Dear Kim & Amanda,

I’d like to thank you for your correspondence and also for all the work you do in advocating for mental health nurses, their patients and the mental health needs of millions of Australians. Our response to your election asks is as follows.

The ACMHN calls for all parties to commit to:

No cuts to mental health nurse (MHNIP) services for 2016-17 and that the same level of services from 2015-16 are provided in 2016-17 to ensure consumer/patient continuity.

The Greens will not only commit to the ongoing maintenance of existing MHNIP funding, but will provide an extra $280 million over the forward estimates for mental health nurses. The Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program (MHNIP) has incredibly positive outcomes for both the clinics that employ mental health nurses and the patients who are supported by them. However, the program has been continually underfunded. Extra funding would mean that the full benefit of mental health nurses to our health system can be realised.

Maintaining the same level of mental health services to consumers through PHNs as programs such as the NDIS, Partners in Recovery (PIR) and Health Care Homes transition to PHN responsibility.

The Greens have concerns about the amount of allocated funding to Partners in Recovery from the 2019-20 financial year onwards. We are concerned that the Government is underestimating the number of existing Partners in Recovery patients who will be excluded from the NDIS, and we are committed to reviewing the current funding allocation post-election to ensure that there is service continuity for everyone.

That operating costs will be covered in a separate budget and will not come from funding assigned to provide services or programs to consumers.

The Greens have committed to a further $1.4 billion of funding over the next four years specifically to mental health services. Both administered and departmental costs are included in this figure. The amount of new money for consumers and patients is expected to make up over $1 billion of new spending for mental health services, and so there is no risk that operating costs will spill over into funding assigned to services.
That the funding provided to PHNs for the mental health flexible funding pool will increase as per expected budget projections

The Greens are committed to increasing the amount of money available to the mental health flexible fund by $400 million over the next four years. Because the Primary Health Networks have been given a short window of time to meet the targets and expectations placed on them, we must ensure that PHNs get the funding they need to do their job properly and deliver high quality, evidence based programs.

Not introducing a co-payment for mental health services that have previously not attracted such a payment

The Greens have stood against the Coalition’s proposed Medicare co-payment since the 2014 Budget, and we will continue to ensure that existing programs with universal coverage are protected from user-pays charges.

The ACMHN calls for all parties to commit to:

▲ Quarantining funding for mental health nurses services (MHNIP) with PHNs for at least 3 and at the most 5 years, to ensure a proper coordinated and fully informed distribution of funding occurs; that there is equitable access across the PHNs, with no PHN being worse off; and for the support of the CMHN workforce growth and stability.

▲ The pool of available funding for mental health nurses to be distributed across the PHNs is maintained at existing levels for 2016-17 and increased to $72 million from 2017-18 with year on year increases as per typical budget projections.

The decision by the Turnbull Government to fold MHNIP funding into the flexible pool also goes against the recommendations of the NMHC review. The review was concerned that the bundling of MHNIP funds to PHNs would exacerbate already existing regional service differentials. The Greens support responsibility for the program going to the PHNs, but would require a 5 year quarantine of MHNIP funding, including the Greens’ $280 million commitment of increased funding for the program.

The ACMHN calls for all parties to commit to:

▲ Funding workforce initiatives that:

▲ Provide a nursing workforce response to the mental health needs of Australians, across the spectrum of health and all clinical settings.

▲ Improve the mental health knowledge and clinical skill of all nurses, especially general practice nurses, emergency nurses, chronic disease nurses and alcohol & other drug nurses.

▲ Support and promote a more sustainable and flexible mental health nursing workforce.

▲ Improve the mental health literacy of all nurses, beginning at undergraduate level.
Our commitment to increase funding for mental health nurses will ensure the ability to have a nursing workforce responsive to the mental health needs of Australians.

The Greens recognise the essential role nurses play in both the health and mental health system. We need to ensure that nurses have access to the training and capacity building that they need to equip them with the skills to provide the best quality of care.

We have committed $140 million over the next four years to develop and implement a rural and regional workforce strategy, and although this is not specific to mental health nurses, we know that mental health nurses have an essential role to play in rural and regional mental health.

Additionally, by shifting responsibility of the mental health nurse program to the PHNs, we believe that there will be more scope for mental health nurse flexibility, as the requirements within the existing Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program are relaxed. The Greens want to grow the role of mental health nurses at all levels and in all types of care.

The ACMHN calls for all parties to commit to:

- Mental health nurses being included from the inception on relevant health review and reform committees as members of these committees.
- Mental health nurses being included as an equal partner in all health discussions
- Ensuring mental health nurses are represented at all levels of policy discussions.

The Greens understand the important role that mental health nurses play in mental health care, particularly in regard to the provision of holistic care that meets a diverse set of client needs that go beyond the medical. They are therefore able to provide a unique perspective on mental health reform that deserves a hearing. The Greens endorse the inclusion of mental health nurses as committee members and equal members in the mental health reform process and their ongoing participation in policy discussions.

The ACMHN calls for all parties to commit to:

Ratifying the OPCAT to promote comprehensive protection of the rights of people in all places of detention in Australia and confirm the Australian Government’s commitment to human rights issues.

The Greens have led the way when it comes to fighting for a more compassionate and humane policy for the treatment of people seeking asylum in Australia. The Greens opposed the reopening of the regional processing centres on Nauru and Manus Island, and the indefinite detention of men, women and children in mainland Australian controlled detention centres.

The Greens are supportive of the ratification of the OPCAT and calling on whichever party forms government to abide by Australia’s existing obligations under international law.
The ACMHN calls on all parties to commit to:

Amending the Border Force Act 2015 to allow health professionals to report openly on or disclose information about the conditions in immigration detention centres, including the removal of any criminal penalties.

The Greens voted against the passing of the Border Force Act and continue to call for it to be repealed in its entirety. In the alternative, the Greens are supportive of amending the existing legislation to allow health professionals to report openly on and/or disclose information about conditions in immigration detention, including the removal of criminal penalties.

In November 2015 the Greens successfully moved amendments to the Migration and Maritime Powers Amendment Bill (No. 1) designed to address the most dangerous features of the Border Force Act. The Senate supported the amendments to remove children from detention, have the centres opened up to media scrutiny, make the reporting of abuse mandatory and reverse the punitive Border Force whistle-blower crackdown. Again, the Greens have led the debate for a fairer and more compassionate approach to people seeking asylum and are the only voice in Parliament that will stand up for decency in this area.

Thank you again for this opportunity to restate the Greens ongoing commitment to mental health nurses. Mental health and mental wellbeing is a priority for the Greens, and we will continue to fight for more funding and fairer outcomes across the sector.

Regards,

Senator Janet Rice

Greens spokesperson for Mental Health