

ASU members have Saved Equal Pay!

On Tuesday night the Federal Government announced that they would lift base funding in Department of Social Services Grants to cover the costs for Equal Pay wages won by ASU members in 2012.

From 1 July 2021, the Federal Government has committed to more than \$44million per year to lift base funding in Department of Social Services to cover the Equal Remuneration Order for Equal Pay.

This covers the following Federal programs funded by Department of Social Services:

- Youth
- Disability
- Families
- Financial Counselling
- Emergency Relief

We are informed the commitment to cover ERO in base funding is beyond DSS. For example, it is already in Attorney General's Department funding.

What does this mean?

We've won our campaign to save frontline jobs.

We've won our campaign to stop pay cuts.

We've won our campaign for recognition of your essential work in social and community services.

You campaigned, and the Government has listened.

This is a fantastic victory for ASU members, but there's still work to do.

We need to make sure that this decision applies across all Federal Departments, and that no job is left out or service missed. Our particular area of concern is Partnership Funding where Federal and State Governments have shared funding arrangements, especially Housing and Homelessness.

We need to contact State Ministers to get them to call on Federal Government to meet this commitment in Partnership negotiations, so that no job is left out or service missed in our victory for Equal Pay.

Disability services and the NDIS

The Federal Budget has guaranteed funding for the NDIS moving forward. This includes:

- Increased funding for NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission and the NDIA (\$800m over four years in new money).
- \$93m over 4 years will focus on NDIS Commission to increase their oversight of providers. We know there has been concern about the Commission not having resources to properly investigate the complaints it receives.

But there is no money or plan for better NDIS training - these are the jobs of the future and could provide new employment for job seekers, but they are skilled and need training support.

Impact on women and women's services

Apart from our victory Saving Equal Pay, the Federal Budget has largely **left out women**, even though they have been on the **front lines fighting the pandemic**, and have **lost the most jobs**.

We know that women's services have been in **higher demand** and workers have been under **more pressure than ever before**. This was the opportunity for the government to recognise the importance of these critical services and support women who have suffered more heavily in the pandemic. **But women have been largely left out of this budget.**

Domestic and Family Violence Services

There is a \$150m one-off payment for domestic and family violence services during the COVID-19 pandemic - this will be \$130m distributed to states, and \$20m for a national awareness campaign. **But:**

- **No commitment to paid family and domestic violence leave**
- **No additional funding for specialist domestic violence housing services (refuges) to help women and children escape violence.**

1800 RESPECT

There is additional funding for 1800 RESPECT over 4 years, but the amount is not for publication. This lack of transparency and tender process is of concern – as the ASU is firmly of the view that there should be **no profit from rape**.

Mental health services and supports

We know that **demand for mental health services and supports have skyrocketed** during the COVID-19 pandemic. This budget was the opportunity for the Federal Government to increase funding in mental health, particularly for community mental health services that we know are critical for many in our community.

But it is clear that the Government has focused on a medical model and telehealth, instead of a community model and social welfare approach, announcing:

- 20 subsidized Medicare sessions for counseling with GP Referral and mental health plan (increased from 10)
- One off \$46m funding to Victorian mental health services for COVID response and one off for mental health bushfire recovery of \$76m (mainly telehealth services in fire affected areas provided by organizations like LifeLine)
- Increase in Headspace services from 124 to 153 services nationally - \$534m for new Headspace services
- No increase in funding to community mental health services or for those who are not eligible for NDIS (the transition money is ending and not continuing).

Paid Parental Leave

The Federal Government has announced that there will be an alternative test for parents whose job was impacted by COVID-19:

- Parents must have worked 10 of the 20 months for births up to March 2021 (rather than 10 out of 13 prior months).

However the Government has ignored our calls for superannuation to be paid on parental leave, which would help women save for their retirement and not retire in poverty.

Child Care

Despite calls to extend or increase support for child care, there is **no new funding in the Budget**. There is the temporary extension of support for Victorians until 2021 and the activity test remains lower for the rest of Australia until April 2021.

But beyond 2021, there are no improvements in access or affordability for Child Care.

This was an opportunity for the Federal Government to make it easier for women to return to the workforce – which would inject billions into the economy. Instead, **women and parents have been left out**.

Housing and homelessness

Social housing and homelessness services have largely been left out of the Federal Budget. With more Australians **at risk of homelessness** during this recession and a predicted influx of need once JobKeeper and JobSeeker support is cut, we **urgently need more social housing** to ensure everyone has a roof over their head, and support for homelessness services.

The only Federal Budget measures on housing and homelessness include:

- Community housing providers can borrow more money to provide more affordable housing themselves.
- The government's priority is \$680m for the Home Builder program, where people who already own their own home can renovate their houses.
- The Government has foreshadowed trials of social impact investments in homelessness and youth at risk of homelessness. But this is about encouraging business to invest in homelessness with guaranteed profits. There should be no profit from homelessness.

There is also a lack of detail in how this will be given to states and how it will be piloted.

- We also have concerns about Partnership funding for housing and homelessness services, and ensuring the Equal Pay ERO is covered by the Federal Government into the future.

There is no actual increase in funding from the Government for more construction or provision social housing, or for homelessness services. Some of our most vulnerable Australians have been left out again.

Aboriginal services

There are no significant increases in Aboriginal services in this budget.

Basic funding is maintained, including for Aboriginal legal services (which includes Equal Pay ERO). There are also some smaller increases in Aboriginal mental health programs, family and domestic violence services, and for Indigenous Business Australia which is for building housing for Aboriginal people in regional Australia.

But this budget has left out support towards Closing the Gap targets and there is little of substance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Aged Care

This budget was the opportunity for the government to **urgently increase funding and fix systemic issues in aged care**. The Federal Government has been under intense pressure over its aged care response during the pandemic; and the interim report of the royal commission found that the government needed to act urgently to reduce waiting times for older Australians seeking in-home support. In this budget the government announced:

- \$2.2 billion increase in Aged Care funding – includes 23,000 additional home care packages. While this is a decent start, it goes nowhere near addressing the need when the waiting list for home care packages 100,000!
- Funding to implement Aged Care Royal Commission COVID recommendations that were previously announced last week (which includes PPE, trained infection control officers in residential care)
- Extension of Aged Care retention bonus – there is no detail on this, and it does not apply to other frontline services working in COVID like disability, youth and family or homelessness.
- Measures to move young people out of residential aged care.
- Only \$10.3m for Aged Care workforce skills. This is an insulting small amount for this large workforce.

These measures are a start.

But when their major funding announcement still leaves 77,000 Australians on the waiting list for home care packages – too many people have been left out.

Migrant services

This Federal Budget, the government has cut **funding from settlement services across departments** (Social Services, Health and Education). This is because the Government wants to cut the number of refugees and migrants coming to Australia over the next couple of years.

Funding instead seems to be moving from settlement services to “integration” and employment services (e.g. English language skills) – which is of concern to the ASU.

There is a big threat to jobs in migrant services and we will need to have urgent union meetings to work together in this sector on these challenges.

Employment services

This budget was the opportunity for the federal government to boost funding for these services and better value employment services workers, as **employment services workers have been under more pressure than ever** with the COVID-19 crisis and economic recession. The budget announcements for this year include:

- Transition to “New Employment Services Model” from July 2022. This means job seekers manage their own job search online, with no face to face meetings with job service providers.
- \$295m over 4 years to develop and implement this digital system. But \$183m to fast track and expand current online employment services.

With the government’s poor record on jobs, we will need to monitor the rollout of this model to make sure jobs are protected and service delivery is not lessened.

Environment and climate change

This Budget was the opportunity for the government to act on climate change, support renewable energy and ensure a Just Transition for workers across the country. **But there is nothing in this budget for a Just Transition and there’s nothing in this Budget that will mean real action on climate change.**

Instead, there is a shift in focus to prioritizing transition to gas over renewables and other climate change mitigation policies. **This budget fails on the environment and on climate change.**

Education & Training

The higher education package passed parliament this week. This means **it is now more expensive to go to University:**

- 113% increase in Humanities degrees.
- Fewer subsidized places at university.

We have been campaigning to stop the fee hike on social and community services degrees. While the government has announced a Social Work Pathway – we need to keep up our campaign as it is not clear yet what it means, and if SACS degrees are excluded from this fee hike.

The focus of skills money in the budget is on STEM skills, and male dominated industries:

- 100,000 new apprentices (but 130,000 have been lost in previous budgets); and the apprenticeship funding is only for 1 year, when apprenticeships typically last 3-4 years.

There is no new money for skills and portable accredited training in community or disability services.

Support for the unemployed

- No extension of COVID-19 supplement to JobSeeker, which will leave too many Australians without enough money to put food on the table.
- **No commitment to lift unemployment benefits into the future** – despite the Budget forecasting record high unemployment for several years.

Superannuation

We know that older women in Australia are the fastest growing group experiencing homelessness today and that women are retiring with almost half the retirement savings of men. **More than 600,000 people completely drained their super accounts** to get themselves through the pandemic crisis.

This budget was the opportunity for the Federal Government to support our campaign and changes that would enable more women to be able to save for a decent and dignified retirement:

To remove the \$450 minimum earning threshold that locks over 1 million Australians out of earning super.

To commit to the promised increase of the super guarantee to 12% to enable workers to rebuild their retirement savings.

To pay super on parental leave and other government carer and family payments.

But there is nothing in this budget for workers to save for their retirement and build their super.

Instead, the government is making it harder to join an industry super fund so that you are locked into a private provider which is commercial and provides lower returns for working people.

None of the changes we have campaigned for to improve Super for women have been adopted.