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\$69.7 MILLION TO BOLSTER HOSPITAL SECURITY

A program proven to de-escalate tensions in emergency departments and an innovative pilot between police and mental health clinicians will be extended under a \$69.7 million hospital security package in the 2021-22 NSW Budget.

Treasurer Dominic Perrottet said the additional security measures will also see 24/7 Health and Security Assistants embedded in eight critical mental health facilities in rural and regional areas.

“Difficult or aggressive behaviour in emergency departments is sadly a global problem but one the NSW Government has zero tolerance for,” Mr Perrottet said.

“This record funding will support successful, innovative programs found to decrease challenging behaviour in patients and family members and keep our health staff safe.”

Health Minister Brad Hazzard said the \$69.7 million funding boost will ensure both the PACER (Police Ambulance and Clinical Early Response) program, which aims to avoid hospital admissions by supporting mental health patients and police on the scene, and the Patient Experience Program, will continue for a further four years.

“Whether it is fear, distress, pain, intoxication or some other underlying pathology, it is not acceptable to hurt the very people trying to help unwell patients,” Mr Hazzard said.

“The Patient Experience Program has helped reduce aggression in our hospitals, creating a safer environment for visitors, health staff and the patients they are treating.”

Minister for Mental Health Bronnie Taylor said the groundbreaking PACER collaboration between mental health experts and first responders enables people to be assessed at the scene of a mental health emergency.

“During the pilot program within St George Police Area Command, there was a five per cent decrease in overall mental health emergency department attendances and a 12 per cent reduction in the number of people apprehended by Police under the Mental Health Act,” Mrs Taylor said.

“These extremely promising results ease pressure on local emergency departments, police and ambulance resources and significantly reduce police response times but, more importantly, mean a better patient experience.”

The \$69.7 million package is part of the response to the recommendations earlier this year of the statewide hospital security review by the Honourable Peter Anderson, A.M. commissioned by the NSW Government, and will include:

- 35 additional Health and Security Assistants (HASA) embedded in eight rural and regional Declared Mental Health Facilities, implemented over the next two years;

- Patient Experience Program continued for four years. First implemented in 2019 at four pilot sites and now in 53 emergency departments;
- PACER program, which began as a trial in June 2020, continued for another four years in 12 Local Area Commands.

The NSW Government has already invested \$19 million to improve security in emergency departments at public hospitals, upgrading CCTV systems, improving access controls between public and staff and installing remote locking to public access doors. Another \$5 million has been spent to upgrade duress alarms for staff in emergency departments, which they are mandated to wear while on duty, and there are more than 3,000 CCTV cameras in operation in NSW public hospitals.

As part of the COVID-19 response, \$15 million has been spent on additional temporary security at hospitals with COVID clinics. Another \$8.6 million has been spent on rolling out the award-winning Patient Experience Program over the past two years, which improves communication with parents and their families and provides extra support while they are in emergency.

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