



Professionals Australia



**Inquiry into wage theft in
Western Australia**

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Submission**

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Translators and Interpreters Australia (a division of Professionals Australia) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Western Australia's Government Inquiry into Wage Theft.

Professionals Australia is an organisation registered under the Fair Work Act 2009 representing over 25,000 professionals including professional engineers, scientists, veterinarians, surveyors, architects, pharmacists, information technology professionals, managers and translating and interpreting professionals throughout Australia. Professionals Australia is the only industrial association to represent exclusively the industrial and professional interests of these professionals.

We know that the work of interpreters is widely misunderstood and often undervalued. They perform a vital service for the community and contribute their expert skills in a diverse range of settings. They are a means to providing access and equity for those who face language barriers to full participation in the community and they play a vital role in maximising the social and economic benefits of Australia's cultural diversity.

More than 90% of interpreting services in Western Australia are provided under labour hire agencies. The labour hire business model for translators and interpreters is to rent out workers, usually at lower pay with no job security.

The Western Australian government employs interpreters through labour hire agencies for the public sector and government agencies ranging from education, health, justice, child protection and prisons. The WA Government buys language services in a way that encourages language service providers and government agencies to underpay interpreters.

As a result of the WA government employment model which is used to employ interpreters in WA health services, interpreters are being underpaid (as health services is a significant employer of interpreters). Under the Federal Award for Health Support Services, interpreters working in hospitals must be paid a minimum of three hours, and no less than \$91.66.

Suppliers of language services under the [Common Use Arrangement](#) (CUA) charge WA government agencies as little as \$95 for a minimum 60 minute call out. After expenses and profits, suppliers cannot pay interpreters what the Federal Award dictates. As labour hire employees, interpreters are then expected to cover costs of travel and parking.

Professionals Australia members have raised concerns with the current model including the Office of Multicultural Interests, where we are currently continuing discussions on how to resolve this.

As government is the main consumer of language services in Western Australia, they can play a significant role in improving the industry and correcting the take home pay of interpreters.

Professionals Australia has a few options that would alleviate these issues

Option 1: Government owned language services agency

The government can choose to supply all government language services via its own language service agency. This option maintains the benefits of an agency but allows the government to effectively achieve quality and efficiency through more direct means.

In the short term the government may be constrained by existing contractual arrangements, but as they expire could move to this model. Prior to contract expiring progress can be made through contract variations.

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Option 2: Manage procurement process

The WA government can seek to improve the industry through a managed procurement process. Future procurement contracts can specify the minimum wages and conditions and other requirements. In the short term the government can make improvements by amending existing contracts. As experienced in Victoria, the language service providers are happy to agree to the amendments when additional funding is available.

The amendments to the contracts can include:

- minimum payments including a classification structure encouraging higher credentialled interpreters
- travel arrangements

We believe that the issues that interpreters face in relation to underpayment can be successfully addressed through ongoing discussions relating to the above options.