



Sentencing Council of NSW
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Via email: sentencingcouncil@dcj.nsw.gov.au

Health Services Union – NSW/ACT/QLD (HSU) thanks the New South Wales (NSW) Sentencing Council for inviting us to make a submission to the review into sentencing for firearms, knives & other weapons offences – we do so on behalf of nearly 48,000 dedicated members.

We submit the following recommendations for your consideration:

- Provide education to the community with advertising and school programs on the impacts of weapon related crimes have on the community, victims and families affected.
- Continue to improve relationships between the NSW Police Force and community groups (eg. PCYC), schools and with a particular focus on disadvantaged communities/groups and youth
- Examine the expansion of the QLD Legislation “Police Powers and Responsibilities (Jack’s Law) Amendment Bill 2022” that would allow a senior police officer to authorise the use of a hand held scanner without a warrant in certain circumstances (designated areas such as public transport and safe night precincts) here in NSW
- Increase the age that knives can be purchased in NSW from the age of 16 to 18.
- Review the effectiveness of the Criminal Legislation Amendment (Knife Crimes) Bill 2023, passed on 29 June 2023, after 2 years of its effective date to see if the doubling of penalties has decreased the utilisation of knives and other weapons in crimes.

Our members are dedicated to providing safe, timely, and accessible healthcare services to NSW residents in public and private health, ambulance, aboriginal health, aged care, disability, and mental health sectors. In response to this review, we draw particular attention to the critical role performed by Security Officers within the NSW public health system.

HSU has repeatedly and publicly advocated that NSW public health security staff should be equipped with expanded powers to address the escalating incidence of knife and other weapon-related violence in health settings. We note that the current

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policy settings governing the work functions of security personnel fail to accurately reflect the daily reality and risks associated with their work.

On 26th April 2023 following the tragic death of paramedic Steven Tougher, Gerard Hayes stated “We believe the Crimes Act should be amended to double the maximum sentence to four years. Gerard went on to say “we believe the thrust of law reform should focus on preventing people carrying deadly weapons in the first place. The use of ‘wanding’ for police to detect knives on people in public places was one option”.

As this review would also be aware, HSU members who work right across the health system experience high levels of workplace abuse, assault, and injury. Our members are positioned across every section of the health system and confront the vulnerability, trauma, mental ill-health and often violence that brings people into contact with health services.

We highlight the recent and tragic death of a NSW Paramedic while on duty on 14 April 2023 – a victim of a knife-related incident. We make no additional comment on this tragedy other than to remind this review of the very real dangers that are frequently associated with the work performed by our members.

Of course, the risk of knife and other weapon-related violence permeates the entire NSW community. The 11 April 2023 knife-related incident resulting in the death of a 17-year-old at the NSW Easter Show is another tragic and disturbing reminder of the immediate and absolute need to reduce levels of knife-related violence and the culture that permits such acts.

To be clear, HSU remains deeply concerned by the high rates of knife and other weapon-related violence and calls upon the NSW Government, through this review, to examine methods to arrest the current rise. In doing so, we reference the recent legislative amendments, Police Powers & Responsibilities (Jacks Law) Amendment Bill 2022, enacted by the Queensland Parliament to allow QLD police officers to scan people using metal detector “wands” in safe night precincts and on public transport as a potential model to adopt in NSW.

In conclusion, we appreciate the opportunity to briefly contribute our recommendations to this crucial review. The safety of healthcare workers and the broader community is paramount - and we trust that the NSW Sentencing Council will consider our suggestions in shaping policies that address and mitigate the alarming levels of knife and other weapon-related violence.