

Friday 21st November

Media Statement

New employer group to fight for workers' pay and conditions

Western Australia's community sector employers have united to form Community Employers WA (CEWA) to secure a higher level of funding and ensure the sustainability of vital community services.

The historic new employer organisation will fight for improved funding and better pay for staff.

"This new organisation represents community sector employers. These agencies have a combined workforce of 36,000 dedicated staff delivering services to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of our community right across Western Australia," said CEWA Co-chair Tony Pietropiccolo of Centrecare.

"CEWA will give a strong voice to the non-government service sector to ensure that our agencies remain viable. Without proper funding we can't attract and retain staff on equitable terms with their government counterparts.

"We have to secure increased funding from the state and federal governments while raising our profile as responsible employers. If we don't do this some agencies will close and others will have to reduce vital services."

Co-chair Chris Hall from UnitingCare West, said a professional employed by Government could earn more than \$26,000 more a year than a community sector worker for the same job.

"In 2006/07 the average weekly earnings for community sector workers was \$882, 30% lower than the average full-time equivalent weekly wage of \$1,140 for the health and community services sector throughout Australia.

"This wage inequality makes hiring and retaining staff extremely difficult, staff turnover within our organisation is incredibly high at 23%. On top of that 66% of staff say that the amount of unfunded work they are doing has increased," Mr Hall added.

“The truth is that our employees are constantly being asked to do more work with fewer resources. The community sector needs increased government funding if it is to be sustainable in providing essential services.”

In Western Australia, over the past year community employers have reported that:

- 73% of waiting lists for their services have stayed the same or worsened;
- The complex needs of 53% of their clients has increased, and;
- The number of people being turned away from their services has increased by 7%.

“The days of living solely off goodwill, volunteers and private donations are long gone.” said Mr Pietropiccolo.

“It is time for a new relationship with governments that recognise the indispensable contribution our sector makes to the community. CEWA will strive to ensure that the community sector is properly funded so its employees can continue to deliver world-class services,” said Mr Petriopiccolo.

“Uncertainty is death and if we can’t reassure our employees that they will have better training, pay and work conditions we will continue to lose them to government agencies that can offer this.”

Mr Hall said CEWA had no intention of competing with other organisations or employer groups.

“We want to build stronger links with the state and federal governments, to work with WACOSS, trade unions and other community sector bodies to achieve our common aims,” he said.

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Foundation members of Community Employers WA:

- Agencies For South West Accommodation
- Anglicare WA
- Association for Services to Torture & Trauma Survivors
- Care Options
- Centrecare
- Communicare
- Good Samaritan Industries
- Holyoake
- Joondalup Youth Support Services
- MercyCare
- Mission Australia
- Multicultural Services Centre of Western Australia
- Ngala Family Resource Centre
- Nulsen Haven Association
- Outcare
- Parkerville Children Youth Care
- Perth Home Care Services
- Red Cross WA
- Relationships Australia (Western Australia)
- Resource Unit for Children with Special Needs
- Richmond Fellowship
- Rocky Bay
- Ruah Community Services
- St Patrick's Community Support Centre
- The Salvation Army
- UnitingCare West
- Wanslea Family Services
- Western Australian Council of Social Service
- YouthCare