

Waterfall Sanatorium

14 April 1909 – 31 December 1958

Other Names:

- Garrawarra Hospital for Consumptives
- Hospital for Consumptives, Waterfall

Details

Waterfall Sanatorium was opened on 14 April 1909 in Waterfall as a hospital for the treatment of patients, including children, who had advanced tuberculosis (TB). Patients were sent to Waterfall Sanatorium, often against their will, and were not released until cured. People who died there are buried on the site. Waterfall Sanatorium closed in 1958.

Tuberculosis was a virulent and highly contagious disease that provoked widespread fear in the years before it could be treated with antibiotics. Doctors and health authorities could commit sufferers to sanatoria like Waterfall, under special laws designed to contain the spread of TB, and detain them until they were cured, or died. TB was also a factor in the removal of children from their families. It hospitalised breadwinners and caregivers, so caused poverty and hardship. It also made children sick, causing them to be institutionalised. Welfare authorities also removed children from households where TB was present. The lethal nature of TB was considered to justify such harsh measures.

Waterfall was the state's only purpose-built facility for people suffering tuberculosis (consumption or TB). As reported in the Agency Description for Hospital for Consumptives, Waterfall, "The site, at 1,000 feet above sea level and 26 miles south of Sydney, was chosen as it was believed that tuberculosis patients needed a high and rarefied atmosphere in the country away from the grime and pollution of cities." It goes on to state, "Treatment consisted of rest, relaxation, improved nutrition, and medicines to treat symptoms as they appeared, with the hope of increasing resistance." Patients stayed in the sanatorium until they were cured (which could take years) or died. Those who died were buried in the Waterfall Sanatorium cemetery.

To begin with children were accommodated with the adult patients. The main building at Waterfall had beds for 180 male patients, with open verandahs looking out to sea. Patients in the active phase of TB were isolated in fibro chalets, about the size of a garden shed. While additional accommodation was built, demand meant that the Sanatorium was often overcrowded, staff were overworked, and extra beds were placed on verandahs.

In 1926 the *Truth* reported that "...there are 19 boys and twelve girls who are inmates of the "sanatorium."...the children played together without any restraint, their ages being from five years to fourteen years. The children had to sleep on the verandahs of the wards of their respective sexes, because there were no wards of their own."

In October 1927 *The Sunday Times* reported the arrest of a former male adult patient who was charged with criminal offences against boys over several years while in the Sanatorium. It was noted that there was little supervision of children in the institution.

In 1927 the Report of the Director-General of Public Health, New South Wales reported "Boys now have their own ward, which was opened in November, and they are kept away from all adult patients. Girls have still to be housed in the women's wards, but as far as possible they are kept apart from the adults. The children have their special school mistress, who supervises their time in school and their games during school hours." The same

report stated cricket and tennis were two games made available for the children to play.

The 1934 Director-General Report noted that “children do exceptionally well here”, and that the Education Department had established a school building and provided the teacher. On the 10 September 1936, *The Catholic Press* reported that religious instruction was given to children at Waterfall by the Catholic Women’s Association’s hospital visiting committee. By 1937 the Director-General Report stated “it is unfortunate that more use is not made of the bed set apart for children and young adults”. 27 people under 20 were admitted that year.

Over the years newspapers reported on charitable visits, fundraising events and donations, most notably regularly mentioning Christmas gifts for child patients.

By 1958 the options available for the treatment of TB including antibiotics and thoracic surgery. A national prevention campaign, combined with isolation no longer being necessary and patients accepted into hospitals, meant the need for Waterfall was diminished. The sanatorium closed and the site was converted to Garrawarra Hospital. The old buildings were boarded up for some time. Garrawarra Centre for the Aged is located on the site.

There are 2000 graves in the Waterfall Sanatorium cemetery, which is part of the Garrawarra Hospital grounds but is controlled by Wollongong Council. In 2012 the Wollongong Mayor, Gordon Bradbery, announced a conservation management plan would be prepared for the cemetery. Permission is required from the New South Wales Ministry for Health to visit the site.

Gallery



T.B. Hospital at Waterfall

Description: This image shows buildings at the Waterfall Sanatorium.



Waterfall Sanatorium

Description: This image shows a range of buildings at Waterfall Sanatorium.

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- [Colonial Secretary \(1 Jan 1821 - 1 April 1959\)](#)
- [Department of Public Health, State Government of New South Wales \(1938 - 1973\)](#)
- [Office of the Director-General of Public Health \(1913 - 1938\)](#)
- [Department of Charitable Institutions \(1888 - 1911\)](#)
- [Metropolitan Hospitals and Charities Department, State Government of New South Wales \(1911 - 1913\)](#)

Resources

- Museums of History NSW, [Infirm / Destitute Asylums Guide](#), No date

Records

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Records

- [Waterfall Sanatorium Records \(1909 - 1971\)](#)
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