



31 October 2023

President Hatcher
Fair Work Commission
Level 11, Terrace Tower
80 William Street
East Sydney NSW 2011
Email: chambers.hatcher.j@fwc.gov.au

Dear President Hatcher,

Uniting is one of Australia's largest aged care providers. Across NSW and the ACT, we serve more than 5,500 aged care residents and over 8,600 Home and Community Care clients.

We greatly welcome the recent wage increases to Modern Award Rates brought about by Stage 2 of the Fair Work Commission's (FWC) Aged Care Work Value Case. While Uniting is proud to have paid our aged care employees above the Modern Award rates for many years, the Stage 2 increase is a significant step in correcting the historic undervaluing of aged care workers across the sector.

It is hugely disappointing to us that this wage increase has not been applied to all employees who work in aged care services and believe the FWC should rectify this in Stage 3. We have read the HSU's submission of 22 September 2023 and support the rectification of the division of indirect and direct workers as well as an additional, funded, 10% award increase for all aged care employees as outlined in the original work value case.

The creation of direct and indirect workers in applying the increase has been extremely divisive for our teams who see themselves 'as one' in their service of our older residents and clients. Uniting does not divide our teams in this way - they are one team delivering holistic supports, care, comfort, and company.

While only 600 of our 5,000 aged care employees are classified as 'indirect', at a shift level and particularly in some smaller services there can sometimes be 1 or 2 indirect employees in a roster of 8 employees. Teamwork, flexibility and blended roles are required to respond to the ever-changing needs of our residents and clients. Not equally recognising the value each team member brings to the people they serve is problematic to morale and motivation.

We would also like to share with you some emails sent to us from our people (de-identified) following the Stage 2 announcement.

"Well let's hope that other TEAM member employees will be rewarded for they're just as important roles in the near future... I am employed mostly in the laundry where only ONE staff member does the washing of 80 odd residents!! Without this service and our efforts our residents would not have clean clothes."

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My other role is cleaning where we have as much interacting with our residents, actually more than the chef!! I'd like to know how this decision was made to pay the chef and not cleaners/laundry who have close contact with resident's. I view this decision as so unfair and very disappointing."

Laundry Assistant - 3 July 2023

"I understand that kitchen hands are not eligible for the 15% pay rise... I have been working for 11 years, I do my job properly and having responsibility all the time, turning up when you need me, worked cleaner and kitchen hand shifts, worked 2 weeks straight, helped ordering when main cook was absent, served a meal/coffee & tea to the residents, taking residents to their rooms etc. I help when care staff is short.

I follow Uniting policy like U-learn education, any other education same as care staff do, had a Covid vaccine and Flu vaccine. Please reassess my roles and pay rates. I am currently feeling treated unfairly. I would greatly appreciate you reconsidering my pay rise."

Kitchen hand - 27 July 2023

"We often hear how important the work we do is for those that are struggling or less fortunate in the community. The lowest paid workers in the department also have mortgages, pay rent and are supporting their own families. With inflation running up to 7% during the last year, the decision to not allocate a wage increase actually means that a negative 7% wage growth has been inflicted on the Maintenance Officers, Asset Coordinators and Asset Officers."

Asset Coordinator - October 2023

We believe that if all aged care workers aren't recognised equally in terms of award increases, their feeling undervalued against co-workers will lead them to seek work outside of the sector. At a time when we are still experiencing workforce shortages, this could have a significant impact on our operations and most importantly, on the older people we serve.

If wages aren't equalised in the Stage 3 decision, many providers will face significant pressure to look at applying the increases themselves. This would place a significant financial burden on a sector that is already struggling. To reward our indirect workers, Uniting has recently paid this cohort of employees a one-off bonus. However, it is not sustainable for us to keep doing this and it won't address the underlying inequity created by Stage 2.

We also want to highlight the additional administrative burden that has been placed on aged care providers by having to separate and pay 'direct' and 'indirect' employees different rates of pay. This is particularly complex when we have employees who have dual roles, such as Care Workers and Laundry Assistants. This incredibly manual process for our HR and payroll teams increases the potential for errors that could impact negatively on employee engagement.

As the FWC prepares to make its Stage 3 and final decision in the Aged Care Work Value Case, Uniting has just one request in our submission.

Please fairly recognise all our aged care workers for the heroes that they are. We want to make this a thriving, rewarding sector to work in that retains our valued employees and attracts more people to serve the older residents and clients who have such great need of their support and care.

For further information, please contact Anat Hassner, Chief People Officer on 0403 706 246 or via email ahassner@uniting.org.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tracey Burton', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tracey Burton
Executive Director
Uniting NSW/ACT