



PUBLIC SERVICE ASSOCIATION
OF NEW SOUTH WALES

General Secretary Stewart Little
President Kylie McKelvie
ABN 83 717 214 309

In reply please quote: CM:cj C/N 90886

26 June 2018

Mr Michael Coutts-Trotter
Secretary
Department of Family and Community Services
Locked Bag 10
STRAWBERRY HILLS NSW 2012

By email: petra.kathagen@facs.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mr Coutts-Trotter,

I am writing in regard to your failure to implement any initiatives or programs to assist caseworkers suffering from mental health issues including secondary and vicarious trauma other than the inadequate Employee Assistance Program.

The PSA has learned that the Chief Ambulance Officer of NSW has apologised to paramedics who have suffered trauma and mental health problems as a result of the work they do. He also acknowledged past failures of the Ambulance Service, and problems of bullying, harassment and intimidation within the organisation. We applaud the actions taken by the Ambulance Service.

As a result of this recognition of the mismanagement of these matters the Ambulance Service is establishing a Staff Health Unit with specialist psychologists, as well as offering a bullying and harassment hotline, a health coaching service and improved case management.

The PSA has consistently raised the issue of caseworkers experiencing secondary and vicarious trauma in correspondence to you and at meetings of the Joint Consultative Committee. Our concerns about caseworkers experiencing mental health problems as a result to the work they do have been dismissed by you and your senior staff. Examples include:

- In late 2017 a Provisional Improvement Notice (PIN) was lodged with SafeWork NSW in relation to the Department's failure to address secondary and vicarious trauma and you and your Department did everything possible to obstruct it and then took punitive action against the Health and Safety Representative who lodged the PIN.
- Our representation of members in the Industrial Relations Commission where your Departmental officers have stood up and denied that the challenging work environment led to the development of post-traumatic stress disorder.
- We assist members on a daily basis experiencing bullying and harassment as a result of the Department's obsession with productivity targets at the expense of a healthy workplace;
- Your introduced the so-called respectful workplace policy and OneSAP which actually makes it harder for caseworkers to make complaints of bullying and harassment;

- Your Departmental officials insist on investigating bullying and harassment matters in-house and refuse to engage independent investigators – not surprisingly the in-house approach which cannot be impartial or objective usually results in organisational defensiveness and a finding that there was no bullying; and
- Those members who dare to raise concerns are targeted by management and without warning placed on a performance improvement program or humiliated by being directed to have an Independent Medical Assessment.

After learning that significant resources have been allocated to support paramedics we will not stand by any longer and see the needs of caseworkers ignored by you and your Department.

We seek your advice on the following:

- When will you apologise to the caseworkers for failing to address mental health issues, including vicarious and secondary trauma and failing to act on the bullying and harassment problems in your agency?
- When will you acknowledge the extent of vicarious and secondary trauma experienced by caseworkers?
- When will you introduce appropriate workplace systems to identify, manage and prevent vicarious trauma and secondary trauma?
- When will you respond to the mental health problems experienced by caseworkers and the endemic bullying and harassment in Community Services Centres and provide specialist psychiatric and psychological support to caseworkers?
- When will you establish a bullying and harassment hotline for caseworkers;
- When will you introduce initiatives to prevent vicarious trauma and secondary trauma including mental health and resilience programs?
- When will you act to determine fair, safe and achievable workloads for caseworkers?
- When will you adequately resource Community Services?
- When will you review the current obsession with productivity targets and unit costs which are resulting in Managers, Casework being effectively required to allocate excessive and unsafe caseloads in order to meet those targets?
- When will you conduct a state-wide audit of individual caseloads and forfeiture of flex time?
- When will undertake a risk assessment in regard to the over allocation of cases and implement control mechanisms to manage workloads? and
- When will allocate sufficient resources to fund initiatives to address mental health issues including secondary and vicarious trauma and ensure that the number of caseworkers in the field is sufficient so that workloads are manageable?

The PSA calls on you to act in this matter as a matter of urgency. To this end we invoke the 1997 Consultation Policy and clause 65.1 of the Crown Employees (Public Service Conditions of Employment Award) 2009:

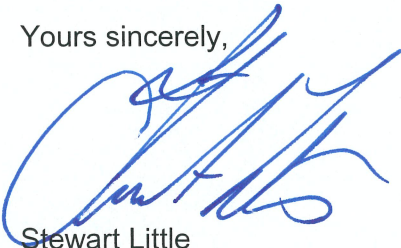
There shall be effective means of consultation as set out in the Consultative Arrangements Policy and Guidelines document, on matters of mutual interest and concern, both formal and informal, between management and the Association”

We seek a meeting with you at the earliest opportunity so that you can address the questions we have put to you and we can agree on what needs to be done to ensure a comprehensive response to address the mental health needs of caseworkers.

We seek your commitment to genuine consultation and a suite of actions to address this matter. We will not accept tokenism or a nil response.

Please contact Sandra Lockey of my office on 92200 982 to arrange a meeting.

Yours sincerely,



Stewart Little
General Secretary

26 June 2018