
MEDIA RELEASE

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GOVERNMENT CANNOT AFFORD TO ABANDON WAGE EQUITY

Family Relationship Services Australia (FRSA) is today dismayed to read the Federal Government's submission to Fair Work Australia in relation to the Australian Services Union's Equal Remuneration Wage Case for social and community service workers.

"The position stated in that submission is short sighted and fails to recognise that a failure to address wage equity in the community services sector will put all government funded programs in jeopardy over the long-term. It will not be long before community organisations will not be able to maintain an appropriately qualified workforce to deliver the services that support the most vulnerable in our community" said Executive Director Samantha Page.

Family and relationship services funded by the Federal Government employ more than 10,000 community service workers in roles that include social workers, psychologists, counsellors, psycho-social therapists, educators, mediators, dispute resolution practitioners, experts in family law, support staff and managers. Because they are often working with highly vulnerable families, the nature and responsibility of this work requires professional qualification and experience. The majority of the current workforce is degree-qualified (55% postgraduate), has 5-10 years experience in the community services sector (57%), is female (80%) and over 40 years of age (71%).

Service provider organisations are dealing with critical staff shortages and competition for skilled workers. Funded organisations compete with a well resourced public sector and the private sector for the services of qualified and experienced practitioners. Generous remuneration packages (including substantially increased superannuation contributions) offered by the public and private sectors cannot be matched by community based providers under current government funding contracts. FRSA member organisations estimate the gap in salaries for practitioners (including qualified and experienced counsellors, mediators and family dispute resolution practitioners) between the community based FRSP sector and the public sector is between \$15,000 and \$30,000 per annum for each full time equivalent position.

"FRSA members overwhelmingly support equal pay for community sector workers and have been active in their support of the wage case, they recognise that wage rates have fallen well behind private and public sectors on the back of historical devaluation of the working being performed. However, throughout this case provider organisations have sought assurance from government that wage increases would be properly funded to avoid services having to be cut."

"We believed that the Gillard Government was committed in principle to gender equity and appropriate value for the work undertaken in social and community services. During the election campaign there was a clear statement of support for the wage case and acknowledgement that this would necessitate a review of Federal Government funding, this is clearly not reflected in the Government's submission the Fair Work Australia. We urge the Federal Government to review its position."

- ENDS -

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Family Relationship Services Australia is the national peak body for over 150 family relationship and support service providers, operating in more than 650 locations across Australia. For more information visit

www.frsa.org.au