



**Professionals
Australia**

Building a stronger and fairer Australia

2022-23 Pre-Budget Submission

Submission by

Professionals Australia

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Introduction

As Australia enters the third year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for strategic government investment to bolster employment, address shortages of critical skills and resources, prepare the economy for long term growth and address inequality and discrimination is more pressing than ever before.

With widespread mass vaccination in place, hopes for the start of a post COVID-19 recovery were quickly dashed by the arrival of the highly infectious Omicron variant, which has revealed severe structural weaknesses within our economy, workforce planning, health systems and local manufacturing capabilities.

Despite efforts by various state governments to restart economic growth by removing COVID-19 restrictions and 'opening up' their economies, the exponential spread of the Omicron variant has had the opposite effect. With a minority of the population having received their booster vaccine, the community has sought to avoid the virus and protect their health by voluntarily curtailing their engagement in the economy.

As a case in point, the NSW Treasury estimates that the Omicron surge has cost that state's economy approximately \$3.5 billion, or around \$500-600 million per week with similar projections forecast for other Australian cities which are experiencing significantly high infection rates.

The Omicron surge has placed extreme pressure on an already overstretched and underfunded health system. Our members in medical science and pharmacy have been part of the frontline workforce, helping us to understand the COVID-19 virus and taking action to reduce its spread and impact on our community.

Pharmacists have been involved in delivering the National Vaccination Program as well as providing other critical health services. Major shortages in Rapid Antigen Tests, personal protective equipment and vaccines have made it extremely difficult for pharmacists to do their jobs properly. As medical scientists developed PCR tests for COVID-19 and the demand for pathology services escalated, inadequate staffing levels were also evident in this sector and resulted in medical scientists working excessive hours and experiencing exhaustion.

Shortages of medical and health supplies also reveal major weaknesses in Australia's local manufacturing capability and speak to the urgent need to rebuild Australia's ability to locally produce essential goods and resources.

With an uncertain economic future heading into 2022 and 2023, it is critical that the next Federal Budget deliver investment that supports Australia's medium to long term growth. There are significant opportunities for strong investment returns in science, technology, engineering, and manufacturing. Seventy-five per cent of the fastest growing occupations require Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) knowledge and skills and 50 per cent of all productivity can be attributed to the application of ICT, meaning that every dollar invested in these sectors provides a significant return on investment for the nation.

Gender inequality and discrimination continue to impact negatively on workforce participation and productivity growth, including in STEM. The capabilities of our valued Australian Public Service are being dissipated by outsourcing and poor management structures and our scientists and pharmacists are experiencing burnout and understandably dissatisfaction with their employment. Dealing with the underlying workforce issues in all these areas is essential.

The 2022-23 Federal Budget provides an opportunity to not only address the immediate impacts of the pandemic, but to lock in structural and systemic solutions that lead to sustainable longer term economic growth and provide a stronger and fairer economy. Our submission identifies key budget priorities and discusses why strategic investment in these areas is urgently required in the next Federal Budget.



Key budget priorities

As we enter the third year of the global COVID-19 pandemic and continue to deal with its serious economic impacts, the need for a framework for long-term investment is more pressing than ever. Investing in areas of the greatest impact while delivering productivity gains will underpin job creation, wage growth and fair workplace outcomes.

- **Strategic investment in emerging knowledge-based industries**
Australia's international competitiveness and future prosperity can be guaranteed through an uplift in our strategic investment in emerging knowledge-based industries like biotechnology, advanced manufacturing, artificial intelligence, ICT, and technology led environmental sustainability.
- **Increase R&D investment**
Our current R&D investment of 2.2% should increase by 0.1%, or more, each year until we achieve 3% of GDP. Increased R & D investment underpins the innovation required to create new products and services and to strengthen our international competitiveness.
- **Investment in residential construction and civil infrastructure**
Further investment in residential construction and civil infrastructure including road and rail projects is critical for ongoing growth. Investment in social housing construction remains inadequate and increasing investment in it will drive employment and improve community outcomes.
- **A Chief Engineer in each jurisdiction**
Without qualified engineers, delivering projects in the Government's stimulus plan and driving economic innovation in regions is put at risk. Qualified engineers provide new ideas, products, and solutions. The engineering profession still does not have its proper place at the decision-making table and a lack of engineering input is thwarting innovation, increasing project waste and costs, as well as the timely delivery of safety and quality outcomes. National support for Chief Engineers in each jurisdiction is required to ensure that the fast-tracking of construction efforts do not compromise on quality, standards, and safety.
- **Investment in skills & recognition**
Investment in the evolving technical and broader workplace skills of engineers, scientists, IT professionals and other professionals through modular forms of training is required to ensure we have a highly skilled and agile workforce to lead us through economic recovery. Funding is necessary to support the alignment of micro-credentials within the Australian Qualifications Framework and ensure shorter forms of training are adequately recognised and accredited.
- **Reaffirming commitment to the legislated Superannuation Guarantee increases**
With 3.05 million Australians accessing \$37.8 billion from their superannuation accounts as part of the government's 'early access to super program,' there is a need to rebuild Australia's retirement savings. An ongoing commitment is required to support the legislated superannuation increases to 12% in 2025 and action is urgently required to address the factors that continue to cause women's lower retirement savings.
- **Education and research to lift productivity, create jobs and provide equality of opportunity**
Universities and research institutions are vital to lift productivity, generate jobs and create new



businesses. The tertiary education sector has been decimated by the pandemic and is in desperate need of additional investment to meet future industry needs and build the nation's skills base, including STEM skills. Further investment in research capacity is also required to strengthen Australia's research base after the challenges of the pandemic.

➤ **Gender diversity a prerequisite for an innovative and sustainable STEM workforce**

The growth of STEM must be accompanied by actions to support more women to join and remain in the STEM workforce. This will increase the capacity of STEM to drive higher workforce participation and productivity growth. Government investment in affordable and geographically accessible quality childcare is critical to strengthen women's workforce participation and requires ongoing and increased funding support.

➤ **Attracting STEM skills to the Australian Public Service and Sector**

Public service and public sector agencies are struggling to attract and retain highly skilled technical staff due to poor wages and conditions of employment. The scope and impact of this problem was noted in submissions to the APS Hierarchy and Classification Review. The 2022-23 Federal Budget must fund a whole of public service STEM workforce plan and move away from the highly restrictive wages policy that apply in the public service, which is causing staff attraction and retention problems.

➤ **Develop a pharmacy workforce plan**

The development of a workforce plan for pharmacy and the implementation of a new classification and wage structure for pharmacists is essential to combat the major workforce challenges that exist in pharmacy. The sector was under intense pressure prior to COVID, and this has only intensified as pharmacies assumed further responsibilities such as administering the vaccination program for adults and children, distributing Rapid Antigen Tests, and providing other services to meet the health care needs of the community.

➤ **Workplace mental health**

The Federal Government should take a lead role through Safe Work Australia to drive investment in workplace mental health. COVID-19 has starkly revealed the impact of underinvestment in our health and mental health systems. It also highlighted the negative impact of workplace pressures on employee wellbeing. As well as investing in health and mental health systems, the Federal Government needs to fund programs that increase the capacity of employers to manage workplace mental health issues in a changing workplace environment.

➤ **Fair industrial regulation**

An industrial relations system that delivers fairness and security to Australian workers will address the immediate challenges of economic recovery and unlock long term prosperity. Industrial laws that support a highly skilled and productive workforce will safeguard living standards. Further diminution of workers' rights will undermine attraction and retention of staff across the professions, including pharmacy, which is already the lowest paid skilled profession in Australia and as a result, experiencing serious workforce challenges.



Strategic investment in STEM

STEM professionals have played a critical role in meeting the challenges of the pandemic and will be central to economic recovery. Strong investment in the STEM workforce as part of the 2022-23 Budget is vital for ongoing economic recovery and resilience.

When flow-on effects are considered, the impact of STEM amounts to over 26 per cent of Australian economic activity, or about \$330 billion per year. Sixty-five per cent of economic growth per capita from 1964 to 2005 can be attributed to improvements in our use of capital, labour, and technological innovation – made possible in large part by STEM.

A sustainable STEM workforce is essential to virtually every goal we have as a nation, and we need a national strategy that values and rewards STEM professionals and defines their place in shaping the nation's future.

Australia must strengthen its STEM skills base and lead increased engagement between the science and technology sectors, government, industry, and academia. The level of ongoing investment in STEM will determine the size and impact of future dividends to the economy.

Engineering

Investing in infrastructure provides opportunities for employment, allows business to grow and supports productive capacity across the economy. The fiscal stimulus that can be targeted and promoted through government spending on new infrastructure, upgrades and maintenance will help create jobs and drive economic growth.

Current engineering practice is about the application of technology, science and research-based solutions to the major challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. The traditional model of innovation has engineers taking scientific discoveries through a process of applied research, design, manufacture or construction and commercialization, with a view to larger-scale production – moving ideas from theory to practice.

The contemporary reality is vastly more complex and is characterised by interdependent science and engineering research and development processes. These processes combine with new technologies to drive collaboration and innovation in areas as varied as construction and manufacturing, renewable energies, the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of human disease, effective counter-terrorism technologies, cyber-security, food security, communications technologies, biodiversity, transport infrastructure planning, forest management and water resources policy.

Engineers are the lifeblood of new industries and a prime source of competitive advantage for established industries like agriculture and high-value manufacturing. Infrastructure building and maintenance will be crucial to economic growth in the post-COVID-19 era. Widespread disruption to government funding priorities, to policy at the state and federal levels, to technology and to stakeholder expectations are a result of the pandemic. For Australia to emerge from the crisis, engineering capability must be placed at the heart of making the most of these disruptions to generate jobs and increase productivity.



COVID-19 will not be the last challenge that we face. The ongoing design and delivery of critical infrastructure and major nation-building projects in the areas of transport infrastructure, energy projects, recycling, agriculture, water and the environment and manufacturing will be fundamental to driving economic recovery. The next drought, bushfire or other challenge is just around the corner, and challenges may arise simultaneously.

Infrastructure investment means we can better meet these challenges. Building and improving safety on our roads, better connections between agricultural and mining regions to ports, airports and other transport hubs, improved flood immunity and the construction of tunnels and bypasses and bridge upgrades will better connect our community and economy. Infrastructure investment means an enhanced national rail freight network, more efficient national freight movement and upgrades to passenger networks.

As a significant purchaser and employer of infrastructure and engineering skills, the Federal Government and state-owned organisations have not invested sufficiently in their own internal capacity – at the very least to remain an adequately informed purchaser.

There are no quick fixes for the complex issues in engineering. However greater investment in workforce and workplace capability and capacity is one of the keys to drive economic growth over the medium to longer-term. Support for Chief Engineers in each jurisdiction is necessary to ensure a focus on community safety, quality, and professional standards in engineering.

Budget priorities

Investment & productivity

Productivity is driven by quality construction and infrastructure projects. A comprehensive outline of specific construction and infrastructure priorities for the Federal Budget is beyond the scope of this submission but the following should be considered:

- Update and increase the pipeline of investment in civil infrastructure including road and rail projects.
- Ensure community safety and building standards are prioritized, including in fast tracked projects in particular in residential building, commercial and civil infrastructure with sign-off by registered engineers as required.
- Ensure optimal use of taxpayer dollars and minimisation of waste in engineering and construction projects.
- Support partnerships between the private and public sectors to deliver specific infrastructure projects – for example rebuilding after bushfires and floods.
- Support the transition to advanced manufacturing to increase the number of value-added products.
- Invest directly in the construction of social housing.
- Invest in digitally delivered infrastructure to increase transparency, improve collaboration and project management, raise safety standards, encourage skill acquisition, and support optimal asset management.

Workforce and capacity development

- Support a Chief Engineer in each jurisdiction.



- Ensure only qualified, professional engineers undertake engineering work. Engineering is complex and has significant public safety consequences. Too many non-engineers are working on projects that should be performed by qualified engineers.
- Support best practice graduate programs and ongoing professional development. To build professional capacity and maintain currency in a fast-moving world, engineers should be supported and reimbursed for costs associated with registration and ongoing continuing professional development.
- Close the gender pay gap in engineering and address the factors that cause women's under-representation in engineering, as women still only make up 12% of the engineering workforce.
- Develop an engineering workforce plan to meet future industry needs. The plan should identify, and project needs into the future and match this to engineering skill needs. By developing an engineering workforce plan and taking steps to enact the plan, businesses and governments will be in a better position to forecast and manage engineering capability and capacity as we emerge from the pandemic.
- Build in-house engineering capacity as a first order priority and if engineering work is to be outsourced, employers should consult with their engineering workforce to ensure internal capacity is maintained and the outcome is truly best value.
- Update procurement policy to prioritise local jobs, local supply chains, capital investment in Australia and manufacturing value-add rather than the cheapest tender. Procurement policy should also ensure that only suitably qualified professional engineers are used on projects.

Information and communications technology

The value of ICT has been brought into sharper focus during the COVID-19 pandemic. The ICT sector is a significant enabler of innovation and driver of productivity and economic growth across multiple industries and emerging areas. OECD, Productivity Commission and ABS studies estimate that 50 per cent of all Australian business productivity can be attributed to the application of ICT. The ICT industry contributes around 8 per cent of Australia's GDP - equivalent to that of the mining industry.

Australia's ICT workforce continued its long-term pattern of growth with the number of ICT positions rising to 772,100 in 2019, up from 723,334 in 2018. A recent Deloitte report estimated a small COVID-19 reduction in the IT workforce which will then grow to over a million workers in Australia by 2027.¹

The rapid pace of change, the complexity of the sector, and the national security implications underline the importance of developing a long-term strategy for technology and R &D.

AI, for example, is projected to add A\$19 trillion to the global economy and boost enterprise profitability by an average of 38 per cent by 2035. Australia's AI skills crisis is widely recognised and while last year's Federal Budget made a start in addressing this obvious gap, the scale of assistance falls well short of what is required to make Australia a leader in AI.

¹ Deloitte Access Economics (2020). Acs Australia's Digital Pulse, p.13.



Specialists across areas such as AI, machine learning, mobile app development, web development, advanced data analytics, cybersecurity and transitioning to the Cloud continue to be in high demand across Australia. In response to an acceleration in remote working, including across government agencies, the demand for IT skills is also likely to grow. The shift to online education and remote working will also see increasing demand for products and services delivered by the ICT industry.

Professionals Australia calls for the upskilling of Australia's technology workforce and a plan to support digital adoption and transformation.

While a comprehensive discussion of workforce development in the technology sector is beyond the scope of this submission, some areas for priority investment are outlined below.

Budget priorities

- Appoint a Chief Technologist to provide a long-term focus on emerging technologies, guide the development and implementation of digital strategies, and promote greater engagement with industry and the broader community, as recommended by the Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA).
- Expand the existing IT workforce development and reskilling plans through more comprehensive investment in digital skills development and ensure cadetships and graduate programs lead to *ongoing permanent employment* not just a constant churn of introductory jobs.
- Prevent the exploitation of skilled migration in Australia's IT workforce by ensuring improved monitoring and reviews of temporary visas. The skilled migrant workforce should only be used to fill genuine short-term gaps, with greater specificity of listed occupations, to avoid the inclusion of occupations or specialisations where there is no evidence of unmet demand. Where there is a genuine domestic shortfall in skills, training programs should also be developed to meet these skills shortages.
- The Australian IT workforce is characterised by a lack of permanent work and job security and the use of labour hire and independent contractors is increasing, including in the Australian Public Service. Widespread award non-compliance, including underpayments, non-payment for additional hours and allowances are prevalent in the sector. Additional funding is required to ensure the Fair Work Ombudsman has the capacity to address these serious breaches in the ICT sector.
- Create a strong, vibrant IT workforce in the Australian Public Sector and end the use of average staffing level caps that undermine the need for an increased in-house IT capability and the ability to deliver to community and provide national security.
- With a gender pay gap of 20.6% in IT, there are serious gender inequities to be addressed in Australia's ICT sector. Discrimination and sexual harassment contribute to the high rate of attrition of women from the technology sector. Further investment to address sexual harassment as a serious workplace health and safety issue and the implementation of all the Respect@Work report recommendations should be a priority for the Federal Government.
- The patent box initiative announced in the last Federal Budget restricted eligibility to medical and biotechnology and should be extended to IT.
- Further support is required for the video game industry. The 30% digital games tax offset for the video-gaming industry as part of the last Federal Budget was an incentive for potential investors in local studios. Further investment is required to take a larger share of the \$250 billion global game



development market. However, there is an urgent need to address the appalling remuneration and working conditions in the video game industry. Better pay and conditions must be secured for those working in existing gaming studios and those set up by investors taking advantage of the tax offset.

- Develop a strategic approach to technology adoption and transformation and require IT giants to pay appropriate tax.

Science

Scientists are vital to Australia's health and economic recovery. Our scientists – pathologists, vets, IVF experts, food technologists, geologists, surveyors, chemists, molecular biologists, agricultural scientists, environmental scientists, botanists, medical scientists, meteorologists, and forestry scientists – work each day in areas that are critical to innovation and improved health, environmental and economic outcomes.

A strong program of investment in the science workforce delivers economic growth and job creation. In Australia, every \$1 invested into our National Health and Medical Research Council returns \$3.20 in health and economic benefits. For every dollar invested, Australian medical research returns \$3.90 in benefits to the population. Investment in basic research capacity has an estimated return on investment of between 20-60 per cent per year.

Just as critically, many scientists are engaged in industry and have contributed an estimated \$330 billion in Australia's economic output over the last 30 years.

Again, it is beyond the scope of this submission to outline the range of investment initiatives that could support research, but it is critical that Australia strengthens its research base rather than allowing it to contract because of the pandemic.

Budget priorities

- Committing to increasing Australia's R&D investment to 3% of GDP by 2030 and to reverse the decline of government R&D funding. We propose increasing R&D funding by 0.1% per year to achieve this target.
- Strategic investment in emerging knowledge-based industries like biotechnology, communications technologies such as 5G, advanced manufacturing, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, machine learning, cloud computing, quantum computing, and the application of technologies to areas such as environmental sustainability, recycling, space capability, agriculture, resources, and health care will be vital to provide competitive advantage.
- Drive private research investment alongside strategic government investment in areas of competitive strength and national priority. Confidence needs to be rebuilt to encourage private sector investment in R&D – which was already falling relative to the size of our economy before the pandemic.
- Stability of funding through policy and funding certainty to focus on finding solutions to long-term challenges rather than short-term outcomes.
- Investment in keeping scientists' skills up to date by committing to career-long learning and more modular forms of up-skilling to ensure an agile and well-trained workforce to lead us through economic recovery.
- Strong investment in public health capacity and capability at both federal and state levels.



- Investment in a research commercialisation framework that effectively transfers publicly funded research results into breakthrough products and new businesses including a flexible, adaptive, and responsive intellectual property regime.
- Investment in upgrading research infrastructure such as the Synchrotron, as well as laboratories, libraries, and computer facilities which are essential for the performance of internationally competitive research.
- Funding national science agencies in the coming term by at least current levels of investment indexed by CPI.
- Improving gender diversity in science and STEM to ensure a sustainable science and STEM workforce to meet Australia's current and future challenges.

Attracting and retaining STEM skills in the Australian Public Service

“What’s happened to APS expertise?” was a telling remark by David Thodey AO in his review of the Australian Public Service (APS) for the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. He went on to say that existing APS structures do not nurture STEM staff to meet today’s challenges.

The lack of planning for qualified STEM skills in the APS, and the failures of outsourcing have let Australians down. The previous Census outage, 2.5 million Australians opting out of the My Health Record following forty-two separate data breaches data-leaks, the failure of the COVIDSafe app, are part of a series of high-profile public examples of major technical failures.

A public service capable of delivering expert advice and capability to government, and the services which our community expects is essential. To do this the APS must employ and retain people with the right expertise in secure, rewarding jobs.

The Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Reference Committee noted early in 2020 that the ASL cap has led agencies to use more contract labour, which costs the taxpayer more in the long run. The Australian Public Service needs to not only maintain its existing workforce, but attract new technical talent, in order to research, scope, develop, oversee, and deliver the growing pipeline of nation building projects. A blunt constraint like a staffing cap does not allow this.

Rebuilding commonwealth owned, sovereign capability and capacity in science, technology, engineering, and ICT will ensure Australia has access to and control over the essential skills, experience, intellectual property and resources to look after our national interests. Ensuring the Australian Public Service is a repository for these skills will help avoid costly delays to project delivery and budget blowouts.

Each time work is contracted out rather than being conducted in house, the government makes an investment into a resource that is lost at the end of the contract. A new model is needed.

Again, it is beyond the scope of this submission to outline the range of investment initiatives that could support the APS, but it is critical that Australia strengthens the APS rather than continue down the path of diminishing our nation’s sovereign capability.



Budget priorities

- Introduce separate classification structures for technical and specialist skills across the APS. Currently these exist commonly, but haphazardly across different agencies.
- Develop a professional and technical workforce development and technology adoption plan
- Fund investment in graduate development with all agencies employing technical professionals given additional resources to invest in developing best practice graduate development programs to provide a pathway into a long-term APS technical career.
- Abolish the Average Staffing Level Cap and support an APS system that prioritises capability and desired output.
- Reduce outsourced labour, contractors and consultants which are expensive and diminish the ongoing capability of the APS. Where there is a need to outsource that cannot be avoided smarter project management and technical oversight is required with a focus: on value for money rather than lowest cost bid, a better balance between quality, sustainability, time and cost, priority for use of local, Australian content, and fair wages and employment conditions to the persons undertaking the work. The onus should be on the agency to fund and invest in skills development to avoid future outsourcing.
- Invest in Information and Communication Technology. COVID-19 has demonstrated some significant gaps in the ICT capability of some agencies. Priority should be given (in terms of financial and human resources) to investing in ICT systems and training.
- End the Wage Price Index approach and return to genuine good faith bargaining with employees on their wages. Wage freezes, wage rise deferrals and other austerity measures is counter to attempts to recognise the important work of APS staff in implementing the government's economic and COVID recovery plans. The government must ensure that APS employees are able to access fair and reasonable employment conditions and wage increases.

Investing in skills development across STEM

A critical driver of job creation, innovation and economic growth can be generated through investing in our skills base and STEM capability. It is estimated that 75 per cent of the fastest growing occupations require STEM skills and knowledge.²

The lack of up-to-date skills such as commercialisation and translation skills in science and R&D is a threat to economic growth, as is ineffective regulation and lack of access to financial resources. Specialised STEM skills are essential for sustaining economic growth. Equipping STEM professionals with the right mix of technical and enterprise skills to make them effective leaders, people-managers, communicators, entrepreneurs, and decision-makers is vital and makes economic sense.

² Australian Industry Group, *Lifting our Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) Skills*. Downloaded at http://www.utas.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0005/368546/lifting_our_stem_skills_13.pdf, February 2019.



Supporting our training system to provide continuing professional development is essential to keep qualifications up to date and develop expertise as new specialist fields emerge. By committing to career-long learning and investing in more modular forms of learning and re-skilling we can ensure an agile and well-trained workforce. As part of this, *we recommend the serious consideration of aligning micro-credentials with the Australian Qualifications Framework to ensure short forms of training can be properly recognised and accredited.*

Improving gender equity and diversity across STEM

The COVID-19 pandemic shone a spotlight on diversity in STEM with concerns that the health crisis will further entrench or widen the under-representation of women and other groups in STEM. Diversity is crucial for the continued expansion and success of STEM and in turn, the capacity of STEM to drive productivity growth.

Previous Federal Budgets have been criticised for not responding sufficiently to the impact of the pandemic on the female workforce, with much analysis suggesting the bulk of measures focused on male-dominated industries.

Gender equality is still a long way from being achieved with a gender pay gap of 20.1 per cent in full time total remuneration and 22 per cent in the Professional Scientific and Technical Services Industry; with median superannuation balances for women at retirement age 23.4 per cent lower than those for men and women still over-represented in industries in which part-time and casual roles predominate.

Budget priorities

The following issues require attention.

1. Use the industrial relations system to progress gender equity.

The federal industrial relations system has historically provided an effective mechanism for progressing gender equity and delivering access to working conditions such as flexible working arrangements, paid parental leave, carer's leave and other conditions that support balancing work and caring responsibilities.

The industrial relations system should be utilised to:

- review the historical under-valuation of work in a range of female-dominated industries.
- support measures to enhance women's access to superannuation and improved retirement savings
- enhance paid parental leave provisions ensuring men can take time off work to care for a newborn child as well as women.
- provide a right to family-friendly working hours.
- provide for superannuation for periods of parental leave
- provide for paid domestic violence leave.

2. Improve accessibility and affordability of childcare



There is evidence that the lockdowns and the move to home schooling arising from the pandemic saw female caring time increase in absolute terms and relative to that of males and that is a key factor in reducing their ability to participate in paid work.

Access to affordable and accessible childcare is a critical determinant of female workforce participation and their financial security.

Childcare that is affordable and accessible to all parents via direct subsidies to childcare centres and making more places available in cities as well as regional and rural centres will support higher levels of female workforce participation. A 4 per cent increase in the participation rate of women over the next decade would add \$25 billion dollars to the Australian economy.³

3. Increase access to education and on-going skill development

To ensure women's equal participation in the workforce, it is critical that they are adequately supported in tertiary education and receive ongoing skill development and training, particularly in STEM.

4. Reduce insecure work

With women overrepresented in the casual and part-time workforce, stronger employment protections are required in the Fair Work Act and the National Employment Standards.

5. Measures to address domestic violence.

The scale of previous Federal Budget's investment in addressing domestic violence has been widely regarded as disappointing, and we call for federal government support for domestic violence funding measures in the 2022-23 Budget that are proportionate with the scale of the problem in the community.

Pharmacy

Pharmacists have been in the frontline in efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our community. They have been asked to deliver vaccines, supply rapid antigen tests (RATs), and continue to dispense medications and other health services, for which demand has also grown.

Pharmacists were already under pressure prior to COVID. They were underpaid and under supported. Pharmacy graduates are the lowest paid graduates in Australia, with a starting salary of just \$49,600. This is below creative arts on \$52,000, tourism, hospitality, personal services, sport, and recreation on \$53,500. The lack of a clear workforce plan and reasonable remuneration and working conditions are holding back the industry.

A recent survey by Professionals Australia of more than 400 pharmacists found that 86 per cent reported the vaccine roll-out was having a "significant" or "extreme" impact on their workload. Over 90 per cent were

³ Grattan Institute (2012) Game-changers: Economic reform priorities for Australia. https://grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Game_Changers_Web.pdf [accessed 18 April 2017]



having problems sourcing RATs and almost a third were not receiving adequate supplies of the vaccinations to meet demand.

Almost four out of five said their workplace was not adequately staffed to deal with the additional demands being placed on it. Almost 50 per cent claimed their workplace did not have adequate health and safety measures in place to keep employees and the community safe, with 25 per cent of pharmacists having to buy their own PPE for work.

Again, it is beyond the scope of this submission to outline the full range of investment initiatives that are required in pharmacy, but the following are essential first steps.

Budget priorities

- Develop a workforce plan for pharmacy which deals with the ongoing wage and workload issues in the sector, which has been exacerbated by COVID-19.
- Support for an increase to the minimum starting wage for pharmacists at the Fair Work Commission as well as a new classification structure to support the development and progression of pharmacists through their career.
- Provide an allowance to employee pharmacists to encourage them to work in pharmacies in regional and rural locations across Australia.
- Source and distribute RATs free to the community and regulate to ensure COVID-19 testing is undertaken at dedicated testing sites rather than in pharmacies, in order to best protect the health and safety of the community and working pharmacists.

Workplace mental health

The profound impact of work on people's mental health is increasingly being recognized and now more than ever before, action is required to support workplaces understand and reduce risks to the mental health of employees. The deep deficiencies in our mental health sector and the limited capacity of employers to manage workplace mental health hazards in a changing workplace environment has been highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As an employer the Federal Government has workplace health and safety responsibilities to the workers that it directly employs. It can and should also take a lead role through Safe Work Australia in raising awareness and providing information and resources to protect workplace mental health in all workplaces.

The 2022-23 Federal Budget should increase support in partnership with state governments that are starting to act on this issue.

Budget priorities

- Invest in campaigns and programs that raise awareness about the importance of workplace mental health.
- Support employers and workers with information and resources to understand their obligations and rights in relation to workplace mental health.
- Fund pilot programs in all sectors to establish evidence and demonstrate workplace policies and practices that work to reduce mental health risks in the workplace.



Fair industrial regulation

All workers have been impacted by the pandemic, but some have been affected more profoundly than others. Many lost their jobs and income and at the same time housing and other costs of living increased. Making ends meet has never been more difficult for so many in the community.

Many workers that Professionals Australia represents were fortunate to keep their jobs but faced other pressures such as increased work demands, long working hours and the challenges of working from home combined with home schooling and other caring responsibilities. Others like medical scientists and pharmacists have worked excessive hours without adequate levels of additional staffing, health and safety measures and other forms of support.

Keeping the economy functioning and the community safe is in large part a credit to the hard work, adaptability, and resilience of Australia's workers.

There is still much uncertainty and anxiety in the community about how this phase in the pandemic will play out and what its impact will be on future employment opportunities and outcomes. It is therefore critical that workers' rights, entitlements, and job security should be prioritised as part of the post-pandemic economic recovery to give workers the confidence to engage fully with the economy.

Professionals Australia made a separate submission to the Senate Inquiry opposing proposed changes in the Fair Work Amendment (Supporting Australia's Economic Recovery) Bill 2020 which can be accessed [here](#) and highlights our position on creating a fairer industrial relations system.

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About us

Professionals Australia is a registered union representing over 20,000 professional employees across the country, including engineers, pharmacists, managers, IT professionals, scientists, architects and translators and interpreters.

We stand for fair, safe, and inclusive workplaces. We support and empower our members to thrive in all stages of their careers and believe that communities, business, industry, and the economy thrive best when professional employees are recognised, respected, and rewarded for their contribution.

Professionals Australia is comprised of several Divisions as outlined below.



The Association of Professional Engineers Australia's members are employed across all sectors of the Australian economy. Engineers perform design, scoping and project management roles in a diverse range of industries throughout the private and public sectors including roads, rail, water, electricity, information technology, telecommunications, construction, mining, oil, and gas exploration, defence, shipbuilding, and manufacturing.



IT Professionals Australia represents ICT professionals across the full spectrum of industries and specialisations. Our members work in a wide variety of roles including ICT trainers, ICT sales, business and systems analysts, multimedia specialists, web developers, software and applications programmers, database and systems administration, ICT security, ICT support, test engineers, telecommunications, and ICT management as employees, via labour hire agencies and as contractors and consultants.



Professional Scientists Australia represents several thousand professional scientists from a broad range of specialisations including health science, biomedical science, ecology, veterinary science, neuroscience, mental health, genetics and genomics, astronomy, biochemistry, mineral processing, environmental science, fertility science, defence research, synchrotron science, environmental science, immunology, water science and automotive design.





Professional Pharmacists Australia represents non-owner community and hospital pharmacists and pharmacy technicians.

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