

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Mental Health coalition calls for NSW government to use state procurement inquiry as an opportunity to lead the way on mental health

A coalition consisting of construction industry businesses, unions and mental health providers have joined with Australians for Mental Health in calling for the NSW Government to use a scheduled inquiry into procurement practices as an opportunity to create radical reform in the way the nation's leaders approach mental wellbeing.

The Build Well(being) coalition said the inquiry, which is being conducted by the NSW Legislative Council's Standing Committee on Social Issues and is chaired by Sarah Kaine MLC, is an opportunity to champion the sort of wide-ranging systemic reform which is essential to combatting the mental health crisis in Australia.

The state of mental health in construction has some of the most alarming figures for any industry in the country with [research finding](#) a staggering 1195 workers in the industry died by suicide – comprising 21 percent of the total suicides across all sectors for the same period.

The findings were echoed by another paper "[The Cost of Doing Nothing](#)", commissioned by the Construction Industry Culture Taskforce, which estimated cultural issues within the Australian construction industry are costing nearly \$8 billion each year due to workplace injuries, mental illness, suicide, long work hours and a lack of diversity.

The coalition has called for the inquiry to recommend the following measures, which would not only model best practice for government but would also directly improve the wellbeing of workers in the industry:

- Mental health and well-being risk assessments by government departments before the issue of any requests for tender or proposal to identify; risks to mental health or wellbeing as well as minimum measures to mitigate those risks.
- That departments and agencies ensure that those minimum measures identified are undertaken
- An update to the NSW Procurement Policy Framework with the requirement for all tenders or proposals to include a mental health and wellbeing risk assessment and mitigation plan, and that this plan be evaluated before any contracts are awarded.
- That suppliers tendering to government be assessed on their track record in relation to mental health and well-being matters, including; the number and nature of accepted workers compensation claims for psychosocial injuries, the existence of policies to identify psychosocial hazards as well as their mitigation.
- That the evaluation of the mental health aspects be given comparable weight to other factors when assessing a prospective supplier.

Quotes from Australians for Mental Health Executive Director, Chris Gambian:

“The crisis in mental health demands that government look at its own behaviour to identify the policies, systems, and attitudes which are driving mental ill-health. We need to dismantle the systems we all know are causing harm and replace them with models which value, and include, mental health so it can thrive.”

“Right now the construction industry is in crisis and there is a huge opportunity to use the buying power of government to create a system and culture which fosters good mental health.”

Quotes from Unions NSW Secretary, Mark Morey:

“We need a proactive approach to mental health that not only sets high standards but also enforces them. This needs to be at the centre of workforce planning, not an afterthought. Government spending is a powerful lever. If companies want to benefit from government work, it’s completely reasonable to expect them to get on the front foot about the mental wellbeing of their employees.”

Quotes from Gabrielle Trainor AO, Chair of the Construction Industry Culture Taskforce:

“We need to make a step change to the culture of the industry to make construction an industry of choice where everyone can thrive. Procurement is the most effective way to do this. The Construction Industry Culture Taskforce has been working collaboratively to develop and trial an integrated Standard for which contractors will be accountable to their infrastructure clients.

“The Standard covers holistic measures on working hours, diversity and wellbeing and health - particularly mental health. All three elements need to be tackled together to truly make the difference. Our pilot projects are telling us that working under the Standard not only makes the industry more attractive and improves the lives of our people, but also improves equity, mental health and wellbeing and productivity.”

About Australians for Mental Health:

Australians for Mental Health was founded in 2014 to campaign for fundamental change in the way the country thinks and acts about mental health. Our mission is to ensure that Australia starts putting mental health at the heart of our national life.

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