

Defend our Jobs and Living Standards Against Attacks

24. 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. 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. Public services are crucial to the development of a modern, productive, equitable; and inclusive society.
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 our borders; education, health, emergency and police services; preserving and promoting our cultural heritage; protecting and managing our natural environment, wildlife and fauna; running courts; providing public transport and utilities, scientific research or developing solutions to the highly complex policy challenges our nation faces.
3. In particular, Congress acknowledges the hard work and dedication of emergency and public service workers during times of natural disaster and the role they play in the provision of essential services in the aftermath of floods, cyclones and bush fires.
4. 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.
5. Congress notes that the level of GDP spending on government in Australia is among the lowest of OECD countries. Congress believes that government is not the provider of last resort; 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. Congress resolves to campaign for commonwealth, state, territory and local government services that are funded and organised on the following principles

No Privatisation

6. Congress notes the *Taking Back Control* report initiated by ACTU affiliates CPSU, ASU, ETU, & NSWNMA, which details the impact of privatisation in Australia. The report found that privatisation of public services and infrastructure, driven by the failed neoliberal trickle-down agenda, has had a devastating impact on Australian workers, service users, and the broader community. Congress further notes the increasing outsourcing of policy development and the government use of labour hire.

7. Congress affirms that public provision means assets, services, and policy remain accountable to our community, they are more likely to be supplied on the basis of need, and public funds are not wasted in order to fund private profit-margins. Congress affirms the ACTU's endorsement of the following principles and recommendations in the report to set limits on the privatisation agenda at all levels of government:

Principles

1. Citizens have a right to well-resourced and capable governments delivering quality public services paid for through a just tax system.
 - a) All citizens should have access to these services irrespective of ability to pay
 - b) Particularly around privatisation decisions, democracy requires transparency, openness, participation and accountability between government and its citizens
2. Quality, rather than cost, is the best measure to judge who has the capacity to deliver services
3. Privatisation should not be presented as providing greater choice to citizens when it removes the choice to continue using existing services, as has occurred in some provisions of disability services
4. Privatisation should not be seen as a means of making savings by lowering the quality of services provided or by reducing the wages and employment conditions of workers
5. Whether government-funded services are provided in the public or private sphere, the community must be able to hold governments accountable for those services
6. All privatised services should be completely transparent to the public. Citizens have the right to know where and how public funds are being spent and the detail of the services provided

Recommendations

7. We call for a moratorium on privatisation until greater regulatory mechanisms and proper policy frameworks are implemented around the delivery of public services.
8. 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

9. 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.
10. 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.
11. There must be NO commercial-in-confidence provisions when taking public money.
12. 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.
13. 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) health and safety
 - c) equal opportunity employment
 - d) codes of ethics and other codes of practice.
14. Governments should take back control of failed privatisations rather than give contracts to new private providers.
15. 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) feedback from service users on quality
 - 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.
16. 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).
17. 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.
18. 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 public 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.
19. Consistent funding that ensures services are available to all. A short-term and narrow preoccupation with budget surpluses, driven largely by party political positioning, is inconsistent with building and maintaining high-quality and accessible public services, and community and public assets. 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.
20. 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 publically 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.

21. 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 notes the detailed plan for a fair taxation system set out in the ACTU Tax Policy 2018, and 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 has 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 needs, and they help to cultivate a climate of non-compliance in which more individuals and businesses are encouraged to avoid paying tax.
22. Model employment: Public services employ nearly 2 million workers across urban and regional Australia. 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:
 - c) Fair and equal pay, regardless of department, agency or location;
 - d) Giving staff the time, training and resources to do the best possible job;
 - e) Collective good faith bargaining rights and union representation for public sector workers;
 - f) A commitment to secure, full-time and on-going employment, avoiding precarious employment arrangements, and the use of labour hire ,and;
 - g) Fair conditions, entitlements and health and safety at work.
 - h) Investment in the development of information technology capability and the skills required to work in the digital environment
23. 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. This 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.
24. 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. These policies are outlined in the Tax Policy before Congress 2018.

- 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