



## Special Commission of Inquiry into Healthcare Funding

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# Chris O'Brien Lifehouse

## **Submission to the Special Commission of Inquiry into Health Care Funding in NSW**

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Dear Commissioner Beasley SC

Chris O'Brien Lifehouse is honoured to present our response to the Special Commission of Inquiry into the funding of health services provided in New South Wales. Our institution is committed to ensuring the safety and well-being of the people of NSW, both presently and in the future, by delivering timely, equitable, and accessible specialised patient-centered cancer care.

As an integral part of the health system, Chris O'Brien Lifehouse is committed to fulfilling the requirements set forth by the Health Services Act 1997 of New South Wales.

Chris O'Brien Lifehouse is eager to contribute insights regarding the allocation of funds for the delivery of specialised cancer care in NSW, striving to optimise health outcomes for individuals with complex or rare cancers across NSW.

Chris O'Brien Lifehouse is prepared to actively engage in any relevant Hearings, fostering the advancement of effective funding models for delivering comprehensive specialised surgical cancer services across NSW.

Yours Sincerely

Professor Michael Boyer  
Chief Executive Officer, Chris O'Brien Lifehouse

## **Aligning Values and Priorities: Chris O'Brien Lifehouse's Contribution to NSW Health's Cancer Care Mission**

Chris O'Brien Lifehouse (COBLH) is a not-for profit comprehensive cancer hospital located in Camperdown on the campus of Royal Prince Alfred Hospital (RPAH). It is an independent private hospital, governed by its own Board of Directors and has its own management and clinical governance framework. The clinical model of care focuses on the patient, along with their family and supports, and aims to provide all required treatments in one location. The hospital provides a comprehensive range of clinical services for cancer including surgery, radiation therapy, systemic therapy, allied health and other supportive treatments. There is also significant associated research and education undertaken within the facility.

Although COBLH is a private hospital, core to its activities is the treatment of public patients in five specialty areas (breast surgery, head and neck surgery, gynecologic oncology, medical oncology, and radiation oncology), under a long-term agreement with Sydney Local Health District (SLHD). In addition, private cancer services are provided across a range of specialty areas including upper and lower gastrointestinal surgery, thoracic surgery, urology, neurosurgery, and plastic surgery. As an independent, not-for-profit entity, COBLH is self-sustaining and has a track record of multiplying impact from government investment by leveraging it with commercial partnerships and philanthropic support. It is supported by a generous philanthropic community which has donated more than \$60 million in the last five years (not including in-kind support).

COBLH opened in 2013 and over the subsequent ten years has grown rapidly. It has become one of the largest providers of surgical cancer services in the state. The combination of public and private activity has underpinned this growth and has ensured that all patients get the benefit of the concentration of expertise that now exists at the hospital. This approach also ensures the best possible outcomes for those complex and rare cancers, for which there is a clear relationship between activity and outcome.

The model at COBLH also enables high volumes of clinical trials and other research activities, which support innovative treatment approaches. This has been demonstrated with the rapid growth in the number of trials and trial participants, the success in obtaining grant funding and the establishment of novel programs such as the Integrated Prosthetics and Reconstruction Laboratory and the Bio-innovation Hub. These programs build on important partnerships with researchers and clinicians at SLHD and RPAH and have also provided a focus for philanthropy which has helped to provide additional support to the Hospital.

The ongoing relationship between COBLH and the NSW Health system builds on investment that has already been made by the Commonwealth and State to create a leading multidisciplinary cancer care hub in the RPAH precinct. With Commonwealth plans to develop similar precincts nationwide, this ongoing collaboration will ensure NSW Health continues as a national leader and potentially enables the State to take further advantage of Commonwealth capital funding for cancer hospitals.

A key factor that underpins the relationship between COBLH and SLHD, as well as the NSW Health system more generally is our shared values in maximising outcomes for people with cancer through three key stages: accurate and timely diagnosis; access to best practice treatment facilities; and high-quality, trained, and supported health professionals. These values include:

- Patient-centered care: Both Chris O'Brien Lifehouse and NSW Health are committed to providing patient-centered care, which means putting the patient's needs and preferences first.
- Collaboration: Both organisations are committed to working collaboratively with each other and with other stakeholders in the health system to achieve the best possible outcomes for patients.

- Innovation: Both organisations are committed to innovation and to using the latest research and technology to improve cancer care services.
- Excellence: Both organisations are committed to providing high-quality, evidence-based cancer care services.

This alignment in values can support and augment the delivery of cancer care services across NSW

- Shared best practices: Chris O'Brien Lifehouse and NSW Health can share best practices and learn from each other's experiences to improve the quality of cancer care services across NSW.
- Joint research and development: The two organisations can collaborate on research and development to create new and innovative cancer treatments and diagnostic methods.
- Coordinated care: Chris O'Brien Lifehouse and NSW Health can work together to coordinate the delivery of cancer care services across the state, so that patients have access to the seamless and integrated care they need.

## Limitations

The model of care that underpins service delivery at Chris O'Brien Lifehouse has been of benefit to many thousands of patients over the past decade since the facility opened. In each of the specialty surgical areas for which COBLH provides public cancer care (head and neck, breast, gynaecology) we provide the largest volume of surgery in the state, based on Cancer Institute NSW data published in October 2022. However, the funding approach used to purchase public services from Chris O'Brien Lifehouse does not reflect the patient population that is being treated. Public activity at COBLH is purchased only by the Sydney Local Health District, despite approximately 45% of public patients residing in areas outside of SLHD (2021, 2022, and 2023 data). This is a difficult situation for SLHD which, to our knowledge, is itself not funded to provide cancer care to patients from other local health districts across the state. The consequence of this is that COBLH provides a substantial volume of unfunded public services (546 NWAU, = \$2.8m in 2022 – 23). In a sense, this means that COBLH is subsidising the provision of public healthcare, which is neither appropriate nor a sustainable situation.

## Potential Solutions

Potential solutions, which would support the ongoing provision of high quality, specialised cancer care to patients from across the state include:

- direct funding from NSW Ministry of Health for those public services provided by COBLH to patients from Local Health Districts other than Sydney Local Health District
- the ability for COBLH to recover treatment costs from the local health district within which a patient resides when that patient chooses to receive treatment at Chris O'Brien Lifehouse

Approaches such as these would support patients to receive care at their institution of choice and would take advantage of the superior results that can be achieved for complex or rare cancers in centres with a concentration of expertise and sufficient volume of activity.

This submission highlights the convergence of values between COBLH and NSW Health, emphasising patient-centered care, collaboration, innovation, and excellence as shared pillars. This alignment paves the way for a dynamic collaboration that can yield substantial benefits across key aspects of cancer care—from sharing best practices to driving joint research and development and ensuring coordinated care state-wide.