

20 March 2020

Hon Roger Cook
Deputy Premier; Minister for Health; Mental Health
13 Floor, Dumas House
2 Havelock St
West Perth WA 6005

Dr David Russell-Weisz
Director General
Department of Health
189 Royal St
East Perth WA 6004

By email only:
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Dear Minister Cook and Dr Russell-Weisz

HSUWA members and COVID-19

The Health Services Union of Western Australia (**HSUWA**) is writing in relation to the evolving COVID-19 crisis and issues that affect our members. We understand the state government and Department of Health are reacting as quickly as possible to this crisis in difficult circumstances.

Our members across the health sector are trusted and respected professionals in our community who will continue to do their best to look after their fellow Western Australians, in partnership with the state government and the Department of Health. We know tough times are with us and likely tougher times are ahead.

We ask for recognition from government that healthcare workers are critical to our state's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We ask for this to be acknowledged by government and accordingly seek the following:

Safety

The priority of the union is the safety of members and the community.

We strongly advocate that adequate PPE be provided to all healthcare workers who are in potential contact with COVID-19 patients or suspected COVID-19 patients.

We ask that workload concerns raised by members in their workplace or by the union are escalated and addressed with urgency by the Health Service Providers (HSPs). For example, we currently have significant concerns over:

- the long length of shifts;
- the number of consecutive days of work; and
- payment of overtime hours (rather than accrual of TOIL or Flexitime).

We ask for a significantly increased Security Officer presence at all hospitals with an ED. These workers should be public sector employees. Security Officers who are currently casuals should be offered permanent employment immediately.

Leave

Healthcare workers need to be able to access leave for the purposes of self-care and to care for their family members. In recognition of the vital role and higher exposure to risk that our members are facing, we ask you act to immediately exempt healthcare workers from the requirement under *Circular #5/2020 – COVID-19 and Employment Flexibilities* that personal and other leave entitlements be used ahead of COVID-19 Leave.

In addition, private labour hire employees and contractors are working throughout our public hospitals in similar conditions as their public sector colleagues with lesser entitlements and protections. We ask that the state government and Department of Health apply significant pressure to those private providers to ensure that this inequity is remedied.

We note that Ramsay Health Care in particular, is not availing their workers of the same or similar access to COVID-19 type leave. This is at effectively two public hospital sites with busy EDs. Ramsay Health Care and other private sector providers to government should also be providing the same or better entitlements contained within Circular #5.

Workers' compensation

We strongly advocate that in the case of any claim for workers' compensation for a healthcare worker infected with COVID-19 that there be a rebuttable presumption applied that it was contracted in the course of their employment.

Testing

We ask for priority access to testing and results for healthcare workers. We ask for priority access to flu vaccinations.

Workforce planning

In relation to the imminent surge in the health workforce, the union seeks:

- consultation with the HSPs and the system-manager about where, by who, when and how new staff will be engaged;
- new starter information be provided promptly; and
- access to discussions with new starters and inductions.

For the existing workforce, please note our members are concerned about transfers (of duties and locations), changes to their scope of practice and basic consultation before decisions relating to the above are made. We know that decisions made in haste, with all the best intentions, can lead to poor decisions that affect health outcomes.

Given the likely closure in the coming days or weeks of childcare centres and schools, we are deeply concerned that healthcare workers with children may be unable to attend work during the height of the crisis. We ask government to consider the creation of dedicated childcare and/or school centres exclusively available to the children of healthcare workers. We think the Department of Health and HSPs are uniquely capable of doing this safely.

We ask that any employee who is a casual or fixed term contract who has met the length of service criterion contained within Commissioner's Instruction 23 (CI-23) be immediately converted to permanency. This is to ensure workforce continuity and the retention of critical knowledge at this time of crisis. For those employees currently on fixed term contracts, not included above, we ask that all contracts that may reach the end of the term for the next 6 months, automatically roll over for 6 months.

We also note that the continuation of disputes in relation to CI-23, is not a good use of resources. In particular, a speedy resolution of the NMHS Security Officers dispute we believe would lead to a more appropriate use of NMHS resources, particularly given the acute need for the security of our healthcare workers and the community.

We consider the union to be a vital stakeholder in this fight against COVID-19. We commit to engaging responsibly in the coming months as a recognised and considered advocate for healthcare workers. We appreciate that some of the items in this letter are already being considered or progressed by government and look forward to your responses, particularly in relation to access to COVID-19 Leave for Western Australian healthcare workers.

Yours sincerely,



Naomi McCrae
Secretary HSUWA

cc: Liz McCleod, Kelly Worlock, Alex Lyons