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Thousands of nurse graduates locked out of jobs

Unions call for the tightening of laws that regulate the use of 457 visas in Australia as staggering numbers of nurse graduates are shunned by employers.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said that the number of graduates who are turned away is about the same as the number of 457 temporary workers who are hired by our public and private hospitals and aged care providers each year.

“Each year thousands of local nurse graduates complete their degrees and can’t find an employer who will give them a chance yet these same employers are hiring staff on 457 visas instead,” Ms Kearney said.

“These vital young workers can’t even get a foot in the door and in most cases they are forced to give up on their nursing dream and change careers.

“They are told they lack ‘experience’ which is outrageous considering they are graduates.”

This comes as the Federal Government has demanded young workers ‘earn or learn’.

“The harsh Abbott Government budget demands more from our young workers and yet offers no solution or increased job opportunity,” Ms Kearney said.

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) conservatively estimates that in 2013/14:

- 60 per cent of Tasmania nursing graduates were unable to find work;
- Only 600 graduates out of 2500 were employed in Queensland;
- In Victoria 800 graduates could not get a job;
- Western Australia it was 400 nurses graduates who were turned away; and
- 280 nurse graduates could not secure a position in South Australia.

ANMF Acting Federal Secretary, Annie Butler, said the use of temporary workers in nursing had risen.

“The number of 457 visa nurses has increased by around 400 per year since 2005 and most recent figures show it’s reached nearly 3100 temporary workers brought in to fill nursing positions annually,” Ms Butler said.

“We must support and invest in the next generation, not send a message that we don’t need them because, quite frankly, we do.”

“The nursing and midwifery workforce is aging. Almost 53 per cent of the nurses are aged over 45 years and 23 per cent are over 55 years old.”

“As these highly experienced individuals start transitioning towards retirement, we need to be creating opportunities for nurse graduates to work and learn side by side with them and, in time, replace them.”

“We have an aging population that will require more care and yet we are not investing in those workers. You have to ask what the health workforce of the future will look like if this is allowed to continue.”

Ms Kearney added that the number of graduates completing their studies had increased by more than 3000 per year since 2001 raising questions about the integrity of the 457 visa scheme.

“The 457 visa scheme was created as an emergency and temporary stop gap. Obviously, it’s not being used correctly and we are very concerned that if the Abbott Government has their way visa regulations will be loosened even further.”

“Unions support the geographic movement of nurses but only with adequate labour market testing that gives local workers a fair go.”

“Regulation must be tightened and the 457 visa scheme must only be used when evidence shows that local workers are not available to do the work.”

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