

Tuesday 4 May 2021

## ACTU, mental health groups and academics call on Cash to back reforms to protect mental health at work

The ACTU has joined with mental health advocates and academics, releasing a joint statement calling on Minister Michaelia Cash and all Work Health and Safety Ministers to vote to support key reforms recommended in both the *Boland Review of Model WHS Laws* and the *Respect@Work* report on sexual harassment in the workplace at an upcoming meeting of state, territory and federal WHS ministers.

Both reports, commissioned by the Work Health and Safety Ministers and the Federal Government respectively, recommended the inclusion of a psychological hazard regulations in the *Model Work and Health Safety Act*. Such a regulation would require employers to treat hazards to mental health – such as stress, occupational violence and aggression as well as bullying and sexual harassment – in the same way as physical hazards in the workplace by identifying specific risks and addressing them.

Reforms to our WHS laws require two-thirds (6 out of 9) of WHS Ministers to agree to changes. It is likely that Minister Cash will be the deciding vote at the meeting which is scheduled to take place on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May and has the power to dramatically improve workplace health and safety laws in all Australian workplaces with regard to mental health.

### **Quotes attributable to ACTU Assistant Secretary Liam O'Brien:**

“These reforms are essential to making Australian workplaces safer and reducing the instances of mental health issues and psychological injuries which affect working people every day. Australia is one of the only developed nations in the world to not have equal protections for physical and psychological health and safety.

“These changes have been recommended by two extensive reviews ordered by government, and now Minister Cash has the opportunity to ensure they will become law in every workplace.

“There should be no difference between the way an employer is required to address a hazard which might impact workers’ mental health to that which impacts their physical health.

“Mental stress is the fastest and one of the only growing causes of injury claims in the workers compensation system. We need to act to make workplaces safer for all workers.

**Media contact:** Isabella Tilley 0414 894 040