



# HACSU

Health & Community  
Services Union

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**Attention:** The Hon. Robin Scott MP, Lizzie Blandthorn MP, Colin Brooks MP, Josh Bull MP, Danielle Green MP, Bronwyn Halfpenny MP, Kat Theophanous MP, Steve McGhie MP, Frank McGuire MP, Natalie Suleyman MP, Marlene Kairouz MP, Sheena Watt MP, Kaushaliya Vaghela MP, Nazih Elasmr MP, Cesar Melhelm MP.

**BY EXPRESS POST**

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Dear Robin, Lizzie, Colin, Josh, Danielle, Bronwyn, Kat, Steve, Frank, Natalie, Marlene, Sheena, Kaushaliya, Nazih and Cesar,

## RE MENTAL HEALTH ENTERPRISE BARGAINING AGREEMENT – ROYAL MELBOURNE HEALTH IN CRISIS

We are writing to you on behalf of the mental health workforce at Royal Melbourne 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 Royal Melbourne.

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 Royal Melbourne Health members continue to assist your communities through some of the most difficult mental health instances, under nigh impossible conditions. Delegates and members have reported that shifts are always short-staffed in the Northern and Sunshine inpatient units. Many staff are forced to consistently work double shifts which is inevitably leading to burnout and



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poor mental health outcomes for our members. Demand has increased significantly due to the knock-on effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Often, consumers are discharged prematurely to make room for new patients due to unprecedented demand. Emergency mental health services across the Royal Melbourne Hospital, Northern Hospital and Sunshine Hospital are constantly breaching timelines for admission as there are far too many people presenting and not enough beds to meet demand. Adding to the pressure, Broadmeadows and the Northern inpatient units have opened SCOVID wards which are understaffed and the CATT teams operating across all Melbourne Health sites are understaffed and overworked. This is simply not acceptable and not sustainable.

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,

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**Paul Healey**  
State Secretary  
Health and Community Services Union

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**Kate Marshall**  
Assistant State Secretary  
Health and Community Services Union

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