New Alliance for fair public sector pay



Western Australian public sector unions have formed a new alliance comprising public school teachers and support staff, health workers, prison officers, firefighters, engineers, community service workers and those in our rail system, among others. It will work to reform the WA Government's wage fixing policy. WA State Wages Policy imposes a cap to increases meaning a decline in real terms for six years for the vast majority of those we rely on to deliver essential health, education, community safety and other services.

Owen Whittle, Secretary UnionsWA and spokesperson on behalf of the Public Sector Alliance said:

"Six years of pay that fails to keep pace with cost-of-living increases for the vast majority of the public sector workforce is unacceptable to working people and their unions.

"It's an unfair policy that undermines morale and goodwill at a time when we rely heavily on their commitment to keep us safe during the pandemic as well as their leadership of our economic recovery.

"We can't afford an economic recovery that fails to improve pay.

"We need to ensure that everyone's pay improves during our recovery.

“By necessity, working people spend their pay to meet costs of living and pay increases are an important driver of our local economy.

“The existing wages policy contrasts unfavourably with government’s own policy on government fees and charges announced to increase by 1.6% overall.

“As a practical example, someone on an annual salary of $65,000 or more is worse off if their pay only rises by $1,000 while their overall costs of living rise by the 1.75% predicted to be the rate of inflation in 2021-22.

“The State Wage Policy pay rise cap at $1,000 means that many low, all average or higher income working people in the public sector are worse off – their pay is going backwards compared with their costs of living, and for at least six years.

“Of course, many essential health, education and community safety workers need professional skills and qualifications are on income around or above the average.

“At a time of skills shortages, we need their skills and to keep those skills and experience, pay needs to be competitive.

“Our public sector workforce and their unions are calling on the government to enter into good faith negotiations and abandon its wage fixing policy and return to genuine enterprise bargaining with the public sector.

“No other working people in WA have their pay decided by their employer without any bargaining or negotiation.

“Recent data from the ABS shows pay rises have been modest over the past year, nationally at 1.5% and with WA lagging behind that at only 1.4%.

“This data also shows that while the private sector wage growth is at a low 1.5%, WA’s public sector pay is the weakest in the nation rising at only 0.9%.

“The pandemic and economic recovery have posed challenges requiring governments to be quick-footed, decisive and effective.

“WA can’t be safe and strong with a poorly paid workforce that loses skills to the private sector because of a wages policy set four years ago in a different era.

“The original intention of the pay rise cap – announced after the 2017 election – was to repair budget finances.

“Partly at the expense of the public sector workforce, that budget repair job is now done.

“The Public Sector Alliance has succeeded in aligning a wide range of public sector Enterprise Bargaining Agreements (EBAs) covering over 100,000 working people in the WA public sector that are due to end in 2022.

“These EBAs cover public school teachers and support staff, health workers, prison officers, firefighters, engineers, community service workers and those in our rail system, among others.

“In the past public sector campaigns have included industrial action, TV and radio advertising, door-knocking and phone calls.

“No campaign strategies are off the table at this point.

“The Public Sector Alliance has committed to an industrial and political campaign for fair pay that will continue as long as needed.”

Further information

The membership of the Public Sector Alliance includes UnionsWA, United Workers Union, CPSU-CSA, United Firefighters' Union, WA Prison Officers' Union, State School Teachers' Union of WA, Health Services Union WA, Professionals Australia and the Rail Tram and Bus Union. Other unions are expected to join this growing alliance.

The ABS data series, Wage Price Index, Australia March 2021 is available online here.

The latest ABS Average Weekly Earnings series is available online here.

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