

Sydney Children's Hospitals Network (SCHN)

Speech Pathology Department

The Children's Hospital at Westmead (CHW)

Consultation Document

April 2026

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Background

This document is to provide consultation with staff on proposed changes to the hours of operation and working patterns in the Speech Pathology department at the Children's Hospital at Westmead (CHW).

The Speech Pathology department operates Monday to Friday, 8.00am-4.30pm, and provides a range of services to inpatients and outpatients including:

- infants, children and young people with feeding and swallowing disorders
- infants, children and young people requiring instrumental assessment such as videofluoroscopic swallow studies (VFSS) and/or fiberoptic endoscopic evaluation of swallowing (FEES) and
- communication disorders such as voice disorders; as a result of brain injury; speech and language delays; arising from conditions involving palliative care; and requiring augmentative and alternate communication systems.

Referrals for children aged 0-18 years are received from the Emergency Department (ED) and inpatient units (IPU), as well as outpatient departments, external paediatricians and other hospitals. Speech Pathologists are integral members of inpatient and outpatient multidisciplinary teams and are involved in research, quality improvement, advocacy, clinical supervision, and the provision of education internal and external to the Sydney Children's Hospitals Network.

From May-August 2023, a 7-day Speech Pathology service was piloted for a three-month period. Staff were given the opportunity to opt-in to a rotating roster and all staff members who were available, opted in.

The weekend service involved one eight-hour shift on Saturdays and one eight-hour shift on Sundays, 8.00am-4.30pm. The scope of the service was to respond to new referrals from ED and IPUs, as well as provide weekend review and intervention to admitted patients that were referred throughout the week in order to progress their clinical goals.

Positive outcomes were demonstrated for patients, caregivers and healthcare professionals. Feedback from caregivers and healthcare professionals was also overwhelmingly positive. A key recommendation from the pilot was to permanently establish a weekend speech pathology service enabling access to speech pathology for patients in the ED and inpatient units, seven-days per week. The recent uplift in Wattle enhancements has provided an opportunity to staff a weekend service.

This consultation document proposes permanent expansion of the speech pathology service from a five days per week to a seven days per week service model. This would involve a transition existing staff from a non-shift classification to rostered shift work classification from May 2026.

Current Organisational Structure of CHW Speech Pathology Department

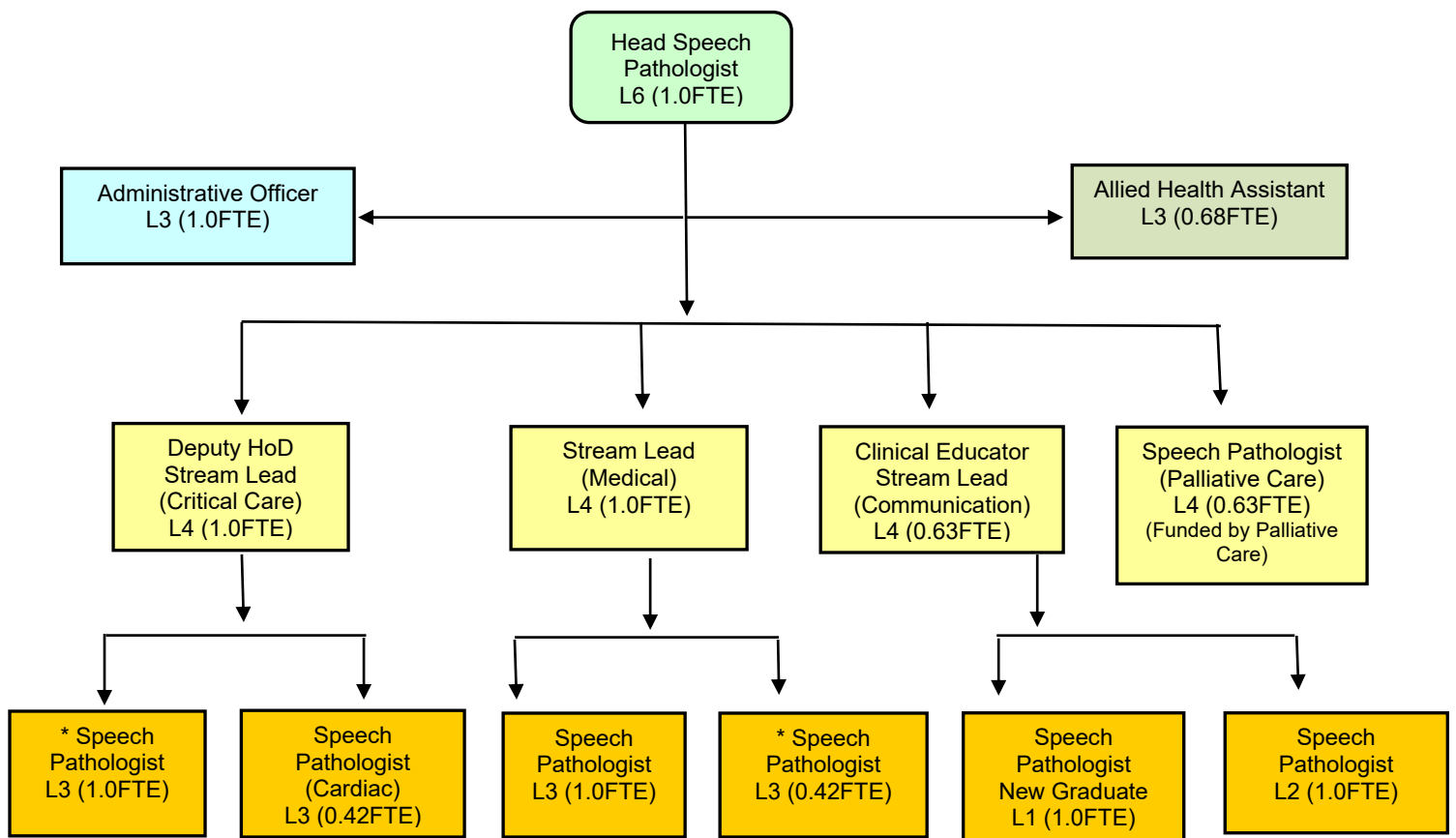


Figure 1. CHW Speech Pathology Structure.

Figure 1 shows the FTE operationally managed by the CHW speech pathology department. Additional speech pathologists are employed within other clinical departments at CHW and are listed in the table 2 Non-affected Speech Pathology Positions at CHW. This proposal does not impact speech pathology positions employed by at Sydney Children’s Hospital.

Case for Change

Over the past 30 years, the speech pathology service has evolved and grown, especially in the area of paediatric feeding and swallowing disorders.

Whilst the current service is provided during business hours, Monday to Friday, 30% of inpatient referrals were generated on Friday evening and on the weekends based on audit results from 2023. Overall inpatient referrals continue to increase year-on-year.

If an inpatient is identified as requiring speech pathology assessment of their feeding/swallowing difficulties or acute communication impairment on a Friday evening, Saturday or Sunday, a wait time of up to 60 hours may be experienced by the patient before the child can be assessed by a speech pathologist. The move to commence a permanent weekend service would assist families in ensuring their children can receive the necessary care at the right time.

Findings from the weekend pilot highlighted benefits to patients, families and healthcare professionals. Approximately one-third of patients referred for speech pathology assessment on the weekends presented to the hospital with a primary feeding-related concern such as turning blue during feeding, poor feeding, weight loss, faltering growth and food/fluid refusal. The remainder of patients referred on the weekends presented to the hospital for other medical reasons including stroke, seizures or chest infections, which also impact their feeding, swallowing abilities and communication and required speech pathology.

Almost 90% of patients treated by a speech pathologist on the weekends were aged within the critical first 2000 days of life (0-5years). Referral rates were maintained across the seven days, indicating that infants and children requiring speech pathology assessment and intervention on the weekends were able to access the right professional at the right time and at the right place.

Outcomes included improved patient safety during mealtimes; prompt diagnosis of the feeding issues; a reduced likelihood of respiratory illness such as pneumonia; avoidance of worsening feeding aversion and unnecessary feeding tube insertion; prompt feeding tube removal; earlier establishment of oral feeding; and provision of education and skill training to caregivers and staff, building their competence and confidence in feeding their children.

Positive feedback was received from caregivers and healthcare professionals about having access to a weekend speech pathology service, and for the speech pathologists, improved workflows and efficiencies were observed, including a reduction in the number of additional hours worked across the seven-day week.

Proposed Change to Positions

CHW is proposing a model of service that supports the establishment of a permanently funded speech pathology weekend service. This proposal recommends existing speech pathology positions funded by the speech pathology department to transition from non-shift to shift work, and staff to participate in a rotating weekend roster. This includes new positions that have been granted to the speech pathology team as part of the Wattle redevelopment (noted with * in Figure 1).

There would be no reduction in the number of positions. The change incorporates new positions to further support the service and its demands. In addition, there are no changes in the grades of positions.

The Position Descriptions will be revised to include the requirement to participate in a rotating 7 day a week roster.

The accountabilities and tasks performed by the Positions will not change. Staff working a Saturday and Sunday shift will be providing whole of hospital prioritised care at their level of skillset. Shift times will remain 8.00-4.30pm seven days a week.

All other employment conditions will abide by the Health Employee's' Conditions of Employment (State) Award 2025. Each shift worker shall be free from duty for not less than two full days in each week (or four full days in each fortnight) and at least one allocated day off in each four-week period. Where practicable such days off duty shall be consecutive.

The positions in the speech pathology department that would transition from non-shift to shift work are listed below in Table 1.

Table 1. Affected Speech Pathology Positions at CHW

Position	Level	FTE	Current	Proposed
Speech Pathologist - Head of Department	L6	1.0	Non-Shift	Shift rotating 7 days a week
Speech Pathologist - Deputy Head of Department and Clinical Lead (Critical Care)	L4	1.0	Non-Shift	Shift rotating 7 days a week
Speech Pathologist - Clinical Stream Lead (Medical and Rehabilitation)	L4	1.0	Non-Shift	Shift rotating 7 days a week
Speech Pathologist - Clinical Stream Lead (Communication and Clinical Education)	L4	0.63	Non-Shift	Shift rotating 7 days a week
* Speech Pathologist - Wattle enhancement yet to be recruited	L3	1.47		Shift rotating 7 days a week
Speech Pathologist	L3	1.47	Non-Shift	Shift rotating 7 days a week
Speech Pathologist	L2	1.0	Non-Shift	Shift rotating 7 days a week
Speech Pathologist (New Graduate) – 1 year contract	L1	1.0	Non-Shift	Shift rotating 7 days a week

The speech pathology positions funded by clinical areas external to the speech pathology department (eg, Palliative Care, KidsRehab, Adolescent Medicine, Cleft and Craniofacial, and Child Development Unit) will be exempt from this change. The Administration Officer and Allied Health Assistant positions in the speech pathology department would not transition to shift work as these positions are not required to support the weekend service model.

The positions that will not transition to shift work are listed below in Table 2.

Table 2. Non-affected Speech Pathology Positions at CHW

Position	Level	Reason
Speech Pathologist (Palliative Care)	L4	Not funded by the speech pathology department
Speech Pathologist (Child Development Unit)	L4	Not funded or operationally managed by the CHW speech pathology department
Speech Pathologist (Child Development Unit)	L3	
Speech Pathologist (Adolescent Medicine)	L4	
Speech Pathologist (Cleft and Craniofacial)	L6	
Speech Pathologist (Cleft and Craniofacial)	L3	
Speech Pathologist (KidsRehab)	L3	
Speech Pathologist (Cochlear Implant Centre)	Various	Not required to support the weekend service
Allied Health Assistant (shared 50:50 with Nutrition and Dietetics)	L3	
Administration Officer	AO3	

Consultation

The proposal identifies the requirement of the positions to change from Non-Shift to Shift worker. Speech pathologists currently employed in the speech pathology department at The Children’s Hospital at Westmead will be consulted about transitioning from non-shift to shift work.

An initial meeting will be held with staff in the Speech Pathology department to present the proposal and staff will have the opportunity to provide feedback as part of the consultation period.

Staff would be rostered to a shift pattern across a seven-day week instead of a five-day week. They would have the opportunity to indicate availability for weekend shifts in advance, and shift swaps could be considered in discussion with the Head of Department and with sufficient notice. Weekend shifts

will attract the relevant penalty rates. Shifts will not be allocated on public holidays as per current service delivery model, and weekend referrals will be seen on the next working day.

The rotating roster will mean that each team member will be rostered on one weekend shift (either a Saturday or a Sunday), approximately every four weeks, or on a pro-rata basis for part time staff.

Anticipated benefits of this change for staff include increased flexibility in workdays across four-weeks and the addition of penalty payments for undertaking weekend work.

Sample Roster

Day	Shift Type	Existing Shift	Proposed Shift
Monday-Friday (current)	Day	08:00-16:30	08:00-16:30
Monday-Sunday (excluding public holidays) (proposed)	Day	-	08:00-16:30

Timeline

Stage		Timescale
1	Consultations with staff and Notifications to Unions (to occur simultaneously)	20/4/2026 to 3/5/2026
2	Consultation Close	3/5/2026
3	Assessment of all feedback	4/5/2026 to 10/5/2026
4	Continue to work with staff affected by changes	11/5/2026 to 24/5/2026
5	Planned implementation date	25/05/2026

Support

Individual meetings with staff members will take place throughout the change process to ensure adequate support to each staff member.

A Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document will also be provided to staff, see Appendix 1. The FAQs will provide answers to questions as part of the change. The FAQ will be updated throughout the consultation period.

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) will also be available to staff. This is a free, confidential and professional counselling service provided by the Sydney Children's Hospitals Network to all staff. TELUS Health can be contacted on 1800 454 713 or staff can access the service online via:

[SCHN Wellbeing Platform | The Sydney Children's Hospitals Network](#)

Management and Human Resources will be available to also provide support.

Feedback and Contact Details

Enquiries and feedback can be provided to:

- Gloria Tzannes, Head Speech Pathologist, Children's Hospital at Westmead
gloria.tzannes@health.nsw.gov.au

Appendix 1. Frequently Asked Questions

SPEECH PATHOLOGY WEEKEND SERVICE AND TRANSITION TO SHIFT WORK FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What are the benefits of a weekend service for patients and families?

Families and children presenting to the Emergency Department and those who are admitted to The Children's Hospital at Westmead will be able to access the Speech Pathology service 7-days a week. Benefits include improved safety during mealtimes; prompt diagnosis of the feeding issues; a reduced likelihood of respiratory illness such as pneumonia; avoidance of worsening feeding aversion and unnecessary feeding tube insertion; prompt feeding tube removal; earlier establishment of oral feeding; and provision of education and skill training to caregivers and staff, building their competence and confidence in feeding their children.

What is a 'shift worker'?

The definition of Shift worker is defined as not being a day-worker (non-shift). The definition of Day worker is a worker who works their ordinary hours from Monday to Friday inclusive and who commences on such days at or after 6am and before 10am otherwise than as part of a shift system.

What are the benefits for me if I work shifts including weekend days?

Penalty rates for weekend work as per the Award.

When will the weekend service start?

Following consultation it is proposed to start from the week commencing 25 May 2026.

What hours are the weekend shifts?

Shift times will not change and continue to be 8.00am-4.30pm every day.

Where will I be working when I'm rostered on the weekends?

The Speech Pathology Weekend Service will cover patients referred from the Emergency Department and Inpatient Units. Weekend Speech Pathology staff will be working in K-Block, Wattle and Banksia buildings. They will have access to the Speech Pathology department if required.

Do I get to choose which shifts I'm rostered on to?

The roster will be published ahead of time as per Award requirements. Individual requests will be considered with sufficient notice.

Will I be required to work on public holidays?

No, the Speech Pathology Service will not operate on public holidays as per current practice.

What happens if I don't want to do shift work?

We expect all Speech Pathologists employed in the Speech Pathology department at The Children's Hospital at Westmead to participate in a rotating shift work including weekends. Individual requests will be discussed on a case-by-case basis as per NSW Health Flexible Work Policy.

Can I swap my weekend shifts with someone else?

Requests for weekend shift swaps will need to be discussed with the Head of Department and mutually agreed with an available staff member. Any shift swaps will also be required to meet safe work expectations of the Award.

Will I be working every weekend?

No, based on the current staffing levels, it is anticipated that full time equivalent staff will be rostered on one shift (either Saturday or Sunday) every four weeks. Staff working part time will be allocated a weekend shift on a pro-rata basis.

Will my take-home pay change?

When you work on a weekend, you will be paid the relevant penalties associated with that shift. Therefore your pay will reflect the addition of the penalty rate payment.

Will I accrue ADOs as a shift worker?

Yes, ADOs will be accrued for staff working 40hrs per week

What would my week look like if I work weekend shifts?

Your substantive hours will be rostered across a seven-day roster. For example, full-time staff members may be rostered Tues-Sat or Sun-Thurs or other combinations of days. For part-time staff members, one of their weekday shifts will move to a weekend shifts when they are rostered on the weekend.

Will Speech Pathologists working in other clinical areas at the Children's Hospital at Westmead and Sydney Children's Hospital be expected to work weekend shifts?

The Speech Pathology weekend service will be staffed by Speech Pathologists employed in the Speech Pathology department. If suitably trained Speech Pathologists in other clinical areas at CHW and SCH express interest in participating in the weekend roster, this may be considered in consultation with their current line manager.

What happens if I'm sick on a day I'm rostered to do a weekend shift?

The current processes of informing the Head of Department will apply.

Who can I call if I need support during a weekend shift?

The Head of Department should be contacted.