



Free support services for Australians living with complex mental health needs www.sane.org

SANE alarmed but not surprised to see mass resignation of NSW Psychiatrists

SANE Australia statement, 23 January 2025

SANE is alarmed but not surprised to see mass resignation of psychiatrists in NSW

The resignation of public sector psychiatrists in NSW is a serious threat to the state's mental health system, with devastating consequences for those with mental illness. This mass departure highlights the fragile state of our mental health infrastructure and the urgent need for comprehensive reform.

Timely access to psychiatry services is critical for both adults and children with serious or complex mental health needs. Public psychiatrists play a vital role in diagnosing and treating individuals who present to hospitals with mental ill health, as well as providing ongoing clinical support for those requiring long-term medical intervention.

Delaying or restricting access to these services can worsen symptoms and result in significant negative impacts, including an increased risk of suicide. People with severe or lifelong illnesses such as major depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, eating

disorders, or personality disorders are particularly reliant on specialist psychiatric care.

This current situation will have severe consequences for all NSW residents but particularly those living with mental illness, as well as for their carers, families, and communities. Access to psychiatry has been a major community concern for many years, with long waiting lists and escalating costs in the private sector driving people into already stretched public services.

It will also worsen the already critical shortage of mental health professionals in NSW, leading to longer waiting times, reduced access to services, and a decline in care quality and continuity. Vulnerable groups, including those with severe mental illnesses, disabilities, and disadvantage, will be the most affected.

Sadly, what we are seeing is not surprising but an entirely predictable reflection of the fragile state of our mental health system. It highlights the broader issue of inadequate investment in mental health services and the urgent need for comprehensive reform.

Lagging government investment and attention also reflect the ongoing stigma and discrimination experienced by people with mental illness, suggesting that mental health is not given the same priority as physical health.

We urge the NSW government to act swiftly to increase investment, expand access to diverse mental health service options, and implement systemic reforms to ensure quality care for all individuals.

While this is a difficult time, it's also an opportunity to engage with a range of stakeholders and critically assess the status quo. NSW Health needs to look at how service options can be diversified to ensure a range of targeted and scalable options are available when and where people need them.

This may include proven options such as digital mental health services, telepsychiatry, improved integration of mental health care into primary health settings, and expanding access to a more diverse workforce, including mental health nurses, counsellors, and peer support workers.

SANE has offered their support to the NSW Government and will continue to represent the complex mental health community while this issue is being resolved.

SANE is the leading national mental health organisation for people with persistent, recurring or complex mental health issues and trauma. It provides a range of free digital and telehealth services to support them and their families. Led by the voices of its community, SANE drives change to improve the lives of those living with complex mental health and end stigma and discrimination. Find out more at: www.sane.org.

Key facts:

The resignation of public sector psychiatrists in NSW is a serious threat to the state's mental health system.

Delaying or restricting access to these services can worsen symptoms and result in significant negative impacts, especially for the most vulnerable members of society.

NSW Government must take this opportunity to critically evaluate how mental health services are delivered to appropriately fund the sector, diversify support options and ensure quality care for this growing public health issue.