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Caring Together: Gender-based rooms for hospital patients

Minister for Health, John Della Bosca, announced today female and male patients in public hospitals would benefit from separate rooms or ward bays wherever possible as part of a raft of health initiatives to be introduced by the NSW Government.

Mr Della Bosca said the improvements were part of the Government's *Caring Together: The NSW Health Action Plan* developed in response to the Garling Report triggered by the tragic death of Vanessa Anderson.

"Public hospitals need to have greater opportunities, backed up by extra resources, to place men and women in separate rooms or ward spaces," the Minister said.

"We acknowledge where patients need emergency or intensive care treatment this is not always going to be possible - especially in the initial stages of treatment - as patient care is going to be the over-riding priority, however, we need to find a better balance.

"The NSW Government is providing \$12 million over four years to employ extra support staff to help with necessary transfers within wards so men and women can be housed in separate rooms and ward bays.

"Support staff will help transport patients to a gender-based area when a bed becomes available and ensure they are settled into their new room," Mr Della Bosca said.

Gender-based rooms will enhance a patient's experience by:

- Providing greater personal privacy,
- Improving dignity for patients; and
- Promoting more open and improved communication between patients and health professionals as people will feel more comfortable and at ease in their room.

"The focus of the action plan is to promote a culture in hospitals where the care and treatment of the patient is at the centre of everything we do," the Minister said.

"As the Garling Report points out, NSW has one of the better public health care systems in the developed world but we need to meet the challenges of the future, including a growing and ageing population.

"The reforms being announced today are the result of extensive consultation across the State and from working closely with doctors, nurses and other health staff.

"In the past few months, I visited about 60 hospitals and have had communication with 12,000 doctors, nurses, health workers and members of the public, either directly or through our dedicated website," Mr Della Bosca said.

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“We received about 5000 letters on the gender-based wards alone – the improvements being announced today demonstrate the NSW Government has listened and is committed to delivering the best health system possible,” the Minister said.

The Minister said Hospital in the Home programs for people with chronic and complex medical conditions will also be expanded as part of the NSW Government's *Caring Together* action plan.

“The programs are already providing options for people who are better managed in their own home where doctors, nurses and allied health team members provide dedicated care.

“More patients with chronic and complex conditions will receive such care over the next five years.”

Initially, the Severe Chronic Disease Management Program will be rolled out focussing on people over the age of 65 (45 years for the Indigenous community) with very high risk conditions including:

- Diabetes,
- Congestive health failure and other heart disease,
- Chronic obstructive lung disease, and
- High blood pressure.

“Supporting and treating people in their home will take pressure off the hard-working and dedicated doctors and nurses in our busy Emergency Departments while ensuring patients continue to get the care they need in a comfortable setting,” Mr Della Bosca said.

“These initiatives are only the beginning of important changes to continue to deliver the best possible health care and to ensure on-going patient care and safety.

“The full details of the *Caring Together* initiative will be announced next week,” the Minister added.

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