

ANMF COVID-19 Newsflash: Public Sector Update

The ANMF acknowledge the difficult challenges that members across all sectors are experiencing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. These specifically include Workloads, Work environment and conditions, Staff shortages and personal impacts. The ANMF have secured the below outcomes for members. We note that there is still more support needed and we will continue to advocate on your behalf.

Outcomes:

PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) Allowance

Following ANMF advocacy and lobbying the Premier for a COVID-19 allowance on Sunday 9 January 2022 which called upon the Premier to intervene and authorise an urgent COVID-19 allowance, the ANMF can advise members that this has not been supported by the Premier at this time. The Premier has indicated that he has asked the Department and the State Service Management Office to commence negotiation with all unions on a COVID-19 allowance, however, would only consider implementation if COVID-19 Escalation went to level. A

The ANMF has responded to the Premier advising of the dismay, anger and frustration that this decision has caused and will only further the risk of losing more critical nurses and midwives who are already burnt out from the Tasmanian Health System.

Fatigue and Hydration Breaks

On Friday 14 January 2022, a direction was issued from the Secretary, Department of Health, to all Health managers to communicate with staff on the symptoms of dehydration and to develop a plan in order to ensure adequate rest and hydration is enabled for all members. This direction in line with Work Health and Safety Legislation also provides for additional break time to doff and don PPE as well as additional breaks to allow for hydration. These breaks may need to be taken individually due to clinical demands, but if any members are unable to take these breaks, your manager should be notified, and you should complete a Safety Reporting and Learning System (SRLS) report.

The ANMF has highlighted that due to staffing levels, many members are still unable to take their meal break, let alone an additional hydration break.

Additional Break Out Spaces

The ANMF has repeatedly raised concerns with respect to adequate break out spaces for members to take meal breaks, particularly those who have volunteered to return as a close contact. The ANMF has also requested areas outdoors with adequate social distancing to be made available to members.

The ANMF can report that additional outdoor areas have been established with marquees at the North West Regional Hospital and verandas being made available at the Mersey Community Hospital.

At the Launceston General Hospital, courtyards have been made available on level 5 and level 3 with a tent also available outside the QV entrance. The ANMF has requested a marquee be made available in Ockerby Gardens.

In addition, the Royal Hobart Hospital have advised that additional onsite space has been located and is currently being made safe for staff use on site. Further details will be provided once able.

Safe Staffing and Surge Workforce Plans

The ANMF has raised concerns with Department of Health representatives, The Secretary of the Department of Health and with The Minister for Health regarding the staffing challenges being experienced by ANMF members. The ANMF has called for an urgent staffing solution either through escalation of the COVID-19 escalation plans or via an alternate surge workforce plan.

However, the ANMF are acutely aware that at the Royal Hobart Hospital, the Launceston General Hospital, North West Regional Hospital and Mersey Community Hospital, many shifts are worked short, and many members are picking up extra shifts and working double shifts to fill other shortfalls on those shifts as well.

As a result, the ANMF have lodged an urgent application with the Tasmania Industrial Commission to seek the assistance of the Commission to address the unsafe staffing levels members are reporting, which are in breach of the industrial agreement.

The ANMF will be seeking the below remedies:

- 1) That benchmarked safe staffing levels are met on every unit/ward that is benchmarked

- 2) That overtime and double shifts will only be used to the average of the preceding 12 months (prior to December 2022) to meet the benchmarked nursing hours
- 3) That the ANMF will be consulted and involved in the development of safe staffing and surge workforce plans
- 4) That workload and workforce models will be developed with the ANMF for vaccination and testing clinics
- 5) That the Tasmanian Government will provide in writing indemnification to all members for any adverse incident or adverse patient outcomes where bench marked hours have not been met or where overtime and double shifts have been used to meet the agreed safe staffing level.

The ANMF are disappointed and frustrated that despite utilising every consultation avenue with the Department and the Tasmanian Government to address members concerns, no timely solution has been provided to address members ongoing stress, fatigue and exhaustion. However, the ANMF believe that the Tasmanian Industrial Commission will assist in paving a timely way to solutions and the ANMF will advise members once a listing date is received.

Further to the above, the ANMF also raised the need for more rest and meal break spaces to allow those returning to work, who are close contacts, an appropriate area to doff and socially distance for their break. Management is currently working alternative solutions with further updates to follow.

The ANMF Tasmanian Branch is 8000 plus members strong! Supporting nurses, midwives, and care workers as the only union in Tasmania employing nurses and care workers to represent members. This is why our Organisers and Member Support Team are uniquely positioned to understand your experiences, represent you in your workplace, and offer industrial advice that's relevant to you.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact our Member Support Team via email on membersupport@anmftas.org.au. Email is the preferred and fastest way of contacting the team. Alternatively, you can phone (03) 6223 6777 or 1800 001 241 if outside Hobart.

Authorised by Emily Shepherd, ANMF Tasmanian Branch Secretary

20 January 2022