



# STUART GRIMLEY MP

Member for Western Victoria  
State Leader of Derryn Hinch's Justice Party

## MEDIA RELEASE



### Support for our Mental Health Professionals is needed

29 September 2021

State Leader of Derryn Hinch's Justice Party, Stuart Grimley MP, is calling for more support for our mental health professionals with new figures suggesting Geelong is already significantly understaffed in the mental health and alcohol and other drug (AOD) sectors and this could get worse with impacts from COVID-19.

According to the Health and Community Services Union (HACSU), people who work in the mental health sector are overworked and underpaid, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data from HACSU says Barwon Health is currently down 34 staff across the acute mental health space and that if just one team member was sick, they would be "in crisis". Further, if just two staff needed to be furloughed the service "would be in trouble". Mr Grimley says these figures are scary and need to be addressed immediately by the State Government.

HACSU said it was already difficult enough to attract people to the workforce, as they hadn't received a pay rise in two years and had notoriously low wages. Mr Grimley, who donates his pollie pay rise every month, said this wasn't good enough. The MP has been involved in EBA negotiations during his time at Victoria Police and understands how difficult it can be for some of the hardest workers to attract any meaningful pay increases.

In a survey undertaken by HACSU, 97 percent of members said that they do not have the appropriate equivalent full-time positions on site to assist with community members grappling with substance use issues. This is simply unacceptable.

Mr Grimley said the State Government needed to sit at the table with the Union as a matter of urgency and negotiate a package that would attract more workers to the sector. This would be consistent with recommendations from the recent Royal Commission into Mental Health.

The mental health sector is increasingly becoming more important to our community.

#### Quotes attributable to Stuart Grimley MP:

"The Government can't talk the talk about the Royal Commission and then not walk the walk when it comes to fair conditions and pay for mental health workers. They need to come to the party, because without mental health workers, there is no mental health help for those who need it. It's as simple as that.

I am shocked to read that Geelong's mental health workforce is *already* understaffed by about 34 staff across the service. This is a huge worry and the pressure on the current staff to turn up to work to ensure people can be helped is concerning. This means mental health staff who themselves need a mental break ultimately can't take sick leave without affecting workforce demand. God help us if staff need to be furloughed due to COVID-19 isolation.

Our mental health is just as important as our physical health. The people who work tirelessly in our physical health sector have their own awards, a clear path for career progression and solid wages to attract workers.

I'm encouraging the government to investigate the possibilities of creating pathways for people who want to enter the field and incentives for them to stay.

I'd like to thank all the people who currently work in the mental health sector. I know that all of them are under extreme pressure due to the pandemic. We never know how important these people are, until we need them ourselves."

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