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Equal pay justice for social and community sector workers signals historic day: unions

Today's ruling by the full bench of Fair Work Australia on pay equity for social and community sector workers is a landmark in the fight for equal pay for women, say unions.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said the decision ended decades of undervaluation of the work of women in the sector.

"Unions worked hard to fight this case on behalf of 150,000 Australian workers who do this very important, yet clearly undervalued work," Ms Kearney said.

"This is an historic decision on the path to pay justice for women.

"The decision to properly value the work of the majority female workforce who look after the homeless, the disabled, refugees, domestic violence victims, children at risk and other vulnerable people in our society is a credit to workplace reforms introduced by the Labor Government.

"The Fair Work Act replaced a draconian set of laws that took away the rights of Australian workers. Today's ruling is a clear indication of why we need good, fair laws in place so that all Australian workers can receive fair pay and conditions.

"This shows the equal remuneration provisions in the Act are delivering on the promise of equal pay, which is a workplace right and a human right. But the ruling would not have been possible without the dedication of community sector workers and their unions in the face of staunch opposition from employers.

"However, the reality is this decision can only flow through to the pay packets of these workers if all governments contribute their share.

"The Federal Labor Government has shown enormous leadership here, fully awarding its share of the funding, with a \$2 billion commitment. Now those state and territory governments who have not already committed to their share must do so.

"It is not okay to pay one group of workers less than another doing work of comparable value and today's ruling merely confirms this.

"This is difficult and demanding work, yet this female-dominated industry is one of the lowest paid in Australia because it has been historically viewed as 'women's work'.

"This has been a major reason why the gender pay gap remains at 18%, despite the right to equal pay for equal work being enshrined in law several decades ago."

Fair Work Australia's ruling will mean social and community sector workers will receive pay increases of between 23% and 45% over the next eight years, beginning on 1 December.

The pay increases will phase in at between 2.5% and 5% a year, depending on salary level.

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