

Social and Community Workers Pay Equity Case

About the case

Workers in the social and community services sector look after some of the most vulnerable people in our society but are among the lowest paid employees of any industry.

The majority have university qualifications and many have decades of experience working with the elderly, young people at risk, refugees, the homeless, victims of domestic violence and the disabled. They are the backbone of our community legal centres, neighbourhood houses, drug and alcohol services, domestic violence refuges and women's support services.

The case seeks major improvements to the pay and conditions of more than 200,000 workers, almost 90% of whom are women — constituting around 10% of all women working in the private sector in Australia. Most earn less than \$20 an hour.

The case is an important opportunity to raise awareness about the lack of equal pay and employment opportunities for women more generally. It's being led by the Australian Services Union and also involves the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union, the Australian Workers Union and the Health Services Union, which also represent workers in the sector.

Maree McDermott – neighbourhood house community development officer

Hi, I'm Maree and I have worked at a neighbourhood centre for 12 years where I'm a community development officer setting up programs that help people meet and make friends or to learn skills which range from vocational to parenting. My job is to help make them feel valued.

Social exclusion is increasingly a problem. Community workers like me provide a safety net for people who are often isolated or facing very severe problems in their lives. The job involves responsibility, careful judgement and a professional approach to very personal problems.

Community development has been my strength and my passion and I take this approach to life in general. Women have often been denied full participation in economic and civil life. Our sector is overwhelmingly made up of women. The wages are undervalued because of the gender of the workforce.

I'm very proud of the difference my being a member of this sector has made to working towards social equality. I have been privileged to meet many wonderful people.

As I approach the final years of my community sector work, it is timely that this equal pay campaign be successful and the sisters and daughters who come after me will be recognised for the skill, knowledge and experience that they bring.

