

MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday 10 September 2020

Nurses, midwives and personal care workers experiencing COVID-19 'double whammy'

Victorian nurses, midwives, graduates and personal care workers have reported experiencing anxiety, stress and fatigue after working for months within the COVID-19 pandemic and living under restrictions.

Responding to a survey about the Nursing and Midwifery Health Program Victoria (NMHPV) sent to members of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (Victorian Branch), 43 per cent said the primary barrier to seeking support was the belief they should be able to cope.

On R U OK? Day, 10 September 2020, NMHPV reminds nurses, midwives, student nurses and midwives, and personal care workers, that they are only human – and NMHPV is available to support them.

Nursing and Midwifery Health Program Victoria (NMHPV) is a free, confidential and independent service offering support, counselling and referral to other services as necessary. It is also a safe space for nurses, midwives, and student nurses and midwives, to discuss family violence issues.

NMHPV is staffed by nurses and midwives with additional qualifications in mental health and drug and alcohol counselling.

For months, Victorian nurses, midwives and personal care workers in residential aged care have been not only working within a one-in-100 years health pandemic but have been dealing with the impacts of lockdown at home, along with the rest of the community. Hundreds of Victorian nurses and personal care workers have contracted COVID-19 and been furloughed, and nurses and personal care workers have also experienced the grief of residents they care for in aged care facilities dying of COVID-19.

Answering a question about how working within the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted them, some of the comments from nurses, midwives and personal care workers were:

- Nothing to look forward to anymore. Feeling low level sadness all the time. Sleeping badly.
- The ongoing level of stress at work and at home and no rest from the high stress levels have caused physical and emotional exhaustion.
- Too concerned about my family when working, especially on COVID-19 ward. Stressed after coming from work. Increased weight and isolated from relatives and friends.
- We are providing round the clock emotional support for (aged care) residents who are missing their families, with little to no support for ourselves in the same position.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Andrews Government has provided \$600,000 additional funding to the NMHPV to meet additional need and extend its service to personal care workers in residential aged care.

NMHPV CEO, Glenn Taylor, said nurses and midwives were notoriously reluctant to seek support for themselves. NMHPV is urging nurses, midwives and residential aged care workers to not wait until a 'tipping point' event occurs – such as a serious health issue, relationship breakdown or burnout – to seek help.

'Our nurses, midwives and residential aged care workers have been incredible throughout the COVID-19 pandemic but they are hurting,' Mr Taylor said.

'There is no shame in seeking support and no issue is too big or too small for NMHPV to handle.'

'Nurses, midwives and personal care workers take the care of their patients and residents seriously. We're here to support them in taking care of themselves in this unprecedented time of demand on our professions and on our mental health.'

Nurses, midwives and residential aged care workers can contact NMHPV on 9415 7551 or email admin@nmhp.org.au or visit www.nmhp.org.au

Nurse & Midwife Support, a 24/7 national telephone support service, is available on 1800 667 877 or visit www.nmsupport.org.au

Media inquiries:

Glenn Taylor, CEO, Nursing and Midwifery Health Program Victoria (NMHPV) is available for interview on 0424 755 241.