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Union win: Big pay rises for staff in long day care

The IEU welcomes today's historic announcement that the federal Labor government will spend \$3.6 billion to fund pay increases that will mean teachers in long day care centres throughout Australia will get a 15% pay rise, above the current rate in the Modern Award – with 10% in December 2024 and another 5% a year later. We also welcome the proposed 4.4% cap on fee increases for parents over the next 12 months.

The long day care sector provides quality early childhood education and care services to hundreds of thousands of children and parents all year round. Under the Modern Award, an experienced teacher in a long day care centre is currently paid \$93,000 a year. The new top rate after the 15% increase will be over \$107,000. For a highly feminised sector, this is a vital step towards closing the gender pay gap.

"Today we're seeing the historic outcome of unions, the federal government and a group of 64 employers working together to lift pay and conditions across the long day care sector," said Independent Education Union of Australia NSW/ACT Branch Secretary Carol Matthews.

"The education and care of our youngest children is important and indispensable work. These long overdue increases better reflect the valuable work of early childhood teachers in laying the vital foundations for our children's development and lifelong learning."

The pay rises, to be funded by the federal government, will help ease critical teacher shortages in long day care centres across the country. Early childhood teachers have been leaving in droves to take up roles in schools and other sectors where the salaries and conditions are substantially better.

"This is a big shift but work still needs to be done," Matthews said. "The gap in pay and conditions between teachers in the early childhood sector and those in schools is still too big. Teachers are teachers no matter the age of their students, and we will keep fighting until there is equity between teachers in the early childhood education and care sector and those in schools."

The IEU is currently discussing with the federal government how the funding will be distributed and the mechanisms to ensure the full increase in funding is passed on to teachers and educators as pay rises. It is expected this will occur through the proposed new enterprise agreement which will include not only the pay rises but other improved conditions aiming to boost workforce attraction and retention, professionalism and service quality.

The IEU joined with the United Workers Union (UWU) and the Australian Education Union (AEU) to access the supported bargaining stream in new industrial relations laws passed as part of the *Secure Jobs Better Pay Act* in 2022. The provision enables unions to bargain for enterprise agreements with groups of employers in a sector rather than in individual enterprises. The laws aim to address the long-term failure to properly value work in feminised sectors such as early childhood education and care.

"Today's outcome better values the work that teachers in long day care centres do every day," Matthews said. "Long day care staff, children, parents and the community are all better off because of today's decision."

Contacts

IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Secretary Carol Matthews 0418 272 902
Media: Monica Crouch 0486 046 975; monica@ieu.asn.au

The IEUA NSW/ACT Branch represents over 32,000 teachers, principals and support staff in Catholic and independent schools, early childhood centres and post-secondary colleges.

Authorised by Carol Matthews, IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Secretary