

Equal pay decision validates claim of underpaid community workers

The South Australian Council of Social Service (SACOSS) today welcomed Fair Work Australia's (FWA) decision today recognising that the 15-20,000 community workers in South Australia are not paid equally for the work they do.

FWA stated today that, "for employees in the SACS [social and community services] industry there is not equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal or comparable value by comparison with workers in state and local government employment."

SACOSS Executive Director, Ross Womersley, said

"We congratulate Fair Work Australia for sending such a strong message on the value of this vital work. Base rates for a tertiary-educated community sector worker in South Australia begin at \$39,000. This is a long way from the \$53,820 publicised last week as the average Australian wage" .

"Social and community service workers provide vital support to South Australians in need. These range from community centres, women's, child, youth and family support services, to migrant and refugee services, community legal centres, health and mental health services, indigenous services, home and community care services....the list goes on."

"We know the pay gap between community sector workers and those doing equal or comparable work is irrefutable. The tribunal today accepted this. And with 85% of the community sector workforce women, this constitutes a significant gender pay gap.

A decision on any dollar figure for a pay increase has been deferred, with the FWA calling for further evidence from the parties on the extent to which wages in the SACS industry are lower than they would otherwise be because of gender considerations. This evidence will be key in determining what kind of remedy FWA proposes to the problem of unequal pay for community sector workers.

Womersley said, "Responsibility for this pay gap is widespread, and includes the many sources of funding that go to the community sector to deliver vital services on behalf of government. There's no doubt that funding will be the critical issue, and SACOSS has been calling on the state and federal governments, as the primary funders of these services, to step up to the plate and assume responsibility.

"It is everyday South Australians who will suffer if the community sector is not properly funded to do its work—and the work is most often outsourced from government."

"Philanthropic organisations and individual benefactors must also realise that funding from these sources will need to increase."

For further comment, contact SACOSS Executive Director Ross Womersley 0418 805 426