

20 January 2022

## Nurses and Midwives at Breaking Point

### Doorstop

**Where: ANMF Office 19 Brisbane Street, Launceston**

**When: TODAY 20 January 2022, 2:30pm**

**Who: ANMF Tasmanian Branch Secretary, Emily Shepherd**

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation Tasmanian Branch (ANMF) is dismayed and frustrated that members' calls to ensure safe staffing for nurses and midwives following borders opening have not been heeded by the Tasmanian and Australian Governments.

In Tasmania, the ANMF called repeatedly for a workforce pillar of the Department of Health's COVID-19 preparedness strategy in early November 2021, well ahead of the December 15, 2021, border opening date. Despite these calls, no surge workforce plan or strategy was developed that would prevent already exhausted nurses and midwives from burning out after borders opened.

The ANMF Tasmanian Branch Secretary Emily Shepherd said today, "after a month of dealing with COVID-19 in Tasmania, nurses and midwives in the state's public sector are exhausted and burnt out.

"The impact of positive cases of COVID-19 have decimated the nursing and midwifery workforce and are likely to increase with school return, when many nurses and midwives will need to provide care to children who become affected by COVID-19.

"The ANMF was able to negotiate a fatigue and hydration direction to allow members more time for meal breaks due to donning and doffing PPE and also to prevent dehydration. However, the reality is that due to staffing shortages, many members say that they are at times unable to take their allocated meal break, let alone an additional hydration break."

The ANMF recently called on the Premier to acknowledge the significant contribution of the nursing and midwifery workforce and the hardship that they are enduring with short staffing, overtime, and double shifts, while also being in full PPE, however, while the Premier has committed to negotiating this allowance, has indicated that this will not come into effect until level 4 of the COVID-19 escalation plans are reached.

“Given the failure to prevent sustained and unreasonable workloads for nurses and midwives by the Tasmanian Government and Department of Health prior to borders opening, and ongoing lack of transparency regarding staffing levels and overtime, the ANMF has no other option but to lodge a safe staffing grievance with the Tasmanian Industrial Commission.

“The ANMF and members, despite being the worst paid in the country, have been more than reasonable in continuing to consult and work collaboratively with the Department on a daily basis to try and get outcomes on these issues, but the reality is that the failure by the Tasmanian Government to recognise and value nurse=s and midwives has led to this staffing crisis and our members have had enough.

“With 259 roster gaps on the upcoming roster in Paediatrics at the RHH, not enough staff at the LGH ED to adequately staff the COVID-19 hot zone, it defies belief that this is being accepted by the Department of Health and the Tasmanian Government. The Government must make decisions to ensure that not only patients are kept safe, but nurses and midwives too,” Ms Shepherd said.

Similarly, in the aged care sector, the ANMF has joined other unions to call on the Prime Minister to deploy the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and provide emergency support and assistance to overwhelmed aged care workers at nursing homes across the country.

The Australian Aged Care Collaboration, the ANMF, the ACTU, the United Workers Union, the HSU National and the Australian Workers’ Union also want the Federal Government to fund additional direct payments for staff to secure the workforce.

“Thankfully in Tasmania we are not experiencing the critical staffing shortages in aged that other states are, however, we still have staffing challenges across the sector, and we must do all we can to ensure that if the situation worsens that those vulnerable aged care residents and those in community are not left missing out on care.

“Lockdowns are restricting many residents to their rooms as services work to keep them safe. With severe staff shortages happening across all sectors, services for older Australians and Tasmanians must be prioritised,” Ms Shepherd said.

There are services that older people depend on that are not being delivered in other states and are at risk in Tasmania simply because there is not enough staff:

- Aged care staff are burnt out with many working overtime and double shifts
- The sector is at crisis point and requires:
  1. immediate ADF support where requested
  2. a COVID-19 payment for all staff
  3. resolution of ongoing issues regarding access to RAT and PPE supplies
- Current crisis exposes unresolved systemic funding and workforce issues

Aged care staff are working hard to provide care in very challenging circumstances and with limited resources. They are on the frontline of the fight against COVID-19, protecting the most vulnerable in our society. They must be resourced and enabled to win this fight. We appreciate the patience and understanding of families and older people and now, the most important thing is to get the support we need to deliver the quality care they deserve.

~End

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