



Social Workers at the heart of HNE health services

The Hunter Branch President of the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) today expressed concern about claims that vacant allied health positions in Hunter New England Health services are being left unfilled with the potential risk that patients are discharged from hospital without adequate assessment and support services.

“Any prolonged delay in filling frontline allied health positions threatens the quality of patient care and places unjustified stress on remaining staff,” said Mr McNamara.

The money recently paid to all NSW allied health staff was the outcome of a long-awaited new industrial award. “This money was back-pay for existing allied health staff, and it should not be portrayed as new funding for more allied health positions,” Mr McNamara said.

The AASW welcomes the proposed review of Allied health services in the Hunter New England Area Health Service. The review will affirm the importance of allied health services as an essential part of health services in the region.

“Social workers are at the heart of health services in the Hunter and New England,” said Mr McNamara, “Patients are better prepared for going home, and are less likely to be re-admitted to hospital, when they receive good quality allied health care.”

Social Workers undertake at least four years of university study, including 140 days of work place experience. Few other allied health professions come to entry level positions in health services with a greater understanding of the realities of the health system and the complexities of patient’s situation.

“Social workers have a solid understanding of patients’ health problems and the pressure that illness and hospitalisation can place on their families,” said Mr McNamara.

Social workers work across the Area Health Service, in hospitals and aged care facilities, rehabilitation services, community health centres, mental health services and child protection. Few other professions are so well represented across the full range of health services in Hunter New England Health.

Mr McNamara suggests that the review of allied health services should:

- Include the experiences and voices of patients and their carers;
- Audit any increase in demand and waiting lists for allied health services;
- Examine recruitment processes and any undue delay in recruitment;
- Consider ways to encourage allied health professionals to work in rural areas;
- Ensure the ongoing professional development and support of allied health staff.