

## SECURE WORK POSITION STATEMENT

Secure employment is an issue that reflects the quality, strength and sustainability of our society. Secure work is built upon the recognition of everyone's capacity to contribute meaningfully to their communities. It is about developing an economy that is accountable to the diversity of the requirements and capabilities in a community.

Secure work also gives individuals the capacity to invest in their lives and make significant contributions to their communities. Secure work guarantees people an income beyond the next pay cheque; a commitment that, in turn, allows them to plan and make decisions in the longer term. This could include buying a house, starting a business, pursuing a passion or starting a family; decisions that have significant impacts on individual lives as well as the life of a community.

People today are more likely to have a number of roles and careers, engage in lifelong learning, move in and out of the workforce (particularly where they have caring responsibilities), and remain active contributors longer than ever before. That is as true for people living with disability or other special needs as it is for the most advantaged. Access to secure and meaningful work is fundamental to developing the capacity and agility such work paths require. Facilitating the active participation of all will ultimately be to the benefit of the community.

### **Where are we now?**

Our workforce has undergone significant change in the last two decades and its shape, its operations and requirements face further and more rapid change in the near future.

We can see some of these changes in the economy, as Australia becomes less reliant on the resources, manufacturing and agricultural industries and the service industries grow. Technological developments have meant an ongoing process through which traditional skills and fields of work are automated, and the creation of employment is occurring in online spaces. The liberalisation and globalisation of the economy has also meant that workers are required to be increasingly flexible and responsive; the emergence of the sharing economy has had a significant impact on the requirements of workers as well as the expectations of consumers.

We have also seen the requirements of the workforce being reshaped by changing social factors and the long-term demographical shifts. An ageing population, increased female participation in the workforce, changing cultural mix, and growing proportion of tertiary educated people, have both changed the make-up of the workforce and the demand for services.

Finally, the results of impending climate change mean that we face making huge social and economic adjustments in order to avoid widespread disaster. The longer we wait to develop social and economic responses to this, the more challenging the problem will become. It is vital that industries and the workforce are redirected and reshaped in a way that ensures a just transition to social and environmental sustainability.

## The problem

The growing problem of insecure work in Australia reflects the fact that while employment conditions are changing in response to emerging economic challenges, this hasn't resulted in the development of a workforce, workplaces or work culture that can adequately serve the needs of individuals and communities.

Brian Howe's 2012 report into insecure work defined it as "poor quality work that provides workers with little economic security and little control over their working lives". Insecure work is characterised by unpredictable or fluctuating income; irregular hours; uncertainty over the length of the employment arrangement; a lack of basic rights and entitlements; and a lack of power to negotiate wages and conditions.<sup>1</sup>

Whereas in the past, casual or insecure arrangements might have been expected for short periods of time, perhaps before people fully entered the workforce, insecure work has become a long-term reality for many Australians today. As a result we are seeing groups of people remain on the margins of the workforce, economy and the society for their whole lives.

Australians living with disability and illness, on low incomes, or otherwise excluded for broader social and cultural reasons are particularly vulnerable to being trapped in cycles of insecure work and inadequate income. Low skill work, in particular, is associated with a marginal employment trajectory, high turnover, low income and few opportunities to develop skills.<sup>2</sup>

The impacts of insecure work are severe and extensive. The limitation or absence of workplace rights and entitlements means that employers have less liability. Employees are more likely to accept poor conditions or exploitative arrangements, and are also less likely to raise concerns about health and safety. They face greater risks of injury or incapacitation. The exploitation of international students and migrants, who are particularly vulnerable in these circumstances, is a demonstrative example. Furthermore, most people want to seek opportunities for themselves and their families, to participate in their communities, to add something to the world around them. But ongoing work insecurity militates against that: it offers few opportunities for people to further develop their capacity, skills and interests at work; and little scope to do so outside of work either.

Research across the Anglicare network in 2014 identified the value of recognising the individual circumstances of disadvantaged job seekers, and of harnessing their aspirations. It also points to the lasting value of building sustainable jobs in the line of sight for these job seekers and providing them with ongoing support to stay in work.<sup>3</sup>

Public policy which does not prioritise investment in the most disadvantaged and vulnerable members of the society is sentencing them, at best, to a life of insecure, transitory employment and the corrosive inequity which comes with it.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Council of Trade Unions. 2012. '[Lives on Hold: Unlocking the Potential of Australia's Workforce](#)' Report of the Independent Inquiry into Insecure Work in Australia, chair Brian Howe

<sup>2</sup> Anglicare NSW South, NSW West & ACT. 2014. '[Limiting Futures: Youth Unemployment in the ACT](#)'

<sup>3</sup> Goodwin-Smith, I. Hutchison, C. '[Beyond supply and demand: addressing the complexities of workforce exclusion in Australia](#)'

Secure work has another context. There are broad social and economic benefits when people at risk of marginal attachment to the workforce find high quality jobs. And there are large areas of social, community and environmental need that are not being met, or met well. The issue of insecure work highlights the critical need to support important and valuable work, through the development of industries that are both responsive to the needs of our communities and ensure adequate conditions and security in employment.

Aged and community care is one such area of growth where the Anglicare network is involved. Currently, the sector is in a position where the new consumer focus of aged and community care risks accentuating the part time and low pay nature of employment while increasing the responsibility and the level of risk carried by worker. There is evidence that services with a strong value base and an ethic of care for consumers and carers alike provide growth opportunities for staff and provide high quality care.<sup>4</sup> However, such an approach is not supported by the low cost, “just in time”, commoditised view of labour which is a feature of our emerging industrial landscape.

### **What should we do?**

If Australia is to maintain a robust and inclusive society, then the creation of secure work and life opportunities for people at risk of social and economic exclusion is essential. We need to build strong, sustainable local economies that are accountable to individuals and communities.

#### The creation of secure work for people across society rests on:

1. workplace law and regulation that
  - a. ensure definitions of employee/employer relationships capture indirect/disguised forms of employment
  - b. contains an inclusive set of minimum standards to protect all employees
  - c. extends portability of entitlements (such as long service leave) to industries such as construction, retail and community services.
  
2. life-long education in the workplace and the public domain that
  - a. allows people to develop skills across their careers, especially transferrable skills and competencies, rather than just at entry-level
  - b. ensures access to high quality education for people at every stage of their life,
  - c. supports local communities and services to create education and training opportunities in new and emerging needs and industries.
  
- Note: The principles of needs based education need to be sustained beyond early school years - investing in the skills of those who are least competitive in the labour market will result in the biggest return.
  
3. Employment and enterprise development accountable to local communities through
  - a. support for community focussed work creation
  - b. partnership funding for social enterprises

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<sup>4</sup> Neilson, Brent (2015) “Outcomes Plus: The added value provided by community social services” New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services. Available from: <http://nzccss.org.nz/publications/#publication--search>

- c. further development of Social Investment Bonds
  - d. the facilitation of work cooperatives
  - e. government led adoption of ethical procurement principles that take on board social and economic impacts locally and regionally
  - f. adequate public funding for essential social services.
4. A responsive social safety net that
- a. recognises people make many different transitions to work throughout their lives, anticipates the risks of these transitions and – rather than penalise people for these transitions - aims to support people smoothly through them. Transitions include moving from education to partial and full employment, into and out of cultural and family responsibilities, into and out of semi-retirement, illness, family breakdown, natural disasters, and simple loss of employment.
  - b. directs employment services for disadvantaged and special needs groups towards local job creation that recognises the circumstances and the aspirations of the job seekers.
  - c. increases Newstart and Youth allowances. Basic income inadequacy means that people’s savings and resilience can be destroyed through short periods of unemployment, and their capacity to get back to work is undermined.

## Resources

Anglicare Australia. 2015. [‘Persistent Insecurity: Submission to Senate Economics References Committee Inquiry into Economic Security for Women in Retirement’](#)

Anglicare Australia. 2015. [‘Common wealth’](#). Submission in response to Re:think Better tax, better Australia discussion paper

Anglicare Australia. 2015. [‘Low Expectations’](#) submission to Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee for inquiry into Social Services Legislation Amendment (Youth Unemployment) Bill 2015

Anglicare Australia. 2014. [‘Pathways to participation’](#) Submission to Social Security Budget Measures Inquiry of Community Affairs Legislation Committee


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Anglicare NSW South, NSW West & ACT. 2014. [Limiting Futures: Youth Unemployment in the ACT](#)

Goodwin-Smith, I. Hutchison, C. [‘Beyond supply and demand: addressing the complexities of workforce exclusion in Australia’](#)

King, S. Kemp, B. Bellamy, J. 2015, ‘The Risk of Deep and Persistent Disadvantage’ in Anglicare Australia (ed) [2015 State of the Family Report: Who is being left behind?](#)

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