National education and union news



Early education election commitment welcomed

The Australian Education Union (AEU) has welcomed the Prime Minister's announcement that a re-elected Albanese Government would deliver three days [per week] of subsidised early education, describing it as a major step forward in ensuring all Australian children receive the best possible start in life.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said this initiative would benefit children, families, and early childhood educators and teachers alike.

"Access to quality early childhood education and care is a crucial investment in the future, and this is a positive move by the Albanese Government," she said.

"This is a win for children, families and the professionals who shape the future of our nation."

Ms Haythorpe said the importance of supporting the educators and teachers who would make this policy possible could not be understated.

"Early childhood educators and teachers are central to the success of this policy," she said.

"These professionals are the heart of early education, and their expertise, commitment and passion are crucial in helping children reach their full potential.

"Ensuring fair pay, improved working conditions and professional development opportunities will be key to retaining and attracting skilled early childhood educators and teachers and providing children with the high-quality care and education they deserve.

"We must ensure these educators and teachers are supported, valued and empowered to deliver the best outcomes for children."

AEU Victorian Branch deputy president Justin Mullaly said by making early childhood education accessible three days a week, this policy will create a more equitable playing field for all children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

“Research has consistently shown that the early years of a child’s life are the most critical for their cognitive, social and emotional development. Yet, for too long, many families have been locked out of these benefits due to the high costs of childcare,” Mr Mullaly said.

“This announcement of three days of subsidised early education will ensure that every child, regardless of their background, will have a foundation that sets them up for lifelong learning.”

Ms Haythorpe said this announcement will deliver economic benefits now and into the future.

“For too many parents, the cost of early childhood education and care has been a barrier to participation in the workforce and to accessing educational opportunities for their children,” she said.

“Delivering these three days of subsidised early education for children who need it will create cost of living relief and allow more parents to return to work, knowing their children are in safe, nurturing and educational environments.

“This is an important step forward for early education, however, the AEU continues to call for the funding of two years of universal access to preschool for all three and
four-year-olds.

“The AEU looks forward to continuing to work with the Albanese Government to ensure that universal childcare becomes a reality, with the support and recognition that educators and teachers need to thrive.”

Australians risk reduction in retirement income under Coalition proposal

The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) has warned that the current push by Coalition members to cut superannuation will cost the average 30-year-old worker around $165,000 in retirement income.

Key Coalition members, including Alex Antic, Matt Canavan and Llew O’Brien, have voiced support for cutting the superannuation guarantee rate from 12 per cent to nine per cent if the Coalition wins the upcoming election.

The reduction of three per cent in compulsory employer-paid superannuation, with the accompanying decline in compounding returns, will mean that the average 30-year-old worker today will lose around $165,000 in retirement income, according to ACTU estimates.

The Coalition members’ reported comments raise questions about how far the Coalition will go to undermine the hard-won entitlements of Australian workers.

In a Sydney University speech in October last year, Shadow Treasurer Angus Taylor stated that the Coalition’s ambition included “aligning superannuation with other global retirement schemes – like [the United States of America’s] 401k.”

Australia’s superannuation system is consistently ranked one of the best in the world and allows Australians to retire with significantly more retirement income than the mediocre US system provides.

ACTU assistant secretary Joseph Mitchell said superannuation was a workplace right and should be protected, not attacked by out-of-touch politicians.

“The Coalition members suggesting a reduction in the superannuation guarantee are very happy to continue to receive 15.4 per cent superannuation for their own retirements,” he said.

“The Coalition’s hypocrisy is unbelievable – they want to enjoy the benefits of super for themselves while robbing working people of it.

“The last time the Coalition were in power, they froze super and forced people to raid their super to get by in a pandemic. Now, they’re talking about cutting super and getting workers to raid what’s left for more expensive houses.

“It’s clear that working people’s wages and retirement savings are at risk under Peter Dutton.

“Working people, through their unions, built a world-class superannuation system. We will defend super for future generations because every worker deserves a comfortable and dignified retirement.”

New powers to tackle wage theft affecting one million workers

Employers can face jail time or fines of up to $7.85 million under new laws criminalising wage theft that come into operation at the start of 2025, after a long union campaign.

More than one million Australian workers experience wage theft by being paid below the national minimum wage or the lowest junior or casual rates in the awards system. This includes one in three casual workers – or 875,000 casual employees – who are mostly working in the retail and hospitality sectors and 538,200 permanent workers, according to ACTU analysis of ABS data.

From 1 January, an employer will now commit a criminal offence if they deliberately underpay their staff. A company can face fines of up to $7.85 million, or three times the amount of the underpayment, whichever is greater. An individual can face up to 10 years in prison, and fines of up to $1.56 million, or three times the amount of the underpayment, whichever is greater.

Civil penalties for wage underpayments have also increased by as much as 25 times for larger companies engaged in serious contraventions that could now be fined up to $4.95 million. Overall estimates of the extent of wage theft vary widely given that it is a practice hidden by employers. Read more here.

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