



HACSU

Health & Community
Services Union

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ABN: 48 505 905 580

Attention: Juliana Addison MP, Michaela Settle MP.

By Email: Juliana.addison@parliament.vic.gov.au, Michaela.settle@parliament.vic.gov.au

BY EXPRESS POST

Dear Juliana and Michaela,

RE MENTAL HEALTH ENTERPRISE BARGAINING AGREEMENT – BALLARAT HEALTH SERVICES IN CRISIS

We are writing to you on behalf of the mental health workforce at Ballarat Health Services regarding the crisis facing our members due to the stalled enterprise bargaining agreement negotiations. After 18 months of bargaining, HACSU has been forced to take the decision to launch protected action ballots at a further two public area mental health services, with action ongoing at 15 services including Ballarat Health Services.

HACSU and its members have no choice but to escalate this campaign. A disappointing offer was made to the workforce on the 3rd of August 2021, one day prior to the statewide stop work. We note that this was the first offer made after 18 months.

The offer reinforces to our members that the Victorian Government does not value our mental health workforces. While we acknowledge the offer includes small measures to address staffing shortfalls and the beginnings of a lived experience classification and salary structure, it is our view that more robust commitments must urgently be made to grow and develop the workforce.

A 2% pay rise would see nurses, social workers, and occupational therapists worse off than their counterparts in the rest of public health system. There are still significant and dangerous staffing gaps, with no substantial offer to improve the working conditions of our administrative staff and our world-first Reproductive Health and Wellbeing clause has been cast aside.

The rejection of our claims, specifically in relation to mental health educators across the state and better working conditions for all our mental workforce, dismisses the findings of the Royal Commission into Mental Health. The findings were clear in that measures to attract and retain staff, incentivization and the implementation of a stronger workplace safety strategy is imperative. The mental health workforce has not had a pay rise in 2 years and our data shows that least 10% of the workforce are considering leaving the sector all together in 12 months. While we welcome capital works commencing on opening new beds, we know for a fact that these beds will be stalled in opening due to severe staffing shortages. It is our view that workforce investment must come first.

The mental health workforces at Ballarat Health Services have been on the frontline in assisting your community during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, these workforces are faced with chronic understaffing, particularly in access and triage, aged mental health units and in the remote and regional areas. For example, the Horsham teams are in crisis as there are vacancies that aren't being filled and many are on leave due to burn out. Community health clinicians from the youth and aged teams are being asked to cover the needs of the adult teams due to long-term vacancies, inevitably creating crucial gaps in service delivery. Members have been forced to furlough, particularly those working in the community teams due to Covid-19 exposure, forcing units to operate with even less staff and increasing the risk of occupational violence. This is simply unsustainable and will lead to dangerous outcomes for our members and your community.



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We are committed to assisting your government in implementing every single recommendation of the Royal Commission into Mental Health. But we cannot stay silent when Members of Parliament do not advocate for the very people who are tasked with implementing these lifesaving services for the Victorian community.

We are seeking to meet with each of you to discuss this further and to implore you to raise this with Minister Merlino and Minister Pallas as a matter of urgency.

The Victorian mental health workforce and your communities simply cannot wait.

In unity,

Paul Healey
State Secretary
Health and Community Services Union

Kate Marshall
Assistant State Secretary
Health and Community Services Union

Jane Kim
Area Organiser – Ballarat Health Services
Health and Community Services Union

For Diary Management – Stephanie Thuesen
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