



2023-24 ACT Budget Consultation

26 MARCH 2023

Dear sir/madam

2023-24 ACT Budget Consultation

The Community and Public Sector Union PSU Group (CPSU) is an active and progressive union committed to promoting a modern, efficient, and responsive public sector delivering quality services and quality jobs. As the largest union in the ACT Public Service (ACTPS), the CPSU welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to 2023-24 ACT Budget consultation.

Our submission focuses on:

- An increase to wages that members deserve through bargaining,
- Continuing to promote secure work,
- Closing the ongoing gender pay gap,
- A sustainable health workforce,
- Investing in child and youth protection,
- Funding WorkSafe infrastructure, and
- Genuine consultation with staff to improve the ACTPS.

An increase to wages that members deserve through bargaining

Like other Australians, Canberrans have been experiencing growing cost of living pressures, the consumer price index (CPI) rising by 7.1% between December 2021 and December 2022.¹ Canberra is also the most expensive capital city on average for renters, rents up by 4.3% over the past year.²

Governments can and should play a greater role in addressing cost of living pressures. The ACTPS is the single largest employer in Canberra and its decisions about public sector wages have a macroeconomic impact across the ACT. Like other workers, ACTPS employees have been struggling with day to day costs because of high inflation. Over the life of their previous agreement, ACTPS employees have only received two salary increases of 1.35% at six-month intervals in December 2021 and June 2022 while CPI over the year to December 2022 was 7.1%.³

The projection of higher inflation into the forward estimates means that pay offers need to keep up with increased cost of living pressures. . We note the Reserve Bank of Australia projects

¹ Consumer Price Index, Australia, December Quarter 2022 | Australian Bureau of Statistics. 25 Jan. 2023, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/price-indexes-and-inflation/consumer-price-index-australia/latest-release>.

² "Most Affordable & Expensive Capital Cities For Rent In Australia." Canstar, 15 Feb. 2023, <https://www.canstar.com.au/home-loans/most-affordable-and-expensive-capital-cities-for-rent-in-australia/>

³ Consumer Price Index, Australia, December Quarter 2022 | Australian Bureau of Statistics. 25 Jan. 2023, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/price-indexes-and-inflation/consumer-price-index-australia/latest-release>.

that year ending CPI would not return to 3% until at least June 2025, highlighting that the ACT Government’s current offer will not deliver the outcome that our members have lobbied for at a range of levels.⁴

The ACTPS can and should be the most forward-thinking public service in the country, delivering for all Canberrans while also being a model employer. Given the strong commitments of the ACT Labor-Greens Government, the ACTPS should be leading the country on many public service issues such as a fair wages policy. The ACT Government needs to come to the table and give a pay rise to all of its workers, ensuring they can receive an increase that will assist with the increased cost of living.

Ultimately, members and ACTPS staff will make the decision about what this will mean for them and their families.

Continuing to promote secure work

Recognising the critical role that ACTPS employees play in delivering services to Canberrans, CPSU believes the ACTPS should have the best staff possible. The tight labour market means that the ACT Government should be offering staff competitive conditions, such as ensuring secure employment to attract and retain staff.

The CPSU supports the ongoing work done by the ACT Government as part of its secure work conversion program. This programme is an example of what can be achieved from collaboration between government and unions.

The most recent State of the Service Report indicates that 1,983 assessments were conducted in 2021-22 with 674 employees or a third (34.0%) recommended for conversion and 391 offers accepted.⁵ This is a marked increase from the 174 employees converted in 2020-21.⁶

Despite this success, the permanent headcount percentage remains lower than it has been for this decade, suggesting that more work needs to be done examining the structural drivers of labour hire, non-ongoing and casual staff.

Figure 1 Employment Modes (Proportion of total workforce based on headcount)

Type	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Perm	77.9%	77.6%	77.4%	77.6%	76.7%	75.9%	76.1%	76%	78.1%	75.8%	75.9%
Temp	15.3%	15.3%	15.6%	15.9%	16.8%	17.4%	17.3%	17.2%	16.5%	16.7%	17.2%
Casual	6.8%	7.1%	7.1%	6.5%	6.5%	6.8%	6.6%	6.8%	5.4%	6.8%	6.9%

Source: Previous ACT State of the Service Reports

While progress has been made to convert insecure workers to permanency, the most prevalent structural driver that leads to the creation of insecure work is the provision of tied funding

⁴ Reserve Bank of Australia. “Economic Outlook | Statement on Monetary Policy – February 2023.” Reserve Bank of Australia, 10 Feb. 2023, <https://www.rba.gov.au/publications/smp/2023/feb/economic-outlook.html>

⁵ ACT Government, Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate. “State of the Service Report 2021-22.” Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate, 13 Oct. 2022, <https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/functions/publications/state-of-the-service-report-2021-22>.

⁶ ACT Government, Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate. “State of the Service Report 2020-21.” Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate, Dec. 2021, <https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/employment-framework/resources-and-links/state-of-the-service-reports>

grants, by ACT Treasury to ACT Government Directorates, through the Budget process needs to be addressed.

Closing the ongoing gender pay gap

The CPSU welcomes the reduction of the gender pay gap in the ACTPS to a record low.⁷ This is a reflection of the important role that collective bargaining can play. More, however, needs to be done as a single focus on the gender pay gap at classification levels ignores the impact that underrepresentation can have. For example, women continue to make up a lower proportion of Executive roles compared to the proportion of women in the ACTPS, which can skew gender pay gap statistics.

An intersectional approach must also be prioritised. We do also note that the gender pay gap for those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds sits at 4.2%. They also have the lowest median salary amongst diversity groups in the ACTPS. Noting that work is being done in other jurisdictions at an Australian, NSW and Victorian public service level to address underrepresentation at more senior levels and aid career progression, more can be done at an ACTPS level.

Finally, the CPSU is concerned the ACTPS gender pay gap is at risk of increasing. The ACT Government has declared its 'Fair Go for GSO' classification review and base pay level increases will result in an approximately 34% pay increase for the lowest paid General Service Officers (GSOs) over the next three years.⁸ While the CPSU welcomes this review and wage increase, the predominantly female low paid support services workers, mainly employed in the health and education sectors, e.g. health service officers and school assistants, have thus far only been offered a pay increase that is approximately half of that quantum. These workers are at equivalent work level standards and classifications as GSOs. With a comparatively much higher proportion of women in these support service roles, the currently disparate pay offer risks increasing the gender pay gap if all employees working at the same level do not get that increase.⁹ To prevent an increased gender pay gap, the CPSU has been lobbying for the ACT Government to agree to the CPSU's claim to extend that classification review and base pay upgrade to benefit all low paid ACTPS workers.

A sustainable health workforce

Across the globe, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to increasing pressure on health workforces with increased attrition rates due to worsening work conditions, increased stress and increased workloads. The ACT Government is the single largest employer of Health Professionals in the ACT. Most ACTPS Directorates employ health professionals, with vast majority being employed by Canberra Health Services. None of these agencies are immune,

⁷ ACT Government, Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate. "State of the Service Report 2021-22." Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate, 13 Oct. 2022,

<https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/functions/publications/state-of-the-service-report-2021-22>.

⁸ Macdonald, Anna. "CPSU Says ACT Wage Rises Should Go Further." The Mandarin, 29 Jan. 2023, <https://www.themandarin.com.au/210534-act-wage-rises-should-go-further-says-cpsu/>.

⁹ "ACT Govt Accused of Pursuing 'Sexist Wages Policy.'" The Canberra Times, 27 Feb. 2023, <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/8101742/act-govt-accused-of-pursuing-sexist-wages-policy/>.

facing chronic workforce shortages.¹⁰ These pressures on the health system have contributed to growing waiting lists.¹¹

The ACT Government needs to prioritise long-term planning across the ACTPS, with a particular focus on those front line agencies such as Canberra Health Service to guarantee they will be properly and sustainably staffed into the future. There has been some recognition with the ACT Government funding wellbeing initiatives for health workers but much more is needed.¹² The ACTPS needs innovative and well-developed strategic approaches to attract new Health Professionals.

Along with more staff, competitive pay and conditions that can both attract and retain the staff that are needed. CPSU has called for private practise funds to be established in the same way as it is for Medical Practitioners, as to allow ACTPS to retain those Health Professionals that we currently have. For example, remuneration for on-call dentists have not increased in line with remuneration for on-call doctors. It has not increased, meaning a real cut in on-call remuneration.

Investing in child and youth protection

Greater investment is needed in the ACT Child and Youth Protection Services (CYPS). Our members have identified that inadequate staffing, increased workloads and under-resourcing are problems that need to be addressed. To provide the care that is needed to properly help some of the most vulnerable children and families in the ACT, more CYPS staff are needed.

Data on youth services in the ACT show declining service standards over the past few years. Investigations commencing within 7 days declined from 65.6% in 2018-19 to 41.4% in 2021-22. Nationally, it is 56.8% in 2021-22. Investigations completed within 62 days declined to 57.1% from 71.7% in 2019-20.¹³

We note that last year, the ACT Government launched its strategy to reform child and youth services, *Next Steps for Our Kids 2022-23*, which was silent on the need to increase the number of caseworkers in the ACTPS to help reverse this trend.

The CPSU recommends the ACT Government funding to CYPS to improve investigation commencement and completion times to pre-pandemic times. This should involve increasing staffing levels and also ensures each child's case is treated individually and that all children have an allocated case worker. This will enable the best quality care to be provided as quickly as possible and is in the best interests of children or families.

¹⁰ Coleman, James. "More than 300 New Recruits Join Canberra's Healthcare Workforce but 'chronic Shortage' Remains." Riotact, <https://the-riotact.com/more-than-300-new-recruits-join-canberras-healthcare-workforce-but-chronic-shortage-remains/637054>. Accessed 17 Mar. 2023.

¹¹ "I Don't Think It's Right': ACT Public Wait List for Endoscopy Services Blows out to 6,000 Overdue Patients." ABC News, 5 Mar. 2023. www.abc.net.au, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-03-06/thousands-in-canberra-overdue-for-endoscopy-services/102055542>.

¹² Media, Newstime. "Wellbeing Initiatives to Support ACT's Health Workforce." Canberra Weekly, 5 Dec. 2022, <https://canberraweekly.com.au/wellbeing-initiatives-to-support-acts-health-workforce/>.

¹³ Productivity Commission. Child Protection Services - Report on Government Services 2023. 24 Jan. 2023, <https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2023/community-services/child-protection>.

Funding WorkSafe infrastructure

As the workplace regulator, WorkSafe ACT has an obligation to protect the Canberra Community and ensure all workers come home safe. When a worker is killed it is a tragedy and those at fault must be held to account. More often than not, the death is as a result of an accident that can and should have been prevented. Currently, WorkSafe ACT is working with a less-than-desirable case management system (CMS) that CPSU believes is not robust enough to support the needs of the organisation. WorkSafe ACT must be funded to develop and purchase a CMS that allows for investigators and inspectors.

Genuine consultation with staff to improve the ACTPS

Genuine consultation with ACTPS employees through their trade union helps to deliver better outcomes for Canberrans, enabling issues to be identified by those working at the front line. Suggestions from CPSU members covered staffing increases, investment in data storage and training.

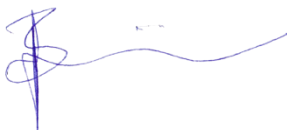
Members were strongly of the view that non-managerial staffing needs to increase to meet growing demands on the ACTPS. Specific staff and areas mentioned were:

- Additional public dentists, dental therapists, and dental assistants,
- Community Services Directorate to give it the capacity to better work with community organisation partners,
- Increasing capacity in environmental policy development (particularly climate change effects on biodiversity) and evaluation (particularly whole-of-program evaluation),
- Additional social work positions in schools, and
- More staff to address delays in processing Working With Vulnerable People Checks

Beyond staffing increases, investment in better data storage as well as training were mentioned. Members recommended investment in data storage systems that meet current and future needs as current options are either extremely limited in capacity or options are prohibitively expensive. They also advocated for increasing the training budget to strengthen the expertise of regulators, particularly in science-based areas.

For further information, please contact me, via email brenton.higgins@cpsu.org.au or on 0400 380 248.

Yours sincerely



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