



HACSU STATEMENT ON ABUSE IN DISABILITY

Tuesday 28 March 2017

On Monday 27 March, the ABC Four Corners program ran an investigation into violence, abuse and neglect in Victorian and NSW disability accommodation services.

The Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) represent over 5,000 disability workers from across Victoria, who work in a professional capacity to support people with disabilities.

HACSU has long fought to support members who report violence, abuse and neglect. The ABC investigation highlights concerns which have been raised by HACSU members time after time and focuses on the key challenges facing the successful rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The NDIS is a much-needed reform which will change lives, however, the system is poorly designed for those with limited capacity to self-advocate and assess risk. Further, the current NDIS pricing structure is forcing not-for-profit and private service providers to cut costs. These cuts go straight to the heart of quality of service provision and stymie the prevention of violence, abuse and neglect of people with disabilities through reduced supervision and greater workforce casualisation.

The Victorian Andrews Government has announced the privatisation of Victoria's public disability accommodation services in an attempt to cut costs in the new NDIS world. This will impact over 2,500 people with profound disabilities currently receiving support from the State Government.

If the Andrews Government is to go ahead and privatise Victoria's public disability services, it is likely we will see abuse, neglect and avoidable deaths rise as people are forced into the underfunded private/non-government sector.

Political leaders, government bureaucrats and service providers are systematically denying the problems with NDIS funding and system architecture, which act as significant barriers to attracting and retaining an experienced, qualified and professional disability support workforce.

Indeed, the private/not for profit disability sector is hugely underfunded and the industrial instruments used to employ the majority of workers provides no job security, no minimum hours and usually minimum wage and conditions. There is a high turnover of staff and many are employed on casual contracts: 40% casualisation in Victorian private/not-for-profit service providers, compared with 23% casualisation in Victorian public disability services. Multiple State and Federal Inquiries into the disability sector pointed to high levels of workforce casualisation as a contributing factor to the prevalence of violence, abuse and neglect.

Further, there are few incentives for staff to up-skill and few service providers pay for even the bare minimum training requirements such as first aid certificates.

Continuity of support workers is the defining point in the quality of life for many people with disabilities. Self-harm, violence, and aggression is often the result of an inability to communicate with the world, an issue amplified by a casual, low-paid and low-skilled workforce.

If Daniel Andrews continues with his privatisation agenda, Victoria will lose thousands of public disability workers, Victoria's most highly skilled and qualified disability workers. They will be replaced with a low-paid, low-skilled and casual workforce, with an increase in abuse, neglect and avoidable deaths likely to follow.

Governments, both State and Federal, must stop pretending that the NDIS is the panacea for the scourge of abuse in the disability sector. Vulnerable people will always face risks from an underfunded and de-regulated system. The CEOs and Boards of disability service providers must be held to account under the NDIS market and for this reason HACSU calls for an end to Andrews' privatisation agenda and a strengthening of the NDIS Quality and Safeguarding Framework and supports the Commonwealth Senate Inquiry's call for Royal Commission into violence, abuse and neglect in the disability sector.