

Federation adds name to joint letter to Premier

September 28, 2020

In an open letter to the NSW Premier, Federation has joined with experts to call for urgent action to address youth mental health in response to a rise in youth suicides in such a calamitous year.

President Angelo Gavrielatos is a signatory to the letter, published in *The Sunday Telegraph* today, that asks the State Government to consider training teachers as mental health first responders and, importantly, increase the number of counsellors in schools.

“There is no doubt that 2020 has been one of the worst school years on record for our young people,” the letter states.

“Bushfires, COVID-19 and the subsequent economic and mental health fallout have been catastrophic, especially for year 12 students going through their HSC exams.”

The letter – endorsed by Sydney University Brain and Mind Research Centre co-director Professor Ian Hickie, 2014 Australian of the Year Professor Pat McGorry, founding CEO of headspace

Chris Tanti and rugby league star (and mental health first aid instructor) David Shillington, among others – was prepared in response to a cluster of student suicides on Sydney’s North Shore and the NSW South Coast.

It asks the NSW Government to increase the number of school counsellors across the public system to at least one for every 500 students.

“These school counsellor levels were levels agreed to in 2018 but never reached,” the letter states.

It also asks that the state’s teachers be given the resources and support they need to assist their students in distress and that when students need help, school counsellors are available to play a role in their recovery.

“We are not asking to increase the burden of care on teachers or increase their workload, we are asking they be better equipped to play their role in the mental health care of young people as identifiers and referrers of children at risk,” the letter reads.

“We also acknowledge that while schools play some part in nurturing our young people, that needs to be backed up by comprehensive mental health care in the community.”

The signatories suggest teacher training could be conducted by Mental Health First Aid Australia, headspace, beyondblue or the plethora of other mental health organisations.

