New South Wales

Special Commission of Inquiry into Healthcare Funding

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Zac Chu makes this submission to the Special Commission of Inquiry into Healthcare Funding as an individual. As per Zac's profile at https://bit.ly/ZacLI, he is a consumer and carer representative who is an active and experienced advocate of healthcare-related issues. Zac consents to this submission including his name being published on the Special Commission of Inquiry's website, and accessible to the public, including persons overseas. Zac's comments on the selected elements within the scope of Special Commission of Inquiry are as follows.

A. The funding of health services provided in NSW and how the funding can most effectively support the safe delivery of high quality, timely, equitable and accessible patient-centred care and health services to the people of NSW, now and into the future.

Increased Funding for Primary Care:

Allocate additional resources to strengthen primary care services, such as general practitioners, nurses, and community health centers. Enhancing primary care can reduce the burden on hospitals and ensure patients receive timely and appropriate care.

Focus on Prevention and Health Promotion:

Allocate funds for preventive health measures, such as vaccination programs, health education, and lifestyle interventions. A strong emphasis on prevention can reduce the future healthcare burden and improve overall community health.

Invest in Telehealth and Digital Health Services:

Continue to support and expand telehealth services to improve accessibility and reduce geographical barriers to care. Invest in robust digital health infrastructure for electronic health records and remote monitoring, ensuring patient data security and privacy.

Enhance Mental Health Services:

Allocate substantial funding for mental health services to address the growing mental health crisis. Develop a comprehensive and accessible mental health system, with a focus on early intervention and community-based care.

Regional and Rural Health Support:

Provide additional funding to address healthcare disparities in regional and rural areas. This includes increased funding for rural hospitals, incentives for healthcare professionals to work in these areas, and improved transportation options for patients.

Patient-Centered Care Models:

Encourage the adoption of patient-centered care models, emphasizing shared decision-making, patient engagement, and care coordination. Funds should be directed towards training healthcare professionals in these practices.

Workforce Development:

Invest in ongoing education and training for healthcare professionals to ensure they are up-to-date with the latest evidence-based practices. Attract and retain skilled healthcare workers by offering competitive salaries and improving working conditions.

Collaborative Healthcare Networks:

Support the development of collaborative healthcare networks that facilitate communication and coordination between different healthcare providers, including hospitals, primary care, and specialist services.

Research and Innovation:

Allocate resources for medical research and innovation to ensure that New South Wales remains at the forefront of healthcare technology and treatments. Encourage partnerships between academia, industry, and healthcare providers to drive innovation.

Transparent Funding Allocation:

Ensure transparency in how healthcare funds are allocated and distributed. Regularly engage with the community and consumer advocacy groups to prioritize funding based on community needs and preferences.

Data-Driven Decision-Making:

Invest in robust data collection and analysis systems to monitor the effectiveness of healthcare services and identify areas for improvement. Data should inform resource allocation and policy decisions.

Long-Term Planning:

Develop long-term healthcare plans that consider demographic changes and evolving healthcare needs. These plans should be flexible and adaptable to address unforeseen challenges, such as pandemics.

Accountability and Evaluation:

Establish mechanisms for ongoing evaluation of healthcare services and funding allocation. Hold healthcare providers accountable for delivering high-quality care and meeting performance targets.

By focusing on the aforesaid aspects, New South Wales can strive to create a healthcare system that is not only responsive to the immediate needs of its population but also sustainable and adaptable to meet future challenges effectively. It is crucial that the government, healthcare providers, and consumer advocacy groups work collaboratively to implement these strategies for the benefit of all residents in the state.

D. Strategies available to NSW Health to address escalating costs, limit wastage, minimise overserving and identify gaps or areas of improvement in financial management and proposed recommendations to enhance accountability and efficiency.

Performance Metrics and Reporting:

Develop and consistently monitor performance metrics for healthcare facilities and providers to identify areas of inefficiency.

Implement transparent reporting mechanisms to keep the public and stakeholders informed about financial performance and outcomes.

Cost-Benefit Analysis:

Conduct regular cost-benefit analyses to assess the value of various healthcare programs and services, focusing on the return on investment for each initiative.

Budgetary Controls:

Implement strict budgetary controls, such as spending caps and mandatory cost-saving measures, to prevent overspending and encourage financial responsibility.

Evidence-Based Medicine:

Encourage healthcare providers to adopt evidence-based medicine and treatment guidelines to reduce unnecessary and costly medical interventions.

Resource Allocation Review:

Periodically review the allocation of resources, ensuring that funds are directed toward services and programs with the greatest impact on patient outcomes.

Lean and Six Sigma Principles:

Apply Lean and Six Sigma principles to identify and eliminate inefficiencies in healthcare processes, which can lead to reduced costs and improved quality of care.

Health Information Technology:

Invest in health information technology to streamline administrative processes, reduce paperwork, and improve the accuracy of billing and coding.

Prevent Fraud and Abuse:

Implement robust systems to detect and prevent healthcare fraud and abuse, including regular audits and investigations.

Collaborative Procurement:

Collaborate with other healthcare organizations and governments to negotiate favorable pricing for medical supplies and equipment through bulk purchasing.

Value-Based Payment Models:

Transition to value-based payment models that reward healthcare providers for delivering high-quality care with cost-efficient outcomes, rather than fee-for-service.

Patient Education:

Educate patients about healthcare costs and the importance of making informed decisions regarding their care. Encourage them to question the necessity of tests and treatments.

Reduce Administrative Costs:

Simplify administrative processes to reduce administrative costs, such as billing and claims processing. This can be achieved through standardization and automation.

Health Workforce Productivity:

Continuously assess and improve workforce productivity and staffing levels to ensure that the right staff are in the right roles to optimize care delivery.

Strategic Resource Reallocation:

Identify underutilized or redundant services and facilities and strategically reallocate resources to areas of greater need and impact.

Regular Audits and Reviews:

Conduct regular financial audits and reviews to identify financial mismanagement, inefficiencies, and opportunities for cost savings.

Public-Private Partnerships:

Explore opportunities for public-private partnerships to leverage private sector expertise and resources in healthcare service delivery.

Sustainability Initiatives:

Implement sustainability programs to reduce environmental impact and associated costs in healthcare facilities.

Consumer Engagement:

Engage consumers and the community in decision-making and resource allocation processes to ensure that their needs and preferences are considered.

Continuous Improvement Culture:

Foster a culture of continuous improvement and innovation in financial management, encouraging staff to propose and implement cost-saving ideas.

Transparency and Accountability:

Maintain transparency and accountability in financial management, regularly reporting on financial performance and outcomes to stakeholders and the public.

By focusing on the aforesaid strategies, New South Wales Health can not only control escalating costs and minimize waste but also improve accountability and efficiency, ultimately providing better value and outcomes for the community.

E. Opportunities to improve NSW Health procurement process and practice, to enhance support for operational decision-making, service planning and delivery of quality and timely health care, including consideration of supply chain disruptions.

Strategic Sourcing:

Implement a strategic sourcing approach that emphasizes long-term relationships with suppliers. This approach can lead to cost savings and a more reliable supply chain.

Supplier Diversity:

Encourage supplier diversity to increase the number of suppliers and reduce dependence on a small pool of providers. Diversifying suppliers can improve supply chain resilience.

Supply Chain Visibility:

Invest in supply chain visibility tools and technologies that allow real-time tracking of inventory, demand, and shipments. This can help in identifying and mitigating disruptions promptly.

Demand Forecasting:

Improve demand forecasting by utilizing data analytics and predictive modeling. Accurate forecasting can help in maintaining appropriate inventory levels and reducing overstocking or stockouts.

Inventory Management:

Implement just-in-time inventory management to reduce carrying costs and free up capital. This approach can also help minimize waste and spoilage.

Supplier Performance Metrics:

Develop supplier performance metrics and regularly evaluate supplier performance. This can ensure that suppliers meet quality and delivery standards.

Emergency Response Plan:

Develop a robust emergency response plan to address supply chain disruptions, such as pandemics or natural disasters. This plan should include alternative suppliers and distribution channels.

Collaboration and Coordination:

Collaborate with other healthcare providers and government agencies to coordinate procurement efforts. This can lead to bulk purchasing, reduced costs, and improved supply chain resilience.

Transparency and Accountability:

Ensure transparency in the procurement process, making information on procurement decisions and contracts accessible to the public and stakeholders. This can build trust and accountability.

Life-Cycle Cost Analysis:

Utilise life-cycle cost analysis to consider the total cost of ownership when procuring equipment and supplies. This includes maintenance, disposal, and environmental impact.

Contract Management:

Implement efficient contract management systems to monitor contract compliance and performance. Automated contract management tools can improve efficiency.

Health Technology Assessment:

Conduct health technology assessments to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of medical devices, drugs, and treatments before procurement decisions are made.

Education and Training:

Train procurement staff and healthcare professionals on supply chain best practices and the importance of cost-effective procurement decisions.

Quality Assurance:

Prioritise quality in procurement decisions, especially for medical devices and pharmaceuticals, to ensure patient safety and positive health outcomes.

Environmental Considerations:

Incorporate environmental sustainability in procurement practices, selecting products and suppliers with green and sustainable options.

Benchmarking:

Benchmark procurement practices against industry best practices and continuously seek opportunities for improvement.

Feedback Mechanism:

Establish a feedback mechanism for healthcare professionals to report supply chain issues and suggest improvements in real-time.

Risk Assessment:

Regularly conduct risk assessments to identify potential supply chain vulnerabilities and develop mitigation strategies.

Continuous Improvement Culture:

Foster a culture of continuous improvement in procurement, encouraging staff to propose and implement process enhancements.

Audit and Compliance:

Conduct regular audits to ensure compliance with procurement policies and regulations.

By focusing on the aforesaid opportunities, New South Wales Health can enhance its procurement process, improve supply chain resilience, and support the delivery of high-quality and timely healthcare while efficiently managing resources. This will be particularly valuable in addressing supply chain disruptions and ensuring the uninterrupted flow of essential healthcare products and services.

H. New models of care and technical and clinical innovations to improve health outcomes for the people of NSW, including but not limited to technical and clinical innovation, changes to scope of practice, workforce innovation, and funding innovation.

Telehealth and Telemedicine:

Expand the use of telehealth and telemedicine to improve access to healthcare services, especially in remote and underserved areas.

Integrated Care Models:

Develop integrated care models that bring together primary care, specialty care, and community services to ensure holistic and coordinated patient care.

Virtual Care Teams:

Utilise virtual care teams consisting of various healthcare professionals, including nurse practitioners, to enhance care delivery, reduce wait times, and improve patient outcomes.

Health Information Exchange:

Invest in health information exchange systems to facilitate seamless data sharing among healthcare providers, ensuring that patients' medical records are accessible and secure.

Patient-Reported Outcomes:

Incorporate patient-reported outcomes and experiences in clinical decision-making, enabling a patient-centered approach to care.

Personalised Medicine:

Leverage genomic and molecular data to tailor treatments and interventions to individual patients, maximising treatment efficacy and minimising adverse effects.

Scope of Practice Expansion:

Evaluate and expand the scope of practice for various healthcare professionals, such as nurse practitioners and pharmacists, to meet the growing demand for healthcare services.

Task Shifting:

Implement task shifting, where appropriate, to allow healthcare workers with lower levels of training to perform tasks traditionally assigned to more specialized professionals.

Advanced Practice Roles:

Develop advanced practice roles, such as clinical nurse specialists and nurse anesthetists, to address specific healthcare needs and reduce the burden on physicians.

Interprofessional Education:

Promote interprofessional education and training to ensure that healthcare professionals can work collaboratively and effectively in team-based care models.

Advanced Technologies:

Adopt cutting-edge medical technologies, such as AI, robotics, and 3D printing, to improve diagnostic accuracy, surgical procedures, and the management of chronic conditions.

Mental Health Integration:

Integrate mental health services into primary care settings to provide comprehensive care for patients with both physical and mental health needs.

Public Health Initiatives:

Invest in public health initiatives, including vaccination campaigns, preventive screenings, and health education, to reduce the burden of preventable diseases.

Workforce Planning:

Develop a comprehensive healthcare workforce plan that addresses the current and future needs of the population, with a focus on recruitment and retention strategies.

Incentivise Rural Practice:

Offer financial incentives and support to healthcare professionals willing to practice in rural and underserved areas to address healthcare disparities.

Value-Based Payment Models:

Transition to value-based payment models that reward healthcare providers based on the quality and effectiveness of care rather than the volume of services.

Population Health Management:

Implement population health management programs that focus on preventive care, early intervention, and management of chronic conditions to improve overall health outcomes.

Public-Private Partnerships:

Collaborate with the private sector, academic institutions, and non-profit organizations to drive innovation in healthcare delivery and improve outcomes.

Outcome-Based Funding:

Explore outcome-based funding models that tie healthcare funding to specific health outcomes, encouraging providers to deliver results.

Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation:

Establish mechanisms for continuous monitoring and evaluation of new care models and innovations to assess their impact on health outcomes and make necessary adjustments.

The aforesaid innovations can transform healthcare in New South Wales, making it more accessible, patient-centred, and efficient while ensuring the delivery of high-quality care that leads to improved health outcomes for the population.