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Albury Wodonga Health Failing Consumers and Failing Our Community

The Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) has serious concerns regarding Albury Wodonga Health's decision to undertake unprecedented changes to its community mental health service.

The service plans to collapse its community teams after closing Benambra, the Community Care Unit (CCU). Albury Wodonga Health states that this action is to provide a surge workforce for critical care areas due to the impacts of COVID-19.

HACSU is extremely sceptical of this claimed reasoning. No other Victorian mental health service has been collapsed due to COVID-19. Rather, the union believes that these changes actually stem from the failures of management, and the failure of AWH's Acute Crisis Intervention Service Model (ACIS) – a model which has led many workers to resign from AWH.

Mental health workers have not been consulted on this drastic change, despite managers and clinical leads having regular meetings amongst themselves to plan these changes. HACSU only received a Change Impact Statement on November 5th – *after* the closure of the CCU. There was adequate time to consult on these changes, but the employer has not done so and has indicated no intentions of doing so.

HACSU members who work in AWH mental health services are experiencing increasing service demand, coupled with the continued furloughing of staff, leading to significant gaps in acute and crisis services. This is of serious concern for not only workers, but all those living in and around Albury-Wodonga who rely on their local health service to be able to provide healthcare when it's most needed.

Staff are too intimidated to challenge or even question any of the decisions being made. Many workers fear that questioning management decisions is a path to losing their jobs, the result of widespread stories about those who speak up facing negative consequences.

Mental Health Services are in demand more than ever in Victoria, and these changes fly in the face of the results of the Royal Commission, which clearly identified the lack of mental health services in Victoria. Closing community mental health services in rural communities will add to the stress the system is under.

The system is at breaking point. This change may just break it.

Media Contact: Stephanie Thuesen 0436 363 612, stephaniet@hacsu.asn.au