



JOBS YOU CAN COUNT ON

1. Australians expect their government to build an economy that works for everyone, not just the few. Despite this, inequality is at a 70 year high; millions of people cannot find enough work, if they can find a job at all; wage growth is at record lows; wage theft is rampant; and more and more Australians are in insecure work. Employers are increasingly undermining working conditions by using non-standard forms of employment such as casual contracts, sham contracts and fixed contracts. As well as unprecedented systematic exploitation of temporary visa workers.
2. The problems we are facing are a direct result of neoliberal policies that have attacked unions, eroded the rights of working people, and allowed employers to exploit inadequate industrial laws. Many workers have watched as good, secure jobs left their communities, only to be replaced with low wage, precarious work, if they were replaced at all.
3. Employment policy in Australia in the modern era has been predicated on the dual assumptions that any job is a good outcome, and that even low paid, marginal work is a pathway to decent full-time employment. These assumptions are both deeply flawed.
4. Good, secure jobs are of enormous benefit to individuals, families and societies. Good, secure work plays a vital role for individual workers and groups of workers in constructing their social identity, as well as providing for higher standards of living.
5. Governments must be committed to creating more jobs, but they must improve the quality of those jobs, if they are to develop a prosperous, productive and harmonious society. Governments are uniquely placed as large-scale employers capable of safe, secure job creation in the public sector. By exercising their capacity as an employer and expanding jobs in the public sector and government sectors, governments could positively impact workforce trends, wage growth and job security in the broader Australian economy.
6. Growth of precarious work, casual employment, labour hire, freelancers and 'gig' workers has undermined good jobs and forced many workers into a low wage poverty trap. This long trend has been accelerated by digital job platforms and contracting out which is often used to avoid industrial laws.
7. As technological change brings changes to work, growth sees jobs change, disappear and new jobs emerge. For it to be inclusive growth, workers in changing workplaces deserve the opportunity to take advantage of new job opportunities through industry skills training arrangements that support lifelong learning and equip existing employees and new entrants to the workforce with new skill sets that evolve with industries. Skill sets would support those in occupations with low rates industry specific qualifications to engage with learning and to create new career pathways.
8. To ensure training is reflective of industry needs, results in a recognised qualification that is portable for workers and is properly funded as part of an overall industry strategy requires rebuilding a cooperative tripartite training system of employer, worker and government representation.
9. To ensure the economic benefits of innovation are maximised and are distributed through inclusive growth, Congress calls on Federal Government to work with State/Territory governments to ensure”:

- a) the needs of industry for new skill sets are mapped to identify skill shortages;
 - b) industry skills, training packages are developed to address skill shortages;
 - c) that identification of skill sets and shortages be carried out cooperatively with representatives of workers, employers and Governments;
 - d) industry skill training and retraining packages be developed for existing workers and new workforce entrants to take advantage of identified industry needs for new skills;
 - e) assistance be given to workers transitioning within or between industries to address skills ;
 - f) ensure industry skill training leads to recognised and portable qualifications for workers.
10. There is nothing inevitable about the future of Australian jobs, they will be what we make them. To improve jobs, we must focus on three key challenges:
- a) Overhaul the broken laws that fail to protect Australian workers;
 - b) Encourage the growth and development of local industries that provide good, secure jobs through good industry policy; and
 - c) Address gender inequality, discrimination and marginalisation.

Fixing broken laws

11. Attacks on workers' basic protections have gone too far. We will reverse the cuts to penalty rates, raise the minimum wage, and change our industrial relations laws to ensure that hard won rights and protections are not stripped away. Priority areas for our industrial relations framework include:
- a) Creating more secure jobs;
 - b) Improving workers' rights and living standards;
 - c) Creating a strong, fair and independent umpire with the power to protect workers; and
 - d) Ensuring that workers get a pay rise through fair bargaining rules.

Addressing the economic downturn; an historic economic and social crisis

12. The deliberate shutdown of large sections of the economy to stop COVID-19 infection and protect public health has caused an unprecedented economic contraction. This is not a normal cyclical downturn: it happened much faster and went deeper. The downturn was led by synchronised closures in the industries most vulnerable to infection: customer-facing service sectors like retail, hospitality, transportation and personal services. The official unemployment rate is just the tip of the iceberg of an immense stockpile of unutilised labour. If we include people technically 'employed' (on their employers' payrolls) but not working, or who want work but are not actively seeking it, or whose hours of work have declined precipitously, unemployment is far higher.
13. This downturn was not only fast and painfully deep. It was deliberate. We wanted production and work to stop, to save lives. Hence the usual antidotes to an economic downturn (aimed at encouraging consumers and businesses to keep spending) are clearly not sufficient.

14. This downturn is different to past crises because of its deeply disproportionate impact on the most insecure segments of the labour market: including women, young workers, and workers in precarious and insecure jobs. Every recession tends to increase inequality, but this one is dramatically increasing inequality through concentrated job losses and reduced hours among workers who were badly-paid and insecure at the start of the pandemic. The decline in women's employment has been greater than for men: partly because women are over-represented in the consumer service industries that were shut down first, and partly because women are more likely to work in casual and other insecure jobs that employers were quick to eliminate. The same problems have affected young workers, workers from Indigenous and immigrant communities, workers with a disability and workers in precarious positions (such as labour hire jobs, sham contract arrangements, and gig workers). This recession will therefore require a pro-active and focused policy response to help the hardest-hit segments of the labour force, first. In particular, rebuilding women's employment must be a top priority of reconstruction.

Australia needs a plan for national economic and social reconstruction

15. If left to its own devices, the private sector economy will likely sink into years of depression after the COVID-19 pandemic is contained. Australia needs more than a cyclical 'recovery': and governments must do far more than 'prime the pump' with short-term fiscal incentives (like tax cuts or temporary make-work projects). Instead, we need an ambitious, sustained, multi-dimensional plan for full-fledged national economic reconstruction. We need a new vision for generating jobs, incomes, and growth in the aftermath of the pandemic. Reconstruction must address critical failures in the business-led economy that were painfully evident before COVID-19 hit: vast underutilisation of labour, the growing prevalence of insecure and precarious jobs, widening inequality, persistent wage stagnation, and the impact of climate change. In other words, we cannot expect that the economy will naturally bounce back to 'normal' of its own volition. The crisis has shown that pre-pandemic 'normal' was neither acceptable nor sustainable. Instead, we must work collaboratively and ambitiously to build a new normal.
16. To achieve that new normal will require years of government leadership, planning and resources. There is a clear precedent for this idea of deliberate, planned national reconstruction. In late 1942, years before the Second World War ended, the Commonwealth government began developing an ambitious, nation-wide reconstruction plan.
17. Australia will need an equally ambitious plan to reconstruct the economy after this more recent 'war' against COVID-19. Of course, the economy and the labour market have changed immensely since the post-war reconstruction of the 1940s and 1950s. The significant increase in the participation of women in paid work has changed the labour market, service industries are much more important now, and the urgent need to reduce carbon emissions must help shape all our economic policies. The core goal of that earlier post-war reconstruction – namely, ensuring that all willing Australians are able to work in a prosperous and inclusive post-war economy – is as valid and timely now, as it was then.
18. Recovering from this social and economic catastrophe will require enormous investments by government: in health care, in income supports, in physical and social infrastructure, in broader public service delivery, in developing new high value industries, and in direct public sector employment. Private spending is crippled by shocked confidence, lost incomes, and deep uncertainty about what lies ahead. The private sector has neither the resources nor the capacity to act cohesively that are required to start and lead the long process of reconstruction. Only government possesses the economic and financial resources, the staying power, and the capacity and authority to plan at a national level, to get the macroeconomic ball rolling again. Without government leadership, and massive and sustained injections of resources and spending power, the economy will inevitably slip into prolonged stagnation – or worse.