

Experienced nurses locked out of jobs despite desperate Queensland Health workforce crisis

Experienced nurses claim Queensland Health continues to reject their job applications over past Covid vaccine status, despite the state having a huge shortfall of nurses.



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3 min read November 15, 2025 - 12:00AM



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One of the nurses with 20-plus years experience who was stood down in 2021 following COVID-19 mandates. Photo Steve Pohlner

Queensland nurses, desperate to re-enter their careers, claim they are still being knocked back from roles in the state's health system despite mandated Covid-19 vaccinations being scrapped years ago.

It comes as Health Minister Tim Nicholls revealed earlier this week that an additional 46,000 workers – including more than 21,000 nurses and midwives were needed by 2032 to meet growing demand.

But senior nurses who were dismissed in 2021 for not following Covid-19 mandates claim they are still being turned down for roles in Queensland Health.

In 2023, Covid-19 vaccinations were no longer mandated for Queensland Health and Queensland Ambulance Service employees.

Yet Michelle, who had more than 20 years of experience as a critical care nurse before being stood down, claimed she still couldn't get a role because of her dismissal in 2021.

She had previously declined the job for medical and personal reasons.

Michelle said being rejected several times from Queensland Health positions had been a “kick in the guts”.

Should Qld nurses still be 'black listed' for refusing Covid mandates?

Yes

No

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“Especially when you think of all the times I’ve missed Christmases and birthdays and all the things you miss out on because you’re caring for other people, and then (Queensland Health) just don’t care about you,” she said.

“I’ve worked for a long time, and I’ve done two degrees to be a critical care nurse, and you kind of think, what was the point of it all?”

Another highly trained nurse who has worked with adults and within the pediatric unit said the emotional toll of being rejected for roles in Queensland Health had been exhausting.

The nurse said she now relied on work with her family business and casual agency nursing shifts.

“It has been a tough ride ever since it happened — obviously, the trauma since 2021 when we were stood down,” she said.

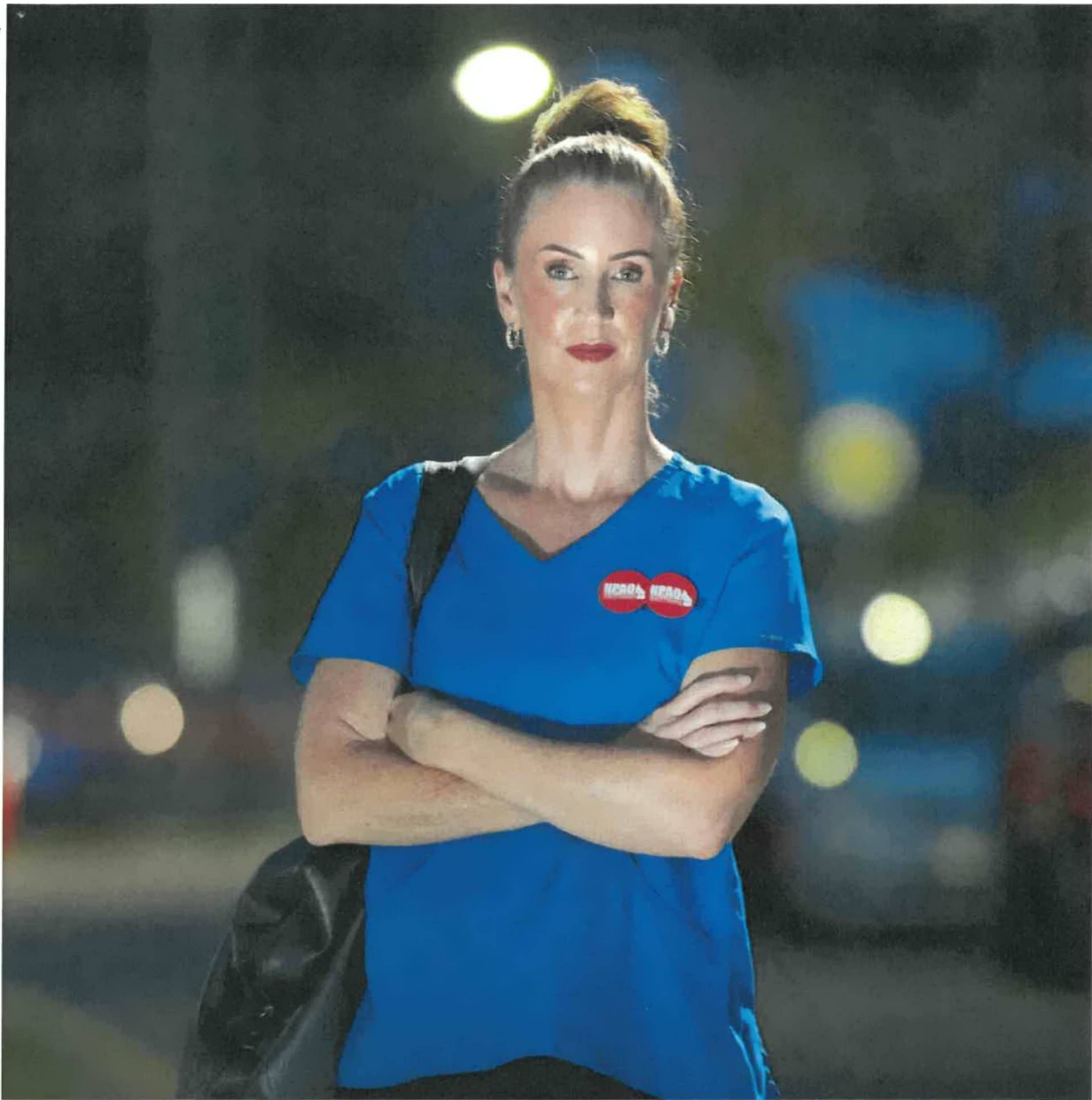
“I’ve just been doing agency, but it’s obviously very tough, because you’re not guaranteed shifts, your shifts get cancelled at the last minute.”

She said it was shocking to hear there was a workforce shortage while previously dismissed nurses were still desperately trying to get their jobs back.

QLD Politics

If they're really that short, then why aren't they just taking back these nurses who are willing. A lot are very senior, which is a big plus; they were trained here, they know the system, and yet they keep standing their ground and refusing to take us back,” she said.

“If there is this massive shortage of healthcare workers, it does not make sense at all.”



NPAQ president Kara Thomas. Photo: Steve Polhner

Nurses Professional Association of Queensland president Kara Thomas said it was “ridiculous” that Queensland Health was still “black-listing” highly experienced nurses and midwives over Covid-era policies that no longer apply.

“We’ve got hospitals stretched thin, and yet nurses with decades of experience are being told they’re ‘unemployable’ because of outdated Covid mandate disciplinary action labels. Denying Queenslanders high-quality care makes no sense,” Ms Thomas said.

“The mandate is gone. The Premier says it’s time to move on. So why are these nurses still excluded? It’s time for leadership to match words with

action.

“These are not junior staff. They’re critical care nurses, midwives, educators, locked out not because they’re unsafe, but because of Covid-19 disciplinary action that they were directed to disclose.

“This is fixable. Remove the misconduct label. Issue a directive. Let them reapply without stigma. It’s basic fairness, we are in a workforce crisis, and it’s what Queensland Health needs to do right now.”

A Queensland Health spokeswoman said applying for roles with Queensland Health is open to any former employee, including those who were stood down for not meeting the previous COVID-19 vaccination requirement.

“Every candidate applying for a position within Queensland Health will be assessed on their suitability. Anyone seeking re-employment after termination must follow the standard Queensland Health recruitment and selection processes,” the spokeswoman said.

Queensland Legislative Assembly

Number: 5825T1804



18 NOV 2025

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