

Friday, 28 August 2020

Equal pay day - Pandemic response must address the gender pay gap

Statement from ACTU President Michele O'Neil

Today is Equal Pay Day, marking the end of the 59 additional days that women, on average, have to work to reach parity with male earnings from the last financial year.

The gender pay gap remains stagnant at 14 per cent, and the pandemic and the Morrison Government's response are on track to leave a legacy of increasing disparity between men and women's pay and retirement savings.

The refusal of the Morrison Government to address insecure work which disproportionately affects women has left a third of the workforce without sick leave during a pandemic and means that women who are returning to work are returning to jobs which are lower paid and more insecure.

In sectors which have carried our country through the pandemic the situation is even worse. Healthcare has one of the worst sector-wide pay gaps in Australia, at 21.3 per cent.

The overwhelmingly female workforces in aged care and early childhood education and care are systemically underpaid and deal with extreme levels of insecure work. Women in the community sector are facing funding shortfalls which will undermine equal pay

The Morrison Government's super early access scheme has forced people to fund their own crisis response and has had a disastrous impact on the retirement savings of women, who have been forced to raid their savings more often than men.

1.3 million women have accessed their super early just to pay their bills. More than 300,000 women have completely emptied their super accounts, 80 per cent of whom were younger than 35.

Young women who are forced to withdraw \$20,000 now to get by during this crisis will be nearly \$95,000 worse off in retirement. Women already retire with 47 per cent less super than men.

It is essential that the recovery from this crisis address the long-standing issues which have reduced the pay and retirement income of women.

The ACTU has put forward a National Economic Reconstruction Plan which would put working people at the center of the recovery and ensure that we rebuild a workforce with stronger rights for working people and less insecure work. It includes access to free universal childcare.

Addressing equal pay requires investment in secure jobs, and improving women's legal rights to win equal pay.

We call on the Morrison Government to stop ignoring the structural problems in our economy and to put an end to the gender pay gap.

ENDS

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