

Opening statement of Michael Wharte
A) Gen Sec NSWOMA

Our submission clearly demonstrates that nurses and midwives are psychologically injured at work due to unsustainable workloads. There exist within NSW Health and other health care settings, unsafe systems of work that are injuring our members. Rather than value and respect nurses and midwives the proposed legislation will simply cast these injured workers aside.

In 2023 the Association handed NSW Health a report out of the University of South Australia. That report examined the impact of Covid and workloads on nurses and midwives in NSW. The report showed that:

- 15% of participants had indications of PTSD – even more were simply burnt out
- The key causes were workload, staffing level and skill mix concerns and job role
- 22% intended to leave the profession, a further 41% were undecided as to whether they would stay or go

NSW Health representatives simply dismissed the report.

During Covid the Coalition government froze our members pay, they did so amongst a decade of wage suppression. A wage suppression that has now led to worsening staffing shortages whilst the hospitals get busier and busier.

When we fought short staffing in the Central Coast, rather than address the matter, the government's solicitors argued and won on a technicality that they only had to roster for staffing levels, not actually provide them. Short staffing at those sites persist.

I note the Special Commission of Inquiry into HealthCare Funding report states that there are high levels of fatigue and burnout and that whilst Covid contributed to this, high rates of burnout persist.

Improved wages and workloads are the key solutions to resolving the cause of the injuries nurses and midwives experience. The current government is opposing wage justice through the NSW IRC. The role out of Safe Staffing levels are being hampered by a failure to agree accountability measures despite the government's commitment to do so.

Until we saw this draft legislation we knew, by the government's actions, that they do not value nurses and midwives.

We see now, through this proposed legislation that they do not care.

Explicitly excluding work pressure as a compensable psychological injury when the government knows that this causes 28% of psychological injuries for nurses, midwives and carers is simply heartless.

To require a nurse, a midwife, and aged care worker to have a court outcome proving sexual harassment before being eligible for workers compensation is appalling. It is not

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Mr. Michael Wharte
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trauma informed – it simply places a barrier in the way of women being safe at work and will allow sexual harassment to continue.

The government must not table this legislation as it stands.

