

INFORMATION UPDATE

YOUR AGREEMENT



PSA General Secretary – AHP and AHA Separate Enterprise Agreement Negotiations

14 March 2025

The PSA remains committed to achieving a single agreement for all those employees currently covered by the salaried agreement.

The government's legislatively required Notice of Intention to Negotiate an Enterprise Agreement issued on 5 August 2024 was for a single agreement to cover all those employees covered by the current salaried agreement.

That Notice of Intention to Negotiate an Enterprise Agreement remains in place. It has never been rescinded, revoked, amended or replaced.

The government's issuing of a new Notice of Intention to Negotiate an Enterprise Agreement for AHPs and AHAs has no effect on the PSA's previously stated negotiating position for a single agreement.

The PSA is participating in these negotiations as part of continuing negotiations for a single agreement which covers all those employees covered by the current salaried agreement.

Although required by Section 76A of the Fair Work Act, the government has never stated or explained its position on this question at issue in negotiations which have been underway since 9 September 2024. The question at issue here is the question of a separate agreement for AHPs and AHAs.

This is one of a number of breaches by the government of the Fair Work Act.

Unlike the government, the PSA is willing to state and explain our position on this question at issue.

The PSA's position has been democratically determined through extensive and thorough membership consultation, is in the best interests of PSA members, and has been determined and reconfirmed by our governing body, the PSA Council.

Separate Agreement

There is no logical reason for a separate AHP/AHA agreement.

There is not one single thing that could be included in a separate AHP/AHA agreement that cannot be included in the salaried agreement. Any pay or conditions that could be included in a separate agreement could be included in the single agreement.

Special, or profession-specific conditions can be included in the single salaried agreement – and indeed, already are.

A separate agreement will not, and cannot, of itself provide better conditions. There is nothing magical about a separate agreement – a separate agreement does not somehow conjure special or profession-specific conditions.

The arguments advanced by others, including by some in this room today, for a separate agreement fail to provide any logical basis for a separate agreement.

I will now go through those arguments as part of stating and explaining our PSA position about a separate agreement.

The arguments we have heard advocating for a separate agreement include the following.

- AHPs are a distinct occupational group, and should have their own agreement, like, for example paramedics.
 - AHPs are not a single professional discipline, unlike paramedics (or nurses, doctors, police, firefighters for that matter).
 - AHPs are a collection of a very wide range of diverse professions and disciplines.
 - “AHP” is an umbrella term for the 26 different professions currently listed in the salaried enterprise agreement.
 - AHPs do not have one single employer – again, as distinct from other single discipline groups, eg paramedics, police, firefighters or nurses.
 - This argument is simply irrelevant.
- Wage increases.
 - Significant wage increases are PSA members’ highest priority. When we were here on 9 September 2024 I said that putting money into PSA members’ pockets was our highest priority and it remains our highest priority. Higher wages will only come when we have a government that understands labour market realities, is prepared to acknowledge the crisis in attraction and retention across our entire South Australian public service, and understands that the cost of living pressures our members are facing are real. A separate agreement will not magically increase wages – in fact past experience in Health in South Australia has shown the exact opposite.
- Workload
 - The PSA is the only union to have achieved a clause for managing workloads and for protecting members from unreasonable workloads. This was achieved in the single, salaried agreement. There is no justification or requirement for a separate agreement.
- Shift Work/Rosters
 - The PSA has been alone in advocating for comprehensive shift work provisions since 2017, including in these negotiations. The issue – as with wages – is that the government has unilaterally, consistently, and repeatedly dismissed our proposals for shift work provisions.
 - There is not a single reason this issue could not be addressed in the salaried agreement. A separate agreement is not required. What is required is an employer willing to consider the same kinds of provisions that are in place in many other industries and workforces - provisions for which the PSA has been consistently advocating.

- Fixed term contracts
 - Again, the PSA has been alone in advocating for increased job security - and not just advocating for, but achieving, real outcomes in this regard.
 - Our Appendix 1 - drafted and negotiated by the PSA - is an example of the outcomes we have achieved, as is the commitment in the current agreement to ongoing employment being the primary form of public sector employment.
 - We know that the use of fixed term contracts continues to be abused by the employer, which is why we are always running disputes for members who are being treated so disrespectfully in this way.
 - Once again, a separate agreement is not what is required. What is required is an employer willing to fix the problem, and to comply with the agreement currently in place.
 - As a start the PSA requires that Appendix 1 be retained in its entirety.
- Professional Development
 - This is an issue that the PSA has consistently pursued, only to be undermined by other unions and bargaining agents in the past.
 - Once again, there is not a single reason this issue could not be addressed in the salaried agreement. A separate agreement is not required. What is required is an employer willing to address this issue.

These are the arguments we have heard being advanced in support of a proposition for a separate AHP agreement.

It is obvious that these arguments being advanced do not support the establishment of a separate agreement – but rather highlight the need for the employer to actually address the issues.

The most important thing is that these issues are addressed.

Division

A separate agreement is a recipe for creating and entrenching division in the public sector workforce.

By division I don't just mean division between the broad umbrella heading of AHPs and the rest of the salaried employees - I also mean division between the 26 professional disciplines of AHPs themselves.

There is potential, for example to create division between Physiotherapists and Social Workers; between Radiographers and Speech Therapists; between Psychologists and Occupational Therapists; between Pharmacists and Developmental Educators.

As I emphasised in the meeting of 9 September 2024, the PSA is about pursuing equity across public sector employment, not about creating or exacerbating inequity; the PSA is about lifting everyone's wages and conditions up – not about pitting worker against worker or profession against profession.

In addition, a separate agreement would have the potential to create enormous anomalies across government - including for example when employees move between classifications, from the AHP stream to the ASO stream.

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The PSA does not support a separate agreement because it will create inequity and promote disharmony across the public sector workforce. We remain intent on achieving a single salaried agreement that actually deals with PSA members' issues.

The PSA will not assist the government, other unions, or any other bargaining agents in splitting up and dividing members, or reducing the negotiation power of members for achieving the outcomes they require.

PSA's priorities

I now move onto the PSA's priorities for a new agreement.

The PSA's objectives remain the same as we have consistently stated since before these negotiations started - that is to achieve an agreement that meets members' needs and expectations based on their priorities.

The PSA is the principal public sector union in South Australia; the only union representing exclusively public sector AHPs and AHAs; and is the only union who can negotiate an agreement on behalf of its members.

The terms of an enterprise agreement are a measure of the respect with which an employer holds employees.

The PSA is determined in these negotiations to achieve an enterprise agreement which recognises and respects the value of the work and dedication our members bring to their life of daily public service.

The PSA's position is that these negotiations start from a commitment to retain all existing conditions of employment contained in the current salaried agreement.

- **We seek confirmation from the government today that every single condition of employment for all those employees covered by the salaried agreement will be retained in any new agreement.**

The PSA has consulted deeply and widely with our members about their enterprise agreement and will continue to do so. Our members have told us the most important things to them in these negotiations are:

1. Wages
2. Job Protection
3. Workload
4. Improving Conditions

Overwhelmingly, and not surprisingly, wages is the biggest issue which affects all of our members.



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Authorised by Natasha Brown, General Secretary
Public Service Association of SA Inc, 122 Pirie St, Adelaide, 5000

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Since the last salaried enterprise agreement was struck, our members have experienced a social and economic whirlwind, which came on the back of an extremely challenging global pandemic – a pandemic during which many of our members held the fort on the frontline of public services.

Public sector workers are resilient. They are dedicated, and they care deeply about the work they do. But they have a limit.

Let me be clear with our intentions. That means dollars. It means fairly compensating public sector workers for the work they do – it means committing to competitive wages and benefits so that the public sector is an employer of choice in a competitive labour market. It's about making an investment to attract and retain the best and brightest.

There is a lot of ground to make up from the effects of the economic disruption our members have experienced in recent years. Make no mistake, the PSA takes this opportunity to put the government on notice that we expect a significant wage package in this enterprise agreement that brings South Australia's public sector wages back into competition with other states and other sectors of the workforce. Our members serve government and our state well. It is well past the time for that effort to be properly recognised and compensated.

Since the COVID pandemic, South Australian public sector workers have experienced unprecedented real wage losses. Conversely, private sector workers have seen their wages nearly return to pre-pandemic levels.

The government is in a very strong position to afford to pay proper pay rises to public servants, and has a responsibility to do so.

South Australia is in a strong economic position. The State Government enjoys a diversified, stable, and strong fiscal situation. Our state bounced back from the deficits created by the pandemic very quickly. Revenue growth for the state has significantly out-paced expenses.

Affordability is simply not a reason for the government to deny properly remunerating our members.

The wages issue is real and important, however there are conditions matters which need addressing in conjunction with the wages to make working in the public sector attractive again.

On job security, we intend to ensure Appendix 1 of the current agreement is maintained in its entirety. We also will be pursuing ongoing employment provisions to reduce the use of contract, labour hire and casual employment in the public sector. Insecure employment is a scourge and is corrosive to the wellbeing of working people. The public sector must provide secure employment.

On workload, we will be pursuing provisions that address the root causes of excessive workloads. Vacancy management is crucial to this.

On conditions, we will be seeking to **reduce** inequities between classes of employees, especially between those public sector employees covered by other agreements.

Our AHP members see inequities in pay and conditions every day when working in multi-classified positions. Different groups of employees working outside standard arrangements of 9am–5pm, Monday to Friday, have different annual leave entitlements, some have four, some five, some six weeks. This is both in comparison internally in the salaried agreement and externally, for example, nurses and police.



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We seek improvements to conditions dealing with cost of living, attraction and retention – especially in regional areas, current labour market pressures and realities, equity with other workers, workloads, recognition of skills and experience, vacancy management, shift penalties, rostering issues and other non-standard work arrangements, leave, recognition of skills and experience, maintenance and recognition of professional qualifications, classification and progression.

Our members across the public sector, including Allied Health Professionals, need improvements in these areas as the government asks them to do more and more with less in increasingly challenging environments.

Today, we bring a clear message from our members that they want a fair wage that enables them to keep pace with the cost of living, live well, and do the best job they can for the communities they serve.

The PSA remains completely focussed on working towards achieving outcomes that deal with our PSA members' priorities and requirements.

We will not be distracted by disruptions and interference to this negotiation process, especially by those whose actions are undermining the opportunity to achieve the best possible outcomes for our PSA members.

The PSA and our members are united in our pursuit to achieve an enterprise agreement that meets our members' needs and expectations.



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