

SKILLED, RESPECTED, EQUAL

Sector Briefing Note



October 2024



Frontline workers lobbying MP's in Canberra to support the campaign: September 2024

Working together to support sustainable quality community services

The Australian Services Union has a proud history of working together with the sector in support of better recognition, respect and funding for the vital work of our members.

The historic ASU Equal Pay campaign from 2010 – 2012 achieved pay increases of between 23-48% on the SCHADS Award in recognition of the historic gendered undervaluation of community and disability services workers. The Equal Pay campaign also secured significant financial support from both State/Territory and Commonwealth Governments to implement the pay rises as they were phased in from 2012 to 2020.

This was only achieved thanks to the sector unity and collaboration in both the Fair Work case, and in a public campaign that called on Governments to support our call and value our sector's work.

Despite the Equal Pay increases, we know that the work of our members is still undervalued. The Award classification descriptors were written in the 1990s. They do not provide adequate recognition of skills, experience, qualifications or complexity of work. They do not reflect the contemporary expectations of work and the ever increasing and changing expectations of regulators and funding bodies. We know that the limited pay and career progression pathways in the Award is a frustration for both workers and employers.

The Skilled, Respected, Equal Campaign

In response to these concerns, the ASU in May launched the Skilled, Respected, Equal Campaign.

The campaign seeks to complete the unfinished business of the 2012 Equal Pay Case – that is to update the SCHADS Award classification structure so that it properly reflects the complexity of work in the sector and provides for clearer career and pay pathways for community sector workers.

Central to this campaign is seeking support of Governments to fund the outcome of any Fair Work decision and new classification structure.

Just like in the Equal Pay Campaign, the ASU will again be seeking the support of the sector in uniting to stand together for a better Award.

The case before the Fair Work Commission

To commence this work, the ASU made an application to the Fair Work Commission in July to vary the SCHADS Award. We're asking the Fair Work Commission to address the following issues:

Part One: Closing the longstanding loophole in the SCHADS Award that allows unscrupulous NDIS providers to wrongly classify and underpay disability support workers as "home care workers. NDIS prices are already calculated on the basis that employees will be paid the correct Equal Remuneration Order (ERO) rate for their SACS classification. We need to set a level playing field for all NDIS providers and ensure the sustainability of the NDIS.

This part of the case will be heard in December with a likely decision in the first half of 2025. This is cost neutral as SACS rates are already the funded NDIS rates of pay.

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The case before the Fair Work Commission continued...

Part Two: Making the classification structure and pay rates easier to use by including indicative job titles and incorporating the ERO rates of pay directly into the Award. We will seek immediate clarity to the Award by inserting indicative job titles at each classification level. These will be the job titles for each classification that were agreed between the ASU, the Commonwealth and the Sector as part of the implementation of the Equal Pay case in 2012.

This part of the case will also be heard in December, with a likely decision in the first half of 2025. This is just about clarifying the agreed sector standards in the current classification system that have been in place since 2012.

Part Three: Updating the classification structure to ensure that the skills and expertise of our community and disability sector workers are recognised and valued.

The current classification structure was written over 30 years ago and is no longer fit for purpose. It does not describe the work of modern community and disability services. We want a clear and unambiguous classification system that recognises our members' skills and duties and provides clear pathways for career progression.

This part of the case will not be heard until 2025. There may not be a decision until 2026 or 2027.

We anticipate that this part of the case will be the most significant re-writing of the Award and require sector collaboration and joint advocacy to Governments to ensure the new classification system is appropriately funded.

The community campaign National Week of Action November 4 to 8

The community campaign in support of our Fair Work Case kicks off with a National Week of Action in November 4 to 8. The purpose of the Week of Action is to spread the message about our campaign to the broader community, build the profile of the campaign in the media, and launch the call on Governments to support and fund the outcome of the case and a new pay and career structure for our members.

We are inviting employers who support this work for a better SCHADS Award to endorse the Week of Action. Already many employers have signed up to the campaign.

Sector unity and support will be critical to winning Government support for our sector. The week of action is the start of that work, and we encourage all employers who would like more information about the campaign and the week of action to contact us below and share information with their staff about the week of action.

To indicate support for the campaign & for more information please contact:

Community Sector

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