

Appendix one – Response from agency



Ms Margaret Crawford
Auditor-General for NSW
Audit Office of NSW
GPO Box 12
Sydney NSW 2001

Our ref H20/131166

Dear Ms Crawford 

NSW Health response to Performance Audit Report – Managing the Health, Safety and Well-being of Nurses and Junior Doctors in High-Demand Hospital Environments

Thank you for your letter of 20 November 2020 seeking NSW Health's formal response to your performance audit report on *Managing the Health, Safety and Wellbeing of Nurses and Junior Doctors in High-Demand Hospital Environments*.

The health, safety and wellbeing of our frontline staff has never been of more importance than during the current COVID-19 pandemic. The outcomes achieved by NSW Health during this challenging time are a testament to the dedication of our staff and the systems and frameworks which provide assurance on their safety.

In reading the audit report, it is important to note that its content reflects a moment in time in the early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the pandemic setting has evolved, significant work has been undertaken to strengthen staff knowledge and confidence in policies and practices associated with operating in a COVID-safe fashion.

Following a review of the audit report I can advise that all recommendations are accepted by NSW Health and will be incorporated into planned activity. In responding, I would like to highlight the following points:

1. The findings and recommendations of the audit report regarding workforce support and incident reporting need to be considered through an understanding of NSW Health's governance model. Local Health Districts and Specialty Networks assess and mitigate incidents as most appropriate to their local setting, rather than being directed by the Ministry of Health.

Within this context, there is an expectation that workplace issues such as those highlighted would be subject to local surfacing and resolution, assisted by the extensive requirements of relevant employment awards, legislation and policy which have been purposely designed to mitigate these issues.

2. A key feature of NSW Health's successful response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been the centralised oversight of performance, strategy and policy development by the Ministry of Health and governed through weekly state-wide pandemic meetings with all NSW Health Chief Executives. Through this mechanism, all frontline services have been informed of developments as the pandemic has evolved.

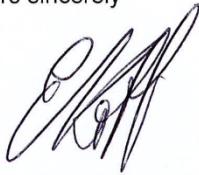
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This approach has been further strengthened through the role of the NSW Chief Health Officer in directing the 16 public health units within Local Health Districts and Specialty Networks and also in the rapid establishment by the Ministry of Health of centralised procurement functions through HealthShare NSW and clinical advice and guidance with regard to the use of personal protective equipment by the Clinical Excellence Commission.

Collectively, these processes form a network of resources for the Health System and ensure the provision of consistent advice to all frontline staff.

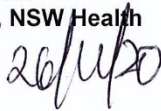
In addition to the above points, please find attached to this letter a summary of NSW Health's responses to the individual recommendations made in this report. I thank you and the lead auditors for your ongoing engagement with NSW Health and its representatives during this audit program.

Yours sincerely



Elizabeth Koff
Secretary, NSW Health

Encl.



Recommendation	NSW Health Response	
By December 2021, NSW Health should:		
1. Evaluate the effectiveness of the new incident management system to enable full reporting of health and safety incidents and risks in all hospital wards, including those where incidents and risks are common and monitor for consistency of reporting over time.	Accept	<p>The Clinical Excellence Commission has led the implementation of a new incident management system, IMS+, across the Health System. IMS+ has been developed specifically for NSW Health and enables staff to report clinical, work health and safety and corporate incidents in a timely and effective manner. The system has also been developed to enable analysis of data on a state-wide level, to guide the identification, assessment and mitigation of risks.</p> <p>In 2021, the effectiveness of IMS+ will be assessed as part of a planned program evaluation process, giving consideration to the findings of this report.</p>
2. Expand the categories of hospital incident data reported to Ministry executives in the Work Health and Safety Dashboard reports - including by linking injury data to incident types by hospital ward category and monitor in conjunction with Local Health Districts for emerging trends and improvement over time.	Accept	<p>The Ministry of Health will review the current dashboard reporting structure to include information on ward category and other data which may assist in identifying system-wide trends for investigation. Consideration will also be given to how data from the new IMS+ system can be used to enhance reporting.</p> <p>The Ministry will continue to work with the Local Health Districts to identify emerging trends and to support Districts in preventing and responding to incidents at a local level.</p>
3. Ensure that nurses and junior doctors have regular opportunities to report on their psychological health and wellbeing, and that system managers have access to aggregate information to guide responses to mitigate these risks.	Accept	<p>For junior doctors, The Ministry of Health will conduct the third and final <i>Your Training and Wellbeing Matters</i> survey in 2021. Post 2021, the Medical Board of Australia's annual survey of trainee doctors will be used to collect relevant data, with a focus on health and wellbeing. Aggregated data will be reported by facility and made available to relevant staff in each Local Health District and Specialty Network.</p> <p>The Ministry will also investigate options for engaging with nursing staff over the same time period.</p>

Recommendation	NSW Health Response	
4. Develop and implement an evidence based guiding framework and strategy to support hospital staff in the aftermath of traumatic or unexpected workplace incidents and monitor implementation.	Accept	<p>In collaboration with key Health System leads, the findings of this audit will be reviewed and incorporated into activity.</p> <p>Of note, NSW is enacting new legislation with respect to the management of serious incidents from 14 December 2020. At this time a new NSW Health Incident Management policy directive will be introduced.</p> <p>Among other enhancements, the new policy will set revised requirements for the assessment and escalation of risk and will also give a focus to supporting staff psychological wellbeing following a serious clinical incident.</p>
5. At regular intervals, publicly report aggregate Root Cause Analysis data detailing the hospital system factors that contribute to clinical incidents.	Accept	<p>The Clinical Excellence Commission will continue to publicly report aggregate root cause analysis data relating to serious clinical incidents, in order to outline key systems factors that contribute to clinical incidents. The effectiveness of this practice will be assessed with respect to the findings of this report and to identify where enhancements can be made.</p>
6. Develop and implement a systemwide platform for sharing research and information about hospital health and safety initiatives across the health system.	Accept	<p>The Ministry of Health will consider opportunities to facilitate information sharing to guide development and implementation of a system-wide platform, in consultation with key stakeholders within NSW Health, including the Clinical Excellence Commission, HealthShare NSW and Local Health Districts and Specialty Networks.</p>
<p>7. Conduct a post-pandemic 'lessons learned' review focusing on the effectiveness of key strategies deployed in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic and making policy and operational recommendations for future pandemic response.</p> <p>In particular, ensure:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> regular scenario based pandemic training for hospital staff updated policies and protocols on hospital infection controls capability to upscale authoritative communication with frontline health workers at the earliest notification of a health emergency and for the duration of the emergency systems and safeguards to ensure the availability of clinically appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) during all phases of a pandemic. 	Accept	<p>The Ministry of Health will lead a review on NSW Health's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, to inform planning for future pandemic response. It is proposed that this work will be completed when appropriate to do so, post-pandemic.</p> <p>The points highlighted by this recommendation will be included in the terms of reference for review, among other items of priority for the Health System.</p>