

**From:** Andrew Hewat <[andrew.hewat@vahpa.asn.au](mailto:andrew.hewat@vahpa.asn.au)>

**Date:** Thursday, 29 July 2021 at 12:08 pm

**To:** "Healthcare Worker Infection Prevention and Wellbeing Taskforce (Health)"

**Subject:** HCW Infection Prevention and Wellbeing Taskforce

Dear HCW Taskforce Secretariat,

As the Taskforce meets again and reflects on its achievements, which are significant and something to be proud of, I felt it necessary to highlight the harsh reality that many HCWs are still facing in the workplace, as a reality check. The following letter is from a workplace delegate and encapsulates the ongoing problems of excessive workload, inadequate amenities, the accumulative fatigue, the dehumanisation and loss of identity that comes from 18 months of wearing PPE, of not seeing their workmates faces, of continuing confusion about ever changing rules and regulations and the constant fear of sickness, death or infecting their families.

*The staff have had it up to here with being told what they can and can't do and when they can do it. Our lives are not our own anymore. It's soul crushing. We go to work every day to help sick people. We put our lives and the lives of our family at risk to do this and we miss out on spending quality time with our family. We aren't allowed to wear our clothes or hair how we want. Or even sit in the tearoom for our breaks if more than 10 people are there which is always. I can't even go to the toilet when I want cause there aren't enough of them or I don't have time. These things just keep adding up.*

*People were on their days off and were phoned to say you must come to work ASAP to get mask fit tested or they wouldn't be able to do their next shift. They had to bring their kids in and were told they wouldn't be paid for it at first. I'm not sure if everyone is getting paid for their time yet.*

*Our sick leave is still quite high and they fudge the email regarding sick leave each day by moving people around and only mentioning sick leave that has notified in the 2 hours before the morning shifts have started not the amount of people on personal leave that day. They still email people like sonographers on their day off cause they're short staffed and people who are training in specific areas are no longer supernumerary. They are treated like they are fully qualified in that area.*

*Management's delivery of information is like a dictatorship. They just order us around. There's no discussion, no empathy, no exceptions and the ones giving the orders out are allowed to keep their facial hair, not wear a face Shield and have their weekends to themselves. We've all had enough of them ordering us around, as the rules don't apply to them. People's mental health is really suffering. We need some support.*

Sadly, this is not an uncommon conversation that we are having with members, and it means the wellbeing of HCWs is still a major issue, with or without Covid outbreaks.

I would also like to ask if a report was produced that covers the audit of health service amenities, including a list of which health services benefited from the funding program and how the money was spent? We are constantly hearing of health services where the amenities are totally inadequate, or they are being downgraded. Despite the work down around staff amenities, they are still inadequate in many workplaces and impacting on staff wellbeing.

We are also still getting requests from members to know how their workplace performed in the ventilation audit. The report has still not been released and the recent Covid outbreak in Victoria and the ongoing threat of Covid leaks from NSW, has heightened the fears of HCWs and they are now very aware that poor ventilation likely played a significant part in the infection of so many HCWs in 2020. HCWs need to have confidence that their workplace is safe and if we have the tools and information to help with that, then we need to do so.

In Unity,

**Andrew Hewat**

**Assistant Secretary**

*Due to COVID-19 measures I am currently working from home.*

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VAHPA acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Elders past and present across Australia. We acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation, the Traditional Owners of the lands on which our office is located.

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