



Media Release

NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association

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Government attacks workers battling COVID-19, in favour of small business

The NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) says its members are outraged by the NSW government's intention to clawback amendments to the *Workers Compensation Act 1987* regarding COVID-19 claims.

NSWNMA General Secretary, Brett Holmes, said upper house members of parliament received more than 24,800 emails from public sector nurses and midwives over the weekend, begging them to block the government's planned repeal. A further 590 emails were sent to lower house MPs.

"Despite their efforts to go above and beyond for the past 22 months, essential workers who are infected with COVID-19 will face significant hurdles if this repeal goes ahead," said Mr Holmes.

"Healthcare workers are at heightened risk of exposure from patients, visitors and other colleagues in their workplaces.

"Yes they can make a workers' compensation claim, but if they are forced through a disputed claims process it could be months before they get an outcome, or a long time without any income if they're a casual worker.

"This clawback would have a huge impact on the casual health workforce. The minimum recovery time is 14 days, yet the average full-time permanent worker gets 10 sick leave days per year, part-time/temporary workers even less, and casuals get zero sick leave. Our health and aged care sectors have relied heavily on these workers during the pandemic and now they're being left to fend for themselves against their employers and their insurer, iCare.

"If the government's repeal succeeds, workers would be forced to engage lawyers to fight their case and produce costly scientific evidence to prove a connection between their infection and exposure at work, something increasingly difficult when vaccinated people can carry the disease without symptoms and may not get tested.

"Not only have nurses, midwives and other frontline healthcare workers shown up to work, day after night, exposed to risk – they'll continue to be exposed to unvaccinated and potentially infectious patients as they go about their work. Yet this government wants to place the financial burden of contracting COVID-19 back on these workers, not to mention increase the unnecessary cost of contested claims.

"The pandemic has taken an unprecedented toll on nurses, midwives and other healthcare and frontline workers, and this is how the NSW government values them.

"Not only is this repeal out of touch, it's insulting and cruel, particularly when it's the workers right across NSW that this government is relying upon to rebuild our economy."

The government wants to repeal Section 19B of the Act, to save small businesses insurance premiums by \$950. However, the claim that this is a make or break decision for employers to hire someone or pay higher wages is farcical.



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