



**HACSU**

Health & Community  
Services Union

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1 October 2021

Attention: The Hon. Martin Foley MP, Steve Dimopoulos MP

By Email: [Martin.Foley@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:Martin.Foley@parliament.vic.gov.au), [steve.dimopoulos@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:steve.dimopoulos@parliament.vic.gov.au)

**BY EXPRESS POST**

Dear Martin and Steve,

**RE MENTAL HEALTH ENTERPRISE BARGAINING AGREEMENT – ALFRED HEALTH IN CRISIS**

We are writing to you on behalf of the mental health workforce at Alfred Health 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 Alfred Health.

HACSU and its members have no choice but to escalate this campaign. A disappointing offer was made to the workforce on the 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 workforce at Alfred Health has assisted not only your communities through some of the most difficult and complex mental health instances but have also assisted the entire State by being redeployed at Hotel Quarantine facilities. While HACSU members understand that Covid-19 is presenting challenges in terms of operations in the sector, it has gotten to a point where nurses and allied health members are forced to work within unrealistic expectation, consistently in breach of the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

For example, in the low dependency units, they are usually staffed 1 nurse to 5 patients. However, since Alfred Health has opened a separate ward dedicated to suspected Covid and Covid positive patients with behaviours of concern, it has left the wards dangerously understaffed. In an effort to bolster the workforce, Alfred Health is utilising allied health staff such as occupational therapists and



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art therapists within numbers on the ward taking patients. This is simply not sustainable and not an acceptable way forward as the organisation is expecting allied health professionals to work outside of their scope, particularly as they are not trained in mental state assessments. On numerous occasions, nursing staff have had double the load of medication rounds because deployed Alfred Health staff to cover shifts are unable to administer them. This is not acceptable.

HACSU have also been made aware that there are wards that currently have no nurse unit managers, with some on annual leave as they are entitled to. But this demonstrates the very urgent matter of settling the Enterprise Agreement which honours HACSU's claims for better wages, conditions and recruitment and retention strategies. The union notes that Alfred Health already has a high instance of occupational violence on site with 96% of HACSU members stating that they have witnessed occupational violence towards their colleagues by patients.

The situation at Alfred Health is extremely dangerous and the current arrangement is likely to lead to a poor outcome for our members and your community. **To put it bluntly, nurses, allied mental health and administrative staff do not feel safe coming to work and it is the view of the Alfred Health HACSU members that patients' care is being severely impacted due to the lack of staffing.**

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

**Stephanie Thuesen**  
Area Organiser – Alfred Health  
Health and Community Services Union

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