



JOINT STATEMENT

“People in NSW are paying the price as the mental health system struggles to cope with workforce shortages,” says the NSW Mental Health Alliance.

In response to the [article](#) published in The Daily Telegraph on Sunday, September 22, 2024, the NSW Mental Health Alliance says it is deeply concerned about the number of people experiencing mental health challenges in NSW that are struggling to access the care, treatment and supports they desperately need.

This is partly because of the workforce crisis that exists in the state’s public and community-based mental health services which continue to impact on health service availability and service user’s wellbeing and potential for recovery.

The Alliance is urging the NSW Government to work with the sector to immediately implement policy changes that attract, train, and retain more mental health workers.

Earlier this year, [a state government-led analysis](#) revealed a 29 per cent shortfall across the service system for the 207,000 people in NSW living with severe and complex mental health and psychosocial needs.

The [National Mental Health Service Planning Framework](#) data gathering tool also found that at least 58,000 people with mental health conditions were missing out on care in NSW across all service delivery contexts.

Despite these damning findings, leading mental health organisations say the needle has not moved, particularly towards meaningfully addressing workforce shortages that span across psychiatry, psychology, nursing, primary care, and community-based psychosocial supports including rehabilitation.

Many frontline workers speak of a growing sense of moral injury and burnout as they witness people missing out on essential mental health care, simply because all parts of the service system lack both the people and resources it needs to cope with overwhelming demand.

Inaction is having a devastating impact on those needing care and delivering care. People who use mental health services are finding it difficult to access preventative services and are obliged to leave services before they have a safe discharge.

The Alliance urges the NSW and Commonwealth Governments to take immediate action to address these shortages and ensure that no one falls through the gaps in the service system.

Quotes attributed to Dr Pramudie Gunaratne, Chair of the NSW Branch of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP):

“Ask any psychiatrist and they will tell you – our mental health system is crumbling under unbearable pressure, and for people and families desperate for help there is quite literally nowhere to turn.

“It is heart-breaking to see patients, particularly those with the most complex and serious needs, paying the price for years of neglect and de-prioritisation of mental health.

“Workforce shortages are pushing the system and frontline workers to breaking point. We see this everyday – our colleagues are distressed, demoralised and exhausted.

“It’s not just that people are leaving, it’s also that we can’t attract newly trained psychiatrists – a survey the RANZCP recently conducted showed that only 20% of newly trained psychiatrists are choosing to stay and work in NSW Health after completing their training.

“There are just not enough hands-on deck to help us care for the most severely ill, the workload is unsustainable, and clinicians are leaving the state or our public health system entirely.

“The issues have been long known, and action must be taken now to ensure people can access the care they desperately need.”

MEDIA CONTACT: For media enquiries, contact Dishi Gahlowt at media@ranzcp.org or 0437 315 911

Quotes attributed to Dr Evelyne Tadros, CEO of the Mental Health Coordinating Council:

“Even with the additional investment that we have long advocated as essential in meeting the needs of people experiencing complex mental health and coexisting challenges; without the necessary workforce the service system will be on its knees in the not too distant future, and the ED presentations we must minimise will inevitably be on the rise.”

Quotes attributed to Dr Karen Spielman, Advocacy Chair of the Australian Society of Psychological Medicine:

“GPs with special interest and expertise in mental health are busier than ever delivering and co-ordinating care for their patients.

“With increasing need and fewer clinicians to share the load sadly costs and wait times increase and more people miss out on care. Caring for those with complex needs requires time and teamwork.

“We support urgent attention to workforce shortages and systemic improvement for the benefit of the NSW community.”

Quotes attributed to Jonathan Harms, CEO of the Mental Health Carers NSW:

“The mental health system has been under resourced for years, but the problems are getting more and more acute and more difficult to solve the longer they are left. The NSW Labor government has shown a pleasing determination to deal with the serious issues for our mental health system, but

these problems have been decades in the making and now require a major effort across government to deal with them effectively.

“This is always hard for governments facing difficult choices and funding constraints. However, for the families and carers of people with significant mental health issues don’t have the luxury of being able to wait and plan their response to a loved one’s mental illness. Their family members don’t get to postpone their distress until it is more convenient.

“Government’s will always have more funds, more time and more expertise available to develop the supports vulnerable people need on their worst days and we urge Premier Christopher Mins and Mental Health Minister Rose Jackson to prioritise meeting the needs of those most vulnerable members of our society.”

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Quotes attributed to Conjoint Professor Mike Hazelton, Australian College of Mental Health Nurses:

“Mental health nurses in NSW are telling us they are giving serious consideration to working in other parts of the healthcare system, or even leaving nursing altogether. Many are considering moving to another part of the country, citing more supportive work circumstances and better pay than in NSW. For many, the stress and strain of constantly increasing workloads, and insufficient staffing has made working in mental health services too difficult.”