

**MEDIA RELEASE**                      **PSA calls of government to prioritise mental health and wellness of employees by means of conducive work environment**

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**EMBARGO**                                None

**ENQUIRIES**                              communication@psa.co.za

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The month of October has been declared by government as Mental Health Awareness Month and the Public Servants Association (PSA) calls on government to also prioritise the mental health and wellness of its own employees.

A conducive work environment will greatly assist in this regard by enabling public-sector employees to fulfil their duties efficiently and provide services to communities. Government is unfortunately lacking in this regard. Apart from being overworked owing to staff shortages and vacancies, public-sector employees face poor working conditions marked by decaying infrastructure that poses a direct risk to their health and safety.

Government's failure to implement wage agreements, coupled with austerity measures, an ailing economy and steep increases in the cost of living and interest rates are taking a toll on public-sector employees' financial and mental health and wellness. The situation is exacerbated by disabling loadshedding, which impacts on their ability to render services to communities and exposes them to public anger.

The PSA is further extremely concerned about the well-being and mental health of workers who on a daily basis work in an environment marked by violence and trauma. These include, amongst others, police officers, nurses, correctional services officials, social workers, and emergency medical services employees. These employees are, in addition, increasingly becoming the target of violent criminals. Despite these circumstances, they are expected to continue providing much-needed services to communities and even go beyond the call of duty.

Unwell employees impact on productivity and lead to absenteeism owing to an inability to cope without support. Mental Health Awareness Month provides government with an opportunity to educate South Africans on mental health and wellness to reduce stigma and discrimination. Government should be a key role player in raising awareness and expanding on existing wellness programmes and actions. This includes increasing the budget for supporting public-sector employees' mental health and wellness in aid of service delivery.

The PSA will continue to protect and promote public-sector employees' rights and interests to ensure an efficient public service. This includes supporting those employees who are victimised, harassed and experiencing unfair treatment. The PSA further encourages South Africans in need of mental health and wellness support to seek help from their workplace wellness programmes, clinics, hospitals, or healthcare service providers.

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