

HACSU: Bleak Victorian state budget leaves mental health & disability workers in the lurch

The 2024-25 Victorian state budget introduces unexpected and unsustainable cuts to mental health services, ignoring the growing need for the government to deliver a coherent workforce strategy and clarify its future role in providing foundational disability supports, said the Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) today.

"At a time of growing community need, the Victorian Government has failed to provide basic details about how it intends to address growing workforce shortages in both mental health and disability, and the wider needs of HACSU members", said HACSU State Secretary Paul Healey today.

"Recognising workforce shortages is not enough. The issues have been glaringly obvious for years, and now is the time for concrete and ambitious policies and vision".

The budget:

- Underinvests in mental health and disability, indicating widespread and devastating cuts to services and programs, both small and large.
- Provides \$6.3 million for bed-based mental health services in 2024/5, with a steep downward trajectory priced in through to 2027/28.
- Cuts the overall disability services budget and allocates a mere \$24 million into initiatives to provide continuing support for Victorians with a disability.
- Delays 35 mental health and wellbeing clinics, with only 15 open so far.
- Cuts paid sick leave for casual and contract disability workers.

HACSU welcomes long overdue investments including crucial eating disorder support and treatment services. Investment in workforce initiatives is encouraging, with a new graduate program in Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals and support for workers to retrain or upskill to work in the disability sector. However, it isn't enough.

"Make no mistake – this is the bleakest Victorian budget we've seen in many, many years. The needs of the workforce are ignored, and for this be accompanied by cuts to services, delays to services and reform efforts, is not only disappointing – it is unacceptable. The impact on workers, consumers, carers, and the Victorian community will be seismic, and will be felt immediately", said Healey.

"The vision of the Andrews Labor government in 2021 when it accepted all of the Royal Commission recommendations, has been completely lost", said HACSU State Secretary Paul Healey today.

"Commitments to support and grow the mental health workforce have been ignored, delayed, and trampled on. In disability, workers have been left without certainty about the future of the sector."

HACSU is a trade union comprising over 11,000 members across Victoria. HACSU has represented Victorians employed in mental health, disability, and alcohol and drug services, across the public, private, and non-profit sectors, for over 100 years. Its members include mental health nurses, social workers, occupational therapists, health professionals, disability support workers, peer workers, admin workers and more.

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