021–22

- **72,507** babies were born in a public hospital
- **24 million** meals were served to patients

- **990,543** overnight admitted patients in a public hospital
- **1 million** people were admitted to a public hospital
- **191,139** people had planned surgery in a public hospital

- **99,028** people had unplanned surgery in a public hospital
- **17.4 million** non-admitted patient services events
- **20,463** surgeries were provided in private facilities under relevant contracting arrangements

- **1.4 million Triple Zero** (000) calls received
- **25.6 million** PCR tests performed
- **16 million** vaccines administered in NSW

- **148,089** users logged into the Electronic Medical Record and **10.9 million** patient charts were opened
- **158,200** children cared for by the Sydney Children's Hospitals Network

- **12.9 million** clean bed sheets supplied to public hospitals
- **575,000** dental service appointments provided
- **71** notifiable conditions tracked by Health Protection NSW

Source: ABS Population data 2021. Some figures are approximate. *2022-23 budget.

Secretary's year in review

As we reflect on another extraordinary year for NSW Health – and my first as its Secretary – it is the commitment and dedication of our staff that impresses me most.

Their tireless work in delivering safe and high quality, patient-centred care to the people of NSW, while protecting them through the next stage of a persistent pandemic and multiple emergency events like the devastating floods we have seen across the state, is nothing short of extraordinary.

I would like to also thank my leadership colleagues across NSW Health and to acknowledge the work of the former Secretary, Elizabeth Koff, who helped guide the state's health system through many months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of all I would like to thank each of the remarkable humans of NSW Health – all of us, every day, who continue to work together to improve outcomes for our patients, carers, community and each other.

Future Health is now

The Future Health Strategic Framework builds on the foundations of the previous NSW State Health Plan and continues the work we've done over recent years in areas such as value-based healthcare, the integration of care and in improving the patient experience.

We consulted extensively with our staff, our partners across the sector, as well as patients and the community to formulate the development of Future Health. These insights helped shape our ambitious 10-year plan to deliver a vision for a sustainable health system that delivers outcomes that matter the most to our patients and the community.

Instrumental to the success of Future Health will be the ways that we can support our workforce to collaborate and innovate, to improve health outcomes, and to continue delivering superior healthcare. Realising our vision requires effort from all of us, and all parts of the NSW Health system have a role to play in leading change. Together, we can help make our exceptional health system even stronger and ready to deliver for the next decade.

Powering through a persistent pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic remained a focus for our health system in 2021–22 and has seen the health system work together like never before to protect the community.

The importance of NSW Health in the whole-of government response to the pandemic should not be understated. In the rollercoaster second year of the State Health Emergency Operations Centre's operation, we saw both the Delta and Omicron outbreaks across the globe and here in NSW. The State Health Emergency Operations Centre expanded significantly to include critical areas such as the vaccination program, testing clinics, border control, the quarantine and exemptions programs, airports and maritime surveillance, aged care planning, intensive care unit and ventilator preparedness. There was also a focus on logistics and supply chain delivery, regional assistance and communications.

It is a significant achievement that we were able to stand up more than 450 testing clinics, conduct more than 25 million PCR tests, manage around 557,000 high-risk patients via outbound telephone calls, and deliver 16.4 million vaccines. Our vaccination program contributed to Australia becoming a world leader in the rollout of COVID-19 vaccinations, and NSW being the first state to reach a more than 90% double dose vaccination rate.

This volume of work has never been seen before. It was an effort like no other, and everyone involved should be proud.

Supporting our friends in crisis

We saw again this year, the devastation of floods across the state, and I saw firsthand the heartbreaking aftermath in the Northern NSW region.

Many communities experienced significant and personal loss, but that didn't stop our local health districts in quickly responding and continuing to provide health care to those who needed it most – including, in some cases, health staff who had also lost their homes.

We banded together in this extraordinary time of need, with NSW Health staff from across the state including Western Sydney, Northern Sydney, Sydney, Mid North Coast, and Hunter New England local health districts as well as Ambulance NSW, responding to the call and travelled to affected areas when help was needed most.

I was in genuine awe of the determination, community spirit, dedication and commitment shown by the Northern NSW staff, and am deeply grateful to those who travelled from other parts of NSW Health to assist them.

Regional health focus

NSW Health is committed to ensuring that people living in regional, rural and remote NSW can access high quality, timely healthcare and have excellent patient experiences and optimal health outcomes.

The resilience, and resourcefulness, of regional communities has shone through the most difficult of times and continues to be a source of great strength.

The establishment of the Regional Health Division of NSW Health is a key driver in ensuring better health outcomes and a continued focus on regional health. Led by the Coordinator General for Regional Health, the regional health team is working in local health districts across regional NSW, building and maintaining relationships with key stakeholders and communicating in a collaborative, respectful and culturally appropriate way.

This ensures strong advocacy of regional health matters and strengthens the coordination, alignment, and integration of activities across the health sector.

A significant apology

This year, we commemorated National Sorry Day on the 26 May with a special event where on behalf of NSW Health, I made a formal apology to survivors of the Stolen Generations.

While past government policies very much still impact the health and wellbeing of our Aboriginal families today, we hope that our apology marks a significant milestone in our history and embraces truth-telling and the ongoing process of healing for our Aboriginal communities.

Clinical care and the human experience

The team at NSW Health continues to lead the way to achieve the three NSW Premier's Priorities. Across the health system, we are working towards improving service levels in hospitals, improving outpatient and community care, and reducing NSW rates of suicide by 20% by 2023.

Delivering the best care during challenging times

There can be little doubt that 2021–22 was one of the most challenging years NSW Health has faced. The Delta and Omicron outbreaks have had a marked impact on our state's health system at every level. The pandemic, combined with the damage wrought on the state as a result of extreme weather events, has meant our already hard-working staff have had to go the extra mile time and time again.

It is thanks to all staff across the NSW Health system that we have continued to deliver safe care to the millions of people who need us every day of every year.

Virtual care enhancing outpatient care

Like all healthcare systems around the world, COVID-19 changed the way care is delivered in NSW. While virtual care is not a new healthcare model, the pandemic provided new opportunities for us to accelerate and invest in the way we deliver virtual care across the state.

NSW Health launched the next stage of our NSW Virtual Care Strategy 2021–2026 to integrate virtual care as a safe, effective, and accessible option for healthcare delivery in NSW. In the last year, 152,500 virtual consultations were hosted via the myVirtualCare platform and used by 25,000 clinicians.

The NSW Telestroke service is another example of how a virtual care model of care is enhancing access to specialist care no matter where you live. It is now fully implemented at 23 regional and rural hospitals across NSW, linking more than 2,300 stroke patients to specialist stroke physicians in metropolitan hospitals via telehealth.

Towards Zero Suicides

We continue to deliver mental health services and care to support the wellbeing of people across the state and there was also a focus on supporting people in flood-affected communities.

New suicide prevention support was rolled out across the state with 20 calming non-clinical hubs called Safe Havens and 20 Suicide Prevention Outreach Teams embedded in communities across NSW. To support flood-affected communities, four pop-up Safe Havens were set up in the areas hardest hit. Instead of struggling alone or heading to an emergency department, anyone who is experiencing mental health distress can now go to one of these purpose-designed Safe Havens.

We also upskilled and supported staff to provide the very best mental health care, with 6,700 staff trained in suicide awareness and response skills under the Community Gatekeeper initiative and trained 1,700 NSW Government staff working outside mental health services in suicide prevention.

In a landmark agreement, NSW was the first state to sign a $383 million Bilateral Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Schedule with the Australian Government. The agreement will see an even greater increase in mental health and suicide prevention supports for the people of NSW over the next four years.

Delivering health infrastructure

Across NSW, 12 projects were completed, improving health services and creating employment opportunities in both metropolitan and regional areas.

Major new regional construction included the final stage of the $241.3 million Dubbo Hospital redevelopment, the $35 million Dubbo Western Cancer Centre, and the $470 million New Maitland Hospital. Two facilities combining health and aged care services were completed under the $296.5 million Multipurpose Service Program – the Hay Health Service and Tocumwal Multipurpose Service.

We also fast-tracked the completion of wards in the $341 million Concord Hospital redevelopment to address the surge in COVID-19 patient numbers.

Under the $700 million Statewide Mental Health Infrastructure Program, an acute mental health unit at Blacktown Hospital and the first specialist mother and baby mental health unit at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital were opened. To help address growing community need in Western Sydney and South West Sydney, we completed Stage 1 of the $550 million Nepean Hospital redevelopment and a new clinical service building for Campbelltown Hospital.

The human experience

Several years ago we recognised that supporting our workforce was core to our efforts to transform the patient experience. We listened carefully to our staff members to curate a program of events and activities offered both online and in person, such as monthly Conversations in Human Experience, the Gathering of Kindness, Patient Experience Week and Mini Compassion Labs. These provide safe spaces for reflection, contemplation, and learning. More than 5,000 staff members from all parts of the state have participated and the feedback has been extraordinarily positive.

Our commitment to improve the patient experience was awarded The Beryl Institute's Organizational Innovation Award for creating our reference guide Elevating the Human Experience – A Guide to Action. The award is international recognition for our efforts to put more humanity back into healthcare, for both patients and all of our staff.

Looking back on the year that was, the impacts of COVID-19 do indeed continue to be felt and they will be for some time, but our work in delivering the health system of the future must progress nonetheless. We will continue to do that work with our hallmark integrity, strength, and resilience but most of all with kindness and compassion.

Susan Pearce
Secretary, NSW Health

An ongoing response to COVID-19

As the COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact our state throughout 2021–22, NSW Health worked together to maintain exceptional service delivery and respond quickly to the needs of our community across the state.

We faced the challenge of adapting to surges in the pandemic caused by the Delta and Omicron BA.1 and BA.2 variants. Our specialist teams continued their commitment to provide world-class care.

NSW Health managed and supported:

- 2.6 million positive COVID-19 cases (1.5 million identified via PCR tests and 1.2 million via RAT tests)
- 25.6 million PCR tests
- more than 450 COVID-19 testing clinics
- 1.9 million text messages to close contacts between June 2021 and December 2021, during the Delta outbreaks.

Boosting vaccination take-up

The focus of the whole-of-government emergency response to COVID-19 quickly shifted to include the rollout of the NSW COVID-19 vaccination program.

In 2021–22, 16.4 million vaccines were administered in NSW and NSW Health delivered 4.2 million of them. NSW Health also accelerated vaccination coverage in the community by providing tailored strategies, targeted campaigns, and convenient access to vaccines. This was particularly important for vulnerable populations and in low-uptake areas in preventing higher rates of serious illness and death from COVID-19. This led to Australia becoming a world leader in the rollout of COVID-19 vaccinations, with NSW being the first Australian state to reach a more than 90% double-dose vaccination rate.

16.4 million vaccines were administered in NSW

Managing our borders

The NSW Hotel Quarantine Program was pivotal in protecting NSW residents and minimising the impact and spread of the pandemic.

The State Health Emergency Operations Centre (SHEOC) provided operational governance for the health and welfare of Australian residents, airline crew and staff at quarantine hotels and special health accommodation facilities. This included implementing evolving public health risk mitigation measures and managing continually improving processes.

The Surveillance Testing Program for transport providers and airport and quarantine workers was established to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from the pandemic. A dedicated maritime team was also established to support the systems, processes and procedures at NSW ports.

There were circumstances where systems were adapted for people who needed to enter or leave the country for compassionate reasons. During 2021–22, the Quarantine Exemptions Unit processed around 9,600 applications.

Keeping People Healthy Award
– (COVID-19 category)

An impressive response

The State Health Emergency Operations Centre (SHEOC)

The SHEOC was established to implement Public Health Orders; assist local health districts and specialty health networks to build critical care and emergency department capacity and establish COVID-19 testing clinics; manage hotel quarantine; and coordinate the supply of personal protective equipment.

Over time it adapted to include critical areas, such as operationalisation of the vaccination program, testing clinics, airport surveillance and more.

The team achieved significant and meaningful outcomes, showed incredible resilience and commitment, and worked collaboratively with our health partners. A well-deserved win!

Managing supplies

The SHEOC supported the rapid deployment of resources to meet surge demands in times of outbreak. It operationalised several rapid testing clinics for close and household contacts.

The team managed procurement and logistics-based requests so that the supply of medical consumables was not interrupted during the pandemic emergency response. Despite global supply chain disruption, NSW has not experienced a single stock outage in protective personal equipment (PPE), medical consumables or devices since the start of the pandemic.

Managing COVID-19 in aged care settings

Additional PPE was provided to residential aged care and disability facilities at risk of having no PPE stock available due to the outbreak. This included supplying more than 2 million items to assist more than 100 residential aged care and disability facilities during the first Omicron wave. This also included supplying RAT kits.

All local health districts supported the sector to help put an end to outbreaks as quickly and safely as possible by:

- enabling access to specialist services to support the clinical care of residents
- providing advice and support to implement infection prevention and control measures.

NSW Health continually engaged with the Commonwealth, the aged care and disability sector and the Aged and Community Care Providers Association through fortnightly and monthly meetings to advise on the public health response to the pandemic. This was in addition to the regular advice the NSW Chief Health Officer provided to the aged care and disability sector.

The Public Health Response Branch revised the comprehensive outbreak management guidance developed early in the pandemic. This includes advice on outbreak management, infection prevention and control, use of PPE and management of COVID-19 cases and contacts. The public health advice on managing COVID-19 outbreaks was expanded to include outbreaks due to other respiratory viruses, including influenza.

NSW was the first state to develop a Joint Protocol with the Australian Government Department of Health and the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission. The protocol outlines roles and responsibilities for outbreak management in residential aged care and disability settings. This includes:

- coordinated whole-of-government plans
- emergency response by SHEOC and local health districts (in addition to public health advice).

Bringing private hospitals on board

In response to the outbreaks of the Delta and Omicron variants, the System Purchasing Branch worked with private hospital operators to increase health system capacity.

Private hospitals conducted additional elective surgery on behalf of the public health system for patients who had their non-urgent elective surgery postponed. In the 2021–22 Budget an extra $80 million was committed by the NSW Government to fast-track these elective surgeries.

Managing intensive care capacity

The management of NSW's intensive care unit capacity was a critical priority throughout the pandemic. The System Management Branch monitored and implemented strategies to support intensive care unit capacity to meet surge demand for patients with COVID-19 requiring treatment. This optimised the management and care of critically ill patients who needed treatment in an intensive care unit, ensuring world-class clinical care.

Clinical communities of practice

More than 3,500 clinicians joined 30 clinical communities of practice to publish almost 100 guidance documents and develop local solutions. There were more than 755,000 views of the communities of practice webpages by more than 444,000 users. The Agency for Clinical Innovation's Critical Intelligence Unit provided rapid, evidence-based advice on COVID-19 and published the weekly Risk Monitoring Dashboard. This assessed transmission risk in healthcare settings to protect staff and patients.

Identifying contacts and supporting those who tested positive

The State Operational Data Store Program and COVID-19 Care in the Community Team partnered to manage COVID-19 cases in the community using the Patient Flow Portal, NSW Health's enterprise patient flow and care coordination system. The teams ensured positive PCR and RAT results registered through Service NSW were automatically assigned to local health districts for care, and matched with each patient's clinical record.

Support was provided to local health districts around the clock as they managed outbreaks, particularly in priority locations, including educational, correctional, and residential aged care settings. The NSW Health Flu and COVID-19 Care at Home Support Line provided free symptom assessment by connecting patients to virtual medical consultations, and provided assistance with medical clearance certificates.

The increased support for COVID-19 patients in the community relieved the pressure on emergency departments across the state by ensuring patients could receive information, care and support within their home settings.

Additionally, cases who were eligible for life-saving anti-viral therapies were automatically referred to a local health district community health team or a GP to receive treatment. This resulted in:

- 407,000 cases completing secondary screening surveys designed to identify high-risk cases requiring further care
- 25,000 eligible patients being referred to NSW Health and primary care providers to access potentially lifesaving COVID-19 antiviral therapies in partnership with HealthDirect.

The Clinical Excellence Commission's collaborative access model also enabled community clinicians to prescribe treatments that reduced hospitalisation and deaths for dispensation at NSW Health pharmacies. This departure from standard practice helped more than 5,000 patients access treatment.

The Operational Data Store Team also set up a process to assist GPs to send letters to COVID-19 patients, including information about how to self-manage at home and what to do if their condition deteriorated. This significantly reduced the number of concerned patients presenting to emergency departments unnecessarily.

As well as processing more than 3.4 million COVID-19 tests, NSW Health Pathology created a Results Portal for patients to access their results quickly. The 2021 winter testing strategy enabled patients tested for COVID-19 to also be tested for influenza and, in some cases, other respiratory viruses. Its genomics team also helped map transmission, assisted with contact tracing, identified variants of concern, and detected drug resistance in new variants.

The Case and Contact Team was set up as part of the Public Health Response Branch early in the pandemic. In collaboration with the Centre for Epidemiology and Evidence, this team was supported and strengthened throughout the pandemic by the enhancement of data and telephony systems.

It was scaled up and down as required and had capacity to surge to more than 330 internal staff, supported by extra staff from 7 external agencies. The team completed 557,521 outbound calls to high-risk COVID-19 cases and contacts, answering more than 214,115 inbound calls from the public.

When the number of COVID-19 cases increased rapidly from several hundred a day to several thousand, the contact tracing system transitioned from individual phone calls to SMS. Those affected were provided with links to information on how to manage their illness, their self-isolation obligations and how to access support. Close contacts were also provided with information on self-isolation, testing advice and support services.

To streamline contact tracing the Venue Management Team was established as part of the Public Health Response Branch to assess the risk to customers and clients at various venues. They also informed on appropriate messaging to contacts identified via QR codes and provided advice to enable them to manage outbreaks in their staff.

Sewage surveillance

From July to December 2021, the NSW Sewage Surveillance Program provided advance warning of the spread of the COVID-19 Delta variant, particularly in regional communities.

Data from sewage surveillance was reviewed daily to assess the need for regional restrictions and lockdowns.

Managing COVID-19 in Aboriginal communities

In collaboration with local health districts, SHEOC established culturally safe and welcoming spaces for the Aboriginal community to access COVID-19 vaccines.

In conjunction with NSW Health Infrastructure, SHEOC coordinated the setting up of Australia's first mobile community-supported accommodation. The model provided respectful, safe accommodation on Country for people with COVID-19 and close contacts, supporting the needs of the community.

The Centre for Aboriginal Health also supported minimising the impact of COVID-19 in Aboriginal communities by delivering tailored, culturally safe communications and support. A new Living with COVID-19 Communication and Engagement Strategy was developed with NSW Health, the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW and Aboriginal Affairs NSW.

Looking after dental health during COVID-19 lockdowns

The development of additional COVID-19 infection control and risk management guidelines supported dental health professionals to build confidence in performing dental care in a COVID-safe way. The procedures for tele-dentistry and dentistry in the home, and guidance for reconfiguring service models maximised the number of patients being cared for within infection control guidelines.

Developing tech solutions to scale up our response

The COVID-19 testing clinics information system was developed by eHealth and SHEOC to streamline information to digital platforms, ensuring it was of high quality, integrated and accessible.

Health Protection NSW also collaborated with eHealth to create a:

- case interview system to rapidly identify contacts and risks in community settings
- scaled close contact interview system to manage communication with people exposed to COVID-19 in the community
- risk assessment system for managing exposures in community settings.

Modelling the ongoing impact of COVID-19

The Centre for Epidemiology and Evidence supported the Public Health Response Branch to make daily cases, testing and vaccination data available to the health system and public. At the same time, the System Information and Analytics Branch created tools to model the effects of the virus on our health system to help manage resources. The Centre for Epidemiology and Evidence also worked closely with Health Protection NSW to provide data on the prevalence of influenza to internal and external modelling teams.

Data was also collected on the effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccination program and any adverse events following immunisation. The System Information and Analytics Branch generated weekly reports on the NSW vaccination program. These reports were based on data from the Australian Immunisation Register analysed by the Centre for Epidemiology and Evidence and the Public Health Response Branch. This supported service delivery and planning, including during the emergence of the Omicron subvariant BA.2 in March 2022.

The branch's work with dynamic forecasting continues to support healthcare planning to meet predicted surges in case numbers as the pandemic evolves.