

Do not make the same mistake twice – protect disability workers

With multiple cases of COVID-19 emerging in the disability sector in Victoria, the Health Service Union (HSU National) and its Victorian disability branch the Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) are urging the Federal and Victorian Governments to act quickly to prevent another aged care tragedy.

The virus has spread to multiple disability providers in Victoria and both staff and residents have been reported as infected.

The characteristics of the disability workforce are comparable to the aged care workforce with insecure and low paid work, workers with multiple employers and workplaces, and vulnerable participants and residents.

Paid pandemic leave, a COVID care allowance, financial support to work at one facility, access to personal protective equipment and training, and establishing an advisory group and a prepared surge workforce are all immediate measures that can assist to contain further outbreaks.

The HSU has sought urgent meetings with the Federal and Victorian Governments imploring them to bring together all stakeholders to address the issues in the disability sector.

The HSU has also written to the Fair Work Commission requesting that they review the case of paid pandemic leave for disability and home care workers.

Quotes attributable to HSU National Secretary, Lloyd Williams

“As a matter of urgency, the Federal Government should commit to supporting and funding paid pandemic leave and working at single sites. No health worker should be out of pocket due to working at one facility or self-isolating due to COVID-19.”

“We need to learn from the tragedy that has emerged in the Aged Care Sector and act quickly and decisively to protect and support people with a disability and their support workers.”

“We cannot make the same mistake twice – protect all disability workers now or risk another aged-care sized wave ahead of us.”

Quotes attributable to HACSU Vic Assistant Secretary, Kate Marshall

“Disability is always back of the queue when it comes to government support and this has left workers, participants and families across Victoria vulnerable.”

“We are incredibly concerned about the real and urgent risk of a COVID-19 outbreak in specialist disability residential accommodation and the potentially devastating impact ahead of us.”

“This is a life or death matter. We lost one disability worker to COVID-19 in the first wave, we must do everything we can to keep people with disabilities and the disability workforce safe.”