



HACSU

Health & Community
Services Union

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Attention: The Hon. Lisa Neville MP, Darren Cheeseman MP, Chris Couzens MP, John Eren MP

BY EXPRESS POST

Email: lisa.neville@parliament.vic.gov.au, Darren.cheeseman@parliament.vic.gov.au,
chris.couzens@parliament.vic.gov.au, john.eren@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Lisa, Darren, Chris and John

RE MENTAL HEALTH ENTERPRISE BARGAINING AGREEMENT –BARWON HEALTH IN CRISIS

We are writing to you on behalf of the mental health workforce at Barwon 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 Barwon 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 Barwon Health have assisted your communities through some of the most challenging mental health circumstances under impossible conditions. All Barwon Health services are severely short staffed with community and access teams at crisis point. Case loads are not manageable with approximately 34 staff down equating to approximately 1796 vacant hours per week. This is simply unsustainable and will inevitably lead to poor outcomes for our members and your community.

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



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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

Lisa Andrew
Area Organiser – Barwon Health
Health and Community Services Union

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