

Public Services Owned by Everyone for the Benefit of Everyone

1. Congress agrees that accessible, accountable and adequately funded public services are essential to securing a fairer and more prosperous Australia and are crucial to the development of a modern, productive, equitable, and inclusive society. They play a vital role in supporting families, communities, workers and businesses across our country. Government investment and ownership of public services and infrastructure creates development and economic growth.
2. Congress notes the important contribution made by public sector workers in commonwealth, state, territory and local government to the delivery of vital public services. Whether it is the provision of income support, pensions or family assistance payments; protection of children and vulnerable families; protection of our borders; education, health, emergency, care and police services; preserving and promoting our cultural heritage; cultural and sporting venues; protecting and managing our natural environment, wildlife and fauna; supporting our agricultural and business sector; running courts and tribunal systems, corrective services, and other justice services; providing public transport, roads, and utilities; planning and public housing; delivering the multitude of community services that keep our communities and workplaces healthy and safe; providing accessible early childhood education and care, aged care, maternal and child health services; maintaining sporting facilities, providing garbage collection and improving local infrastructure; responding to climate change and natural disasters; providing library services and critical homelessness support; scientific research or developing solutions to the highly complex policy challenges our nation faces.
3. Public sector workers play a critical role in supporting Australians when they most need it. In particular, Congress acknowledges the hard work and dedication of emergency and public service workers during times of crisis and natural disaster and the role they play in the provision of essential services in the aftermath of pandemics, floods, cyclones and bush fires.
4. As we look ahead, public services will also be a key part of our national prosperity. Our community and our economy can be made faster, stronger, and more fair with a strong public services that have the staffing, funding and tools they needs. Historically, the most successful and the most equitable reconstruction efforts have required a greater role for the public sector, and this one will be no different.
5. Congress notes that we continue to see the capability of public services undermined by the growth of labour hire and contract work across all levels of public service, the increasing use of consultants for strategic planning and policy work, and the outsourcing and privatisation of work, services and assets across all areas of government and chronic understaffing of public services. This erosion of our public services means that the community does not always get the level of service and support it needs now, and that government planning and preparation for the challenges we face in the future is compromised. The use of labour hire and consultants also undermines employment in Australia's public services and contributes to the spread of insecure work.

Recognition of the importance of the public sector in reconstruction

6. Our community and our economy will be more efficient, stronger and fairer with government support through both active fiscal measures and improved access to advice, support and services.
 - a. For public services this means more jobs and more secure jobs, better services, stopping privatisation and re-building in-house capacity to meet the immediate needs of the community and support our future development. It means being able to do the job you want to do for our community.

- b. For community it means better services, increased support for social infrastructure such as social housing and skills development, a healthier population, greater confidence in government, and jobs we can count on.
 - c. For business this means better industry planning and support measures to underpin direct stimulus programs and improved social and physical infrastructure to support sustainable increases in economic activity.
 - d. For our small and regional communities, employment of public services acts as an economic stabiliser; increases the skills base available to a community; and boosts the economy through economic multipliers in the regions.
7. The work of Australia's public services is important across all areas of Government. Congress rejects the false dichotomy of frontline and back end public sector workers. Policy, regulation, ICT and scientific work by the public sector are essential to being prepared for and responding to crises. Processing work is now frontline work.
 8. Government economic and legislative intervention is essential to provide opportunities for all Australians, improving equality through redistribution, provide public safety and security and protect the community through the regulation necessary in a market economy.
 9. Congress believes that government is a critical provider of services and other important economic and social functions in Australia. There are many services and functions that must remain public to ensure they are for the benefit of everyone and not for the profit of a few.
 10. Congress believes that government services make an important contribution to the well-being of all Australians across their lives and to a well-functioning society. It is critical to ensure that public services are universally accessible to all Australians.

Principles

11. Congress resolves to campaign for commonwealth, state, territory and local government services that are funded and organised on the following principles:
 - a. Public services are a fundamental indicator of our society's priorities and should be accessible to all Australians irrespective of their ability to pay.
 - b. A good strong, public sector needs decent pay and conditions as well as secure jobs. Public sector wages provide an anchor for local economies during times of crisis and cuts in real wages are counterproductive.
 - c. Australians have a right to well-resourced and capable governments delivering quality public services paid for through a just tax system.
 - d. Privatisation is the transfer, in whole or part, of public assets or service provision from the government to an entity outside the government. Privatisation includes the outsourcing of service delivery, sale of public assets, 'user choice', voucher systems, public-private partnerships, use of labour-hire, social impact investment, and mutualisation. Privatisation has never been limited to the sale of national corporations; outsourcing local public services; imposing fees, charges, tolls or higher rents and fares; private finance of public services; or to imposing competitive regimes that have drastic consequences for service users and public sector staff. Governments should prioritise public value, transparency and secure jobs when spending public money, particularly around privatisation decisions, democracy requires transparency, openness, participation and accountability between government and its citizens.
12. Congress calls on all levels of government to harness the power of government to create jobs and opportunities for all.
13. Congress affirms that local government needs a secure economic base and will support campaigning to:
 - a. increase funding for essential Council services, operations, and personnel, including through fair funding increases to the ongoing Financial Assistance Grants;

- b. increase funding for local government maintained roads, services and infrastructure;
 - c. channel additional disaster funding through local government and ensure financial assistance is expended in affected local communities; and
 - d. ensure local government have a voice in key policy matters.
14. Congress calls for an end to all forms of privatisation. Privatisation has failed Australians because on any transparent assessment the alleged benefits of privatisation have not met the costs or the impacts on workers and the community.
 15. Congress calls for the return of public assets and provision of services to public hands. Public service capability and public assets should be rebuilt and reclaimed as a matter of priority.
 16. Where there is a privatised service, governments must take back the regulatory space and set the rules. An independent regulatory body should oversee privatised assets and services to ensure accountability.
 17. Congress affirms that Australia's employment services system should be brought back into public hands. Australia no longer has an effective coherent national employment services system. Instead, there is an inefficient, outsourced system.
 - a. Congress agrees that the privatized, for-profit, employment services system has led to a punitive system that fails to support Australians into employment. Privatisation of employment services has failed. For-profit employment services should be ended.
 - b. Congress agrees that reforms to the employment services system must include assisting local community specialist not-for-profit entities to contribute to the Commonwealth system.
 18. Governments must continue to employ sufficient, qualified staff to evaluate the quality and competence of service providers, and to provide a continued role in strategic advice. Departments of government should not be tendering policy decisions out to consulting or accountancy firms.
 19. There must be no commercial-in-confidence provisions when taking public money.
 20. If a service is to be privatised, governments must set a fixed tender price that ensures cost is removed from the decision process and tenderers are competing on the basis of quality only. This prevents it being a race to the bottom.
 21. Any decision to privatise public services, through whatever mechanism that may be disguised as, are subject to rigorous and transparent assessments of the benefits, costs, impact on workers and the community. Prior to any new privatisation, governments should:
 - a. Provide details of all the proposed benefits, sources of savings and evaluation of costs;
 - b. Assess the benefit to the public, including a comparison of service provision and access to prove why delivery of services cannot be maintained by the government;
 - c. Define minimum qualifications for new employees prior to privatising;
 - d. Prohibit any company that has evaded taxes or broken the law from taking over public services.
 22. Government contracts constituting existing privatization should be assessed prior to their next termination date using the above framework.
 23. Where privatisation occurs, the new provider must, as a minimum, maintain the same employment conditions and standards as the government service it replaced in regards to:
 - a. wages and conditions of employment;
 - b. security of work;
 - c. health and safety;
 - d. equal opportunity employment;

- e. codes of ethics and other codes of practice;
 - f. service recognition and redundancy provisions; and
 - g. any other standards or expectation identified in the ACTU's 2024 Congress Procurement policy.
24. Governments should take back control of failed privatisations rather than give contracts to new private providers.
25. All privatised services that receive government funding to provide a public service should report annually to ensure services and infrastructure that use public money are open, transparent and delivered to the highest quality. Such reports must contain:
- a. a log of all complaints;
 - b. a comprehensive and detailed, up-to-date cost of services, detailing government funds received and where the money has been spent;
 - c. measurable key performance indicators (KPIs);
 - d. a continuous quality feedback mechanism for service users;
 - e. changes to workloads and employment conditions over the short and long term;
 - f. evidence that minimum staffing numbers and standards, including conditions for staff, are met and that accredited qualifications are recognised.
26. Australia should rebuild public assets and public sector capability in new areas. These could include:
- a. clean energy;
 - b. new energy generation, storage and distribution solutions;
 - c. a publicly owned and run transactions bank;
 - d. government-based shared equity funding for low income earners, in areas such as affordable housing and solar power;
 - e. digital government;
 - f. infrastructure and assets (such as the East Coast Very Fast Train line); and
 - g. a Commonwealth employment service.
27. Governments must legislate to ensure funding for services is not linked to the ability of the provider to comment on government policy or dependent on its capacity to grow the organisation.
28. There is an urgent need to restore confidence in the provision of specific privatisations:
- a. TAFE – there is a strong case for re-building the public sector role by resourcing TAFE and removing government funding from private vocational colleges. This should involve stronger regulation of private providers and re-investment in public institutions.
 - b. Disability services – governments must immediately act to ensure the retention of existing or the creation or recreation of government facilities and staffing for those with complex needs, or for other gaps in access to disability services. Congress affirms the right of people with disability to exercise choice and control when accessing disability services. Congress calls on the Federal Government to consult with people with disability and disability services workers when implementing the recommendations of the Disability Royal Commission and the NDIS Review. Any reforms must improve working conditions of highly skilled disability services workers and respect the rights of people with disability.
29. Consistent and equitable funding for all tiers of government that ensures services are available to all. In tough economic times workers, families and businesses rely even more on being able to access the

support that only government can fund and provide. Cutting budgets, jobs and offices, and a lack of capital investment, in such a context undermines service quality and undermines the long-term capacity of government at all levels to deal with the complex challenges our society faces. Arbitrary cost-cutting measures such as so-called “efficiency dividends” undermine public services and should not be used. Congress further notes that government investment in services, assets and infrastructure are effective in building the sustainable development of our communities.

30. Rebuilding the public sector cannot happen through one-off budget supplementations that do not provide certainty to the workplace, workers, or the public. The public sector has faced decades of efficiency dividends, blunt cuts, increased responsibilities and growing demands from complex policy challenges. Simply redirecting funding, or tying funding to policy objectives, or only providing funding for a fixed period, is inadequate. Congress calls for there to be an examination of funding models to ensure they meet the expectations and demands on the public service.
31. Consistent support for science and innovation. The future prosperity of the Australian society depends on our capacity to develop the skills and technologies of the future and solve the big problems of the present such as climate change. Governments must prepare Australia for the future. Strong and consistent public support for science and research, via publicly funded research institutions such as CSIRO, is essential. Public support makes possible secure, long-term research employment and the kind of high-risk and long-term research into new technologies that most private firms will not undertake by themselves. Cuts to public funding in an attempt to secure short-term budget surpluses are counter-productive, deeply damaging to our capacity to innovate, and demonstrate a profound misunderstanding of the importance of consistent and long-term support to cultivating the conditions necessary for successful research and development. Further, government should invest, through the creation of government owned entities, in the manufacturing and distribution of the products developed through this approach.
32. Properly funded tax administration: Raising the revenues we need to fund quality public services we all depend on requires a system where the rich pay their fair share. Congress agrees that a fair tax system is only possible if public tax administration at commonwealth, state and territory levels has sufficient staff and resources to ensure everyone pays the tax they owe in full and on time. As corporations continue to develop new and more complex ways to avoid paying the tax they should, it is more essential than ever that the Australian Tax Office and State and Territory revenue agencies have appropriate and stable levels of funding to make sure they comply. Cuts to staffing and resources weaken our ability to collect the public revenues we need, they deplete the skills and experience the ATO and State and Territory revenue agencies need, and they help to cultivate a climate of non-compliance in which more individuals and businesses are encouraged to avoid paying tax. Model employment: Government is not only a major employer, it is a public institution that should embody the values of fairness and equality that we want to see practiced across our society. All levels of government should therefore seek to operate as model employers. This should involve ensuring:
 - a. fair and equal pay, regardless of department, agency or location;
 - b. giving staff the time, training and resources to do the best possible job;
 - c. collective good faith bargaining rights and union representation for public sector workers;
 - d. a commitment to secure, full-time and on-going employment, avoiding precarious employment arrangements, and the use of labour hire;
 - e. fair conditions, entitlements and health and safety at work;
 - f. ensuring that the politicisation of the public service is minimised, ensuring frank and fearless advice by increasing the threshold in all public services that are tenured;
 - g. ensuring the public sector workforce reflects the diversity of the Australian community, including in the employment or, support for, and promotion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse and LGBTIQ+ workers and workers with disability; and
 - h. investment in the development of information technology capability and the skills required to work in the digital environment.

33. Congress notes that strong whistleblower protections foster accountability, transparency, and confidence in the public sector and its workers, and are essential to reveal corruption, conflicts of interest and other unethical behaviour. Governments must foster a pro-disclosure culture and ensure reform to enable all workers in the public sector who disclose misconduct to be adequately protected and able to access the necessary advice and support they need, including from their trade union.
34. Congress holds that it is imperative that the Government be on the front-foot, ensuring that there is:
 - a. a cohesive, whole of government approach to the safe and ethical use of AI;
 - b. that workers are part of the discussion about, and appropriately trained in, the use of these technologies; and
 - c. that independent processes for examining the social impact of algorithms used by the public service, in consultation with workers, and the use of data must be fully and properly informed by the expertise of workers, which requires properly resourced human oversight and decision-making over all public sector compliance programs.
35. Increased and improved social infrastructure: Congress acknowledges there is an urgent need to increase investment in areas such as social and public housing, preventative and early intervention social services, local health facilities, public transport, school buildings and child care facilities. Investment in public infrastructure delivers social and economic value to our community. The financial costs of doing so will be compensated for, in whole or in part, by a reduction in the social costs generated by poor health, crime and limited access to services and good employment opportunities. Such investment should be focused on those low income and regional communities who have often suffered most from systematic underinvestment, deindustrialisation and the impact of slowing economic growth.
36. Congress holds that all governments should develop and investment strategy to enable ongoing learning and development for public services to enable greater mobility, greater adaptability, and high productivity in the public services.
37. Congress holds that public services provide an important pathway for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to contribute to policies and programs that assist meeting their aspirations and contributors towards Closing the Gap. Congress supports the following being included in the provision of public services:
 - a. all government services should have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Employment Strategy that aims to increase the participation of, and retain, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers and be formed in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their unions, which should include retention, attraction, and career development options for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers;
 - b. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples Voice should be established in agencies to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees to be consulted and involved in the decisions that impact on them and provide opportunities to contribute to how the programs and policies can be improved and made more inclusive;
 - c. the establishment of skills pathways to enable greater participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in government services and promotion within public services, to be established by Commonwealth, State and local governments.
38. Congress firmly opposes any wage capping on public sector workforces and notes the depressive impact artificial wage caps can have on both public and private sector wages.
39. Congress supports the need for governments to review the measurement frameworks of public service productivity to better capture the effectiveness and quality of impact on public service delivery outcomes.
40. Congress supports all unions, communities and service-users fighting for properly resourced, high quality and publicly provided services. In particular Congress agrees to campaign for the following:
 - a. progressive tax policies consistent with generating the public revenues needed to provide adequate and consistent funding for public services provided by all levels of government;

- b. halt and reverse all cuts to the staffing and funding of public services, and the move from direct to outsourced and indirect employment. Any further changes to how services are resourced must be subject to consultation with unions and service users, and be consistent with providing the quantity and quality of services that our community needs;
- c. oppose all forms of privatisation of public assets and services in whole or in part. Unions will campaign for public provision that is adequately resourced, accountable, responsive to social need, and which will mean public money is used to deliver high quality services rather than to subsidise private profit;
- d. government to reverse failed privatisations and resume the provision of public services, and the ownership of assets and infrastructure, on the basis of our social and economic interest;
- e. that the Commonwealth Government ratify the C151 – Labour Relations (Public Service) Convention, 1978, enabling the same rights to organise and collectively bargain as other workers;
- f. that all levels of government halt and ban the use of public sector wage freezes, through legislation or via use of other policy instruments;
- g. that all levels of government end the use of accounting methods and policies that under public services, such as labour expense caps, efficiency dividends, and other processes that reduce labour force size and decrease public service effectiveness;
- h. that the Productivity Commission change its focus from cost of delivery for the service to quality of delivery and improvement of ratios of staff to numbers of public served; and
- i. that the Commonwealth, State and local governments provide an investment fund to enable ongoing improved productivity of public services through increased professional development and training.