

SHARED STATEMENT FOR A BETTER SERVICES AUSTRALIA

Services Australia provides essential support to millions of Australians every day. All Australians access Centrelink, Medicare or Child Support services at different stages in their lives. COVID-19 highlights the need for a strong, supportive, accessible and publicly funded social security system more than ever.

Pensioners, older Australians, people with disability, people experiencing homelessness, carers, families, refugees and students all rely on the essential services that Services Australia workers provide, as do people who are looking for paid work, fleeing domestic violence or experiencing cyclones, bushfires or floods.

The Commonwealth Government continued to privatise jobs and increase insecure work, outsourcing essential services to private companies, even as more Australians than ever relied on Services Australia through COVID-19. Over 30% of Services Australia workers are now outsourced or insecure.

The Government privatising Services Australia jobs, means less training and less security for workers and more errors and more delays for the community. A secure, experienced and well trained workforce is key to a properly resourced Services Australia.

Australians need a social security system they can rely on and that treats everyone with dignity, compassion and respect. As representatives of community groups, users of Services Australia services and Services Australia workers, we therefore call on all political parties and candidates to:

- Commit to developing a respectful and compassionate social security system, including by implementing the Raise the Rates recommendations so that everyone is able to afford the basics of life and live above the poverty line.
- Increase resources for phone and face to face services and make access easier, to genuinely support older Australians and all those who struggle with the drive to use online services.
- Remove breach powers from private JobActive providers and return them to Services Australia.
- Redesign the debt recovery process so that it is fair and humane, allowing trained and experienced staff to exercise discretion. Reinstate the statute of limitations for debt recovery.
- Respect affected Australians by abolishing the cashless debit card and income quarantining methods.
- Increase staffing numbers for the Indigenous Services business line.
- Hire more social workers so they can fulfil their case management role supporting vulnerable members of the community, not just process claims.
- Rebuild in-house capacity and expertise of Services Australia by converting insecure workers to secure APS jobs, with proper training, where they can build up experience.

