



Gender Undervaluation – Priority Awards (AM2024/19, AM2024/20, AM2024/21, AM2024/22, AM2024/23)

Submission cover sheet

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Organisation

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Priority Award(s):

- ☐ *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Practitioners and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services Award 2020*
- ☐ *Children's Services Award 2010*
- ☐ *Health Professionals and Support Services Award 2020*
- ☐ *Pharmacy Industry Award 2020*

☒ *Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Industry Award 2010*

How to prepare a submission

Submissions should be emailed to awards@fwc.gov.au. Directions set out the due dates for submissions. Directions are issued by a Member of the Commission and will be published on the [Gender undervaluation – priority awards review](#) webpage on the Commission's website.

Make sure you use numbered paragraphs and sign and date your submission.

In your submission, provide a summary of your experience and any relevant issues and proposals. As background, you may wish to review the Commission's [Gender pay equity research webpage](#), the [Stage 2 report: Gender pay equity research](#), and the [Annual Wage Review Decision 2023-24](#) with particular focus on paragraphs [85]-[132], and [162]-[172]].

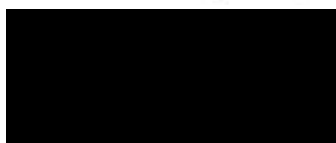
Issues

1. [Using numbered paragraphs, outline the main issues you want the Fair Work Commission to consider as part of the Gender Undervaluation – Priority Awards case for your indicated award(s). If possible, include references to any relevant sections of the *Fair Work Act 2009*, or other legislation or specific clauses in the indicated award(s) that apply]

Proposals

2. [Tell us your proposals to address the issues you have raised in the submission. If you are proposing that the Commission should consider varying the minimum wage rates for the relevant classifications in the indicated award(s), you should include draft wording for the proposed variation]

Signature:



Name:

Delia Donovan

Date:

5 September 2025

FAIR WORK COMMISSION

Matter No.: AM2024/21

Re: **Gender-based undervaluation – priority awards review**

SUBMISSION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE NSW

Issues

Introduction

1. Domestic Violence NSW is the peak body for frontline specialist domestic and family violence services in NSW. On behalf of almost 200 member organisations, we work to improve policy and legislative responses for the specialist domestic and family violence sector, whilst supporting quality service delivery.
2. Domestic Violence NSW members represent the diversity of NSW services and workers supporting adults, children, families, and communities impacted by domestic and family violence. Our members include crisis and refuge homelessness services, domestic violence response enhancement, domestic and family violence case management, Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations, migrant and refugee organisations, community housing, Staying Home Leaving Violence providers, women's legal services, women's court advocacy services, men's behaviour change programs, and women's health.
3. Domestic Violence NSW members work across the entirety of NSW, providing client support to women, children and youth who have experienced domestic and family violence.
4. The specialist domestic and family violence sector – which operates under the Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Industry Award 2010 (SCHADS Award) – is highly female-dominated, historically undervalued, and remunerated at lower award rates as compared to male-dominated sectors and awards.
5. As identified by the Fair Work Commission, the SCHADS Award is subject to gender-based undervaluation. Domestic Violence NSW agrees with this finding.
6. However, Domestic Violence NSW is opposed to any changes to the SCHADS Award that will result in lower wages for any workers in the specialist domestic and family violence sector and/or exacerbate the gender-based undervaluation of the Award.

Lodged by: Domestic Violence NSW

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Response to provisional view

7. In May 2025, Domestic Violence NSW made a submission in response to the Provisional Views – Gender-based undervaluation – priority awards review, expressing our concern with the preliminary finding to apply the ‘Caring Skills’ benchmark rate to the classification structures of the SCHADS Award.
8. Domestic Violence NSW welcomed the initial decision of the Expert Panel in the Review: [2025] FWCFB 74 which found that social and community services employees, crisis accommodation employees and home care employees in disability care covered by the SCHADS Award have been the subject of gender-based undervaluation.
9. Domestic Violence NSW supported the further determination that these findings constitute work value reasons justifying a variation to the modern award minimum wage rates applying to each category of employees.
10. However, Domestic Violence NSW expressed concern that the provisional view to abolish the classification structures of the SCHADS Award and replace them with a classification structure based on alignment with the ‘Caring Skills’ benchmark rate will further undervalue the minimum wage rates as applied to the specialist domestic and family violence workforce.
11. Alignment of the SCHADS Award with the ‘Caring Skills’ benchmark is highly likely to have a negative and lasting impact on the specialist domestic and family violence sector and its workforce. Our workers risk seeing their pay reduced, despite the Fair Work Commission’s assurance that no worker’s wage will go backwards because of any new classification structure.
12. Domestic Violence NSW is of the position that the ‘Caring Skills’ benchmark rate does not reflect the variety and scope of work undertaken by the specialist domestic and family violence sector covered by the SCHADS Award.

Specialist domestic and family violence sector workforce profile

13. [*Strengthening the NSW Domestic and Family Violence Sector Workforce Development Strategy 2025–2035*](#), released by the NSW Government in August 2025, indicates that:
 - a. In 2022, the preliminary estimate of specialist domestic and family violence workers in NSW was 3,300.
 - b. 56% work for a community organisation, NGO, not-for-profit organisation or charity.
 - c. 88% identify as a woman or female.

- d. 53% are aged 35–54.
 - e. Two-thirds (66%) reported that they were employed in ongoing full-time roles while another 18% held ongoing part-time positions.
 - f. The most common qualification is a bachelor's degree (36%), with approximately one-third holding a lesser qualification (34%), and the remainder holding a higher degree (31%).
14. Domestic and family violence is the product of interrelated and deeply entrenched social, cultural, political, and economic factors.
 15. While broader awareness of the prevalence of domestic and family violence has increased over recent years, the workforce that responds remains invisible.
 16. A specialist domestic and family violence worker is distinguished by their particular focus, knowledge and skills, and the functions they perform in their role. The work undertaken by domestic and family violence workers is unique.
 17. Job roles include responsibilities ranging from crisis response, engagement and assessment of clients (women and children), safety planning (including assessing the level of threat presented by a person who uses violence), advocacy and referral to support and/or accountability programs, and long-term case management.
 18. Responding to domestic, family, and sexual violence requires assisting clients with complex and intensive case management.
 19. It requires working directly with victim-survivors of domestic and family violence – women and children – and it often requires work with perpetrators of violence.
 20. The priority of a specialist domestic and family violence worker is the safety of their client. Creating safety plans for victim-survivors – and working to secure their safety – is highly skilled and complex work that can mean the difference between life and death for a woman and her children.
 21. Specialist frontline domestic and family violence workers are often the linchpin that make other systems – for example, the legal system – safer for our clients.
 22. In many cases, the domestic and family violence caseworker is the sole holder of knowledge about outcomes for a victim-survivor and the available pathways to support. This knowledge is used to work directly with the police and courts through the justice and legal systems, with the Department of Communities and Justice and the child protection system, with housing and homelessness services, and with the broader ecosystem of community organisations and government departments operating in local communities, to keep victim-survivors safe by identifying options and pathways in highly constrained systems.

23. The skills required for effective support of victim-survivors of domestic and family violence cannot be acquired through qualifications alone.
24. Domestic Violence NSW is concerned that aligning award rates with qualifications, particularly bachelor's degrees and higher, will have a negative impact on our senior, lived experience and Aboriginal workers, and a negative impact on our sector.
25. Distinct to the specialist domestic and family violence sector is its origins in intersectional feminist community activism. Over fifty years ago, when domestic violence was neither recognised in law nor responded to by police, a group of young female activists established the first domestic violence refuge in the world in Sydney, Australia. This first refuge led to more refuges and support services across NSW and Australia. Many of these services are still in operation today, and many of the activists who helped establish them continue to work in the sector.
26. As a result, our sector comprises of experienced senior workers who possess deep insight into the dynamics of domestic and family violence and the complexities of this work. Yet our senior workers – with decades of experience – may not hold formal qualifications, particularly tertiary qualifications.
27. Our sector has workers with lived experience whose expertise has been gained from having a specific life experience and knowledge of domestic and family violence. Yet our lived experience workers may not hold formal qualifications, particularly tertiary qualifications.
28. And our sector has Aboriginal workers who are recognised for the value of their lived experience and cultural knowledge who are integral to the cultural safety of the specialist domestic and family violence sector through fostering a supportive environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. Yet our Aboriginal workers may not hold formal qualifications, particularly tertiary qualifications.
29. Award wage structures, although recognising experience, disproportionately advantage individuals with access to tertiary education.
30. Many of our workers cannot get access to, afford, or have the capacity to undertake a tertiary qualification. For women in lower socioeconomic communities, this pathway is often inaccessible. For others, working in a gender undervalued sector has constrained their ability to access tertiary study.
31. Colonialist practices and systemic barriers continue to limit tertiary education opportunities for Aboriginal peoples. Rather than undervaluing Aboriginal workers unable to access traditional academic routes, it is essential to acknowledge that lived experience and cultural knowledge are of immense value, especially when working with Aboriginal clients.

32. Not holding formal qualifications should not negate the highly valued breadth and depth of experience of our senior workers, our workers with lived experience of violence, and our Aboriginal workers. The depth of their knowledge should be reflected in the Award wage structures.
33. Working alongside our experienced workers, our lived experience workers, and our workers with deep cultural knowledge are qualified entry-level workers with professional training but limited experience in this complex field.
34. New workers with tertiary qualifications frequently lack foundational training and the necessary knowledge, skills and capabilities to work in the domestic and family violence sector.
35. The effectiveness of our sector relies on the mentoring and support given by senior and experienced workers and workers with lived experience and cultural knowledge to new and emerging workers to do the complex work of responding to domestic and family violence.
36. Being on the frontline responding to violence has long-term safety and wellbeing impacts on our workers, which is reflected in ongoing challenges recruiting and retaining the specialist domestic and family violence workforce.
37. It can be challenging to attract qualified workers to our low paid sector because of the ongoing challenges of worker burnout due to complex casework managing client safety, high caseloads, and daily exposure to trauma.
38. Working with clients affected by domestic and family violence can take a significant toll on practitioners. Domestic and family violence response work is complex, often crisis driven, and commonly delivered in workplace environments characterised by high demand and limited resourcing.
39. The health and wellbeing implications for the workforce delivering victim-survivor services are widely accepted, with the stressful nature of the work linked to a range of negative health and wellbeing outcomes including workplace stress, vicarious trauma, burnout and compassion fatigue. Working with perpetrators of violence is difficult and complex work that requires adequate practitioner supports to safeguard against burnout and other health and wellbeing issues.
40. In addition, domestic and family violence casework is done under a political and media spotlight. With approximately one woman murdered each week by a current or former intimate partner, media reporting is frequent and confronting.
41. For specialist domestic and family violence workers, the political and media spotlight means that the vicarious trauma associated with their work with victim-survivors does not leave them at the end of the working day. Reminders of the trauma and impact of domestic and family violence are everywhere.

Proposals

42. Domestic Violence NSW disagrees with the 'Caring Skills' classification structure and benchmark rate being applied to the SCHADS Award. We cannot support any changes to the SCHADS Award that may negatively impact our workers and potentially lead to lower pay and reduced career progression.
43. Domestic Violence NSW underscores the request made in our previous submission that the Expert Panel undertake a comprehensive review of the SCHADS Award to ensure that any new classification system adequately compensates our workers and values the work and skills of the specialist domestic and family violence sector.
44. A comprehensive review of the SCHADS Award should include consideration of:
 - a. The complexity of casework and service responses for women and children in the specialist domestic and family violence sector.
 - b. The unique intersection of specialist domestic and family violence work with policing, the legal system, the child protection system, and housing and homelessness services.
 - c. The significance of lived experience within this specialist workforce, which may not be reflected in formal qualifications.
 - d. The cumulative effects of workplace stress, vicarious trauma, burnout and compassion fatigue associated with working directly with victim-survivors of domestic and family violence.
45. In addition, Domestic Violence NSW strongly supports the Councils of Social Service (COSS) Network's position that:
 - a. Social and community service employees and crisis accommodation employees have been the subject of gender-based undervaluation, and that the current SCHADS structure and rates of pay are not fit for purpose.
 - b. The Fair Work Commission proceed cautiously in developing a new classification and wage structure that faithfully reflects the nuances of community sector work and equitably translates the Award.
 - c. The Fair Work Commission include significant consultation with the sector and other interested parties in developing new Award classification structure(s) and wage rates.
 - d. The Fair Work Commission consider an implementation timeframe that enables the sector to methodically undertake the transition without undue rush or pressure.

- e. That no workers in the sector be financially worse off under the provisional structure – existing or new.
 - f. The existing Equal Remuneration Order rates must be protected and used as the baseline for determining any new wage rates.
 - g. The Commonwealth, and each State and Territory Government, guarantee funding for the community sector to be able to afford any new wage rates and support organisations to transition to the new structure, as determined by the Fair Work Commission.
46. Domestic Violence NSW supports the submissions of the Australian Services Union, ACOSS (on behalf of the Councils of Social Service (COSS) network), DV West and Women's Services Network (Wesnet).

5 September 2025