



HACSU

Health & Community
Services Union

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ABN: 48 505 905 580

Attention: The Hon. Jaclyn Symes MP, The Hon. Martin Foley MP,
The Hon. James Merlino MP, The Hon. Maryanne Thomas MP, Steve Dimopoulos MP.
By Email: Jaclyn.symes@parliament.vic.gov.au, martin.foley@parliament.vic.gov.au,
james.merlino@parliament.vic.gov.au, maryanne.thomas@parliament.vic.gov.au,
steve.dimopoulos@parliament.vic.gov.au,

BY EXPRESS POST

Dear Jaclyn, Martin, James, Maryanne and Steve,

RE MENTAL HEALTH ENTERPRISE BARGAINING AGREEMENT –ALBURY WODONGA HEALTH IN CRISIS

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

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 members at Albury Wodonga Health have assisted your communities through some of the most difficult mental health instances the State has ever seen. Across the board, the service is severely lacking in staff. Every day the inpatient units are short staffed, and the access and community teams are at crisis point. There have been many instances of the community teams not being able to operate and the service has been limited to 1 person on leave at a time. Often the Wodonga mental health team and acute crisis teams avoid taking sick leave due to fear of letting their colleagues down. There is no permanent psychiatrist, and the service is forced to use locums



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and there have been many instances where entire teams have had to be taken offline. This is simply unsustainable and dangerous for our members and your communities.

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

Jordan Casey
Area Organiser – Albury Wodonga Health
Health and Community Services Union

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