

## **JOINT MEDIA RELEASE**

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# **Alarm as critical Mental Health Service turfed from Oakden site to inadequate alternative**

A critical mental health service located in Adelaide's north-east has been told it must vacate its current site by 29 March without an appropriate alternative being in place.

The situation has raised alarm with clinicians and health unions, who are speaking out because they say a lack of planning by health authorities is raising potential safety issues for both patients and the community.

Howard House – which is an outpatient treatment facility for forensic mental health patients – is located on the former Oakden site. The site has been sold to developers.

The alternative being put forward by the Northern Adelaide Local Health Network (NALHN) and the Government - which is a combination of using existing facilities at James Nash House and the North East Community Mental Health Service - is not appropriate for these patients or the community.

### **The Chief Industrial Officer of the South Australian Salaried Medical Officers Association (SASMOA), Bernadette Mulholland, says:**

“It beggars belief that NALHN and SA Health have had this long to plan an alternative for these important services and they have come up with a completely inappropriate plan.

“The alternative being put forward by the employer is simply not clinically appropriate. It presents safety issues for both patients – who are in the high-risk category – and the community.

“Clinicians have been telling SA Health and NALHN that there is no capacity either at James Nash House or the North East Community Mental Health Service to safely and appropriately accommodate the staff and services from Howard House.

“This services must remain at Howard House until an appropriate alternative is found.”

### **Australian Nursing & Midwifery Association (ANMF) CEO/Secretary Adj Assoc Professor Elizabeth Dabars AM says:**

“NALHN have known for 3 years about this move, and they were notified several times, as recently as 6 months ago, of our concerns about staff and client safety. It is unbelievable that they would want to continue with the proposal with all the red flags we've raised.

“The plan to have victims and victims next of kin ('VNOK') in the same vicinity as the people that have offended against them is staggering. This goes so far outside of any reasonable test for common sense, let alone the ANMF's 10-point plan to reduce violence against healthcare workers.

“There has also been no thought in relation to the office spaces, which are too small, or the lack of IT equipment, which is essential in the world of Electronic Medical Records, which is about to rolled out in NALHN.

“Our members are worried that this ill-advised move will disrupt the work of a large multi-disciplinary team, who have worked collaboratively and cohesively for a long time.”

**Public Service Association (PSA) Assistant General Secretary Natasha Brown says:**

“The Government has completely failed to plan for and appropriately fund this relocation. \$150,000 is simply not enough to adequately fund the relocation of a critical statewide service that delivers care to extremely high-risk mental health patients.

“This makeshift arrangement is unprofessional and unsafe and could even see high-risk mental health clients come into contact with elderly and general mental health patients. There is also a possibility that victims or next of kin could come into contact with offenders.

“This is an area of mental health that presents enormous challenges for the dedicated workers delivering this service, it doesn’t need to be made harder as a result of government ineptitude.”