Independent Review of the
Commonwealth Parliamentary Support System

Issues Paper – Overview of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Support System

July 2026

ParliamentaryReview@finance.gov.au

Support Services

If this paper raises concerns for you, please see below for available support services:

For people currently working or volunteering in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces (CPWs) across Australia, as well as former parliamentarians, staff and volunteers of CPWs (not limited by location):

- **PWSS Counselling** – free, confidential, in-house counselling and support for work and personal issues.
    - Access via Suite M2.105, support@pwss.gov.au, SMS 0487 112 755, or call 1800 747 977 Option 1 - 24/7

- **Employee Assistance Program** – Current employees engaged under the *Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984* and parliamentarians, as well as their immediate family and household members, have free access to TELUS Health counsellors and supports for work and personal issues.
    - Access via 1300 360 364 or via PWSS website using the following details:
        - **Username**: pwss
        - **Password**: Wellbeing

- **Culturally appropriate support for First Nations people** – a dedicated support line is available with clinicians who either identify as, or who have in-depth cultural awareness and experience supporting, First Nations people.
    - Access via TELUS Health on 1800 816 152

- **Before Blue** – an early intervention mental health program which provides tools and support to manage stress, build resilience, and enhance overall mental wellbeing.
    - Call 03 9810 6100 or register via the website using company code **PWSS-B4B**.

Current employees engaged under the *Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984* can also access the following service:

- **Early Intervention Program** – available if an employee sustains a work-related physical or psychological illness or injury and includes up to $5,000 to reimburse out of pocket medical costs incurred accessing relevant treatment.
    - Access via PWSS at support@pwss.gov.au or whs@pwss.gov.au, SMS 0487 112 755 or call 1800 747 977

For the broader community:

LifeLine Australia
Crisis support and suicide prevention
Ph: 13 11 14
SMS: 0477 13 11 14
Website: www.lifeline.org.au

Suicide Call Back Service
Counselling to people affected by suicide
Ph: **1300 659 467**
Website: www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au

1800 Respect
Sexual assault, domestic and family counselling
Ph: **1800 737 732**
SMS: 0458 737 732
Website: www.1800respect.org.au

MensLine
Counselling service and support for men
Ph: **1300 789 978**
Website: www.mensline.org.au

Beyond Blue
Mental health information and support
Ph: **1300 224 636**
Website: www.beyondblue.org.au

Q Life
Anonymous, free LGBTIQ+ peer support and referral
Ph: **1800 184 527** (3.00pm to midnight)
Website: www.qlife.org.au

Introduction

The Special Minister of State, Senator the Hon Don Farrell, has established an Independent Review of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Support System to ensure it is fit for purpose and meets community expectations.

The Minister has appointed Mr Mathew Jose and Ms Rachael Thompson to conduct the Independent Review.

The Independent Review is examining the legislative frameworks that support the work of Commonwealth parliamentarians and their staff, including the work of agencies that perform functions under those frameworks.

The Independent Review is also examining the implementation of the Australian Human Rights Commission's *Set the Standard* report, and the safety and security arrangements for parliamentarians and their staff. As part of its work, the Independent Review will consider recommendations arising from previous relevant reviews, including the *Independent Review of Resourcing in Parliamentarian Offices*.

We welcome submissions from all in the Australian community, particularly from those with experience working in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Support System.

Please note the Independent Review will not examine individual workplace conduct or expenses matters. The Independent Review will also not examine operational matters that are the responsibility of the Australian Federal Police and other law enforcement and security agencies.

Further information on the Independent Review is available via the following link: Independent Review of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Support System.

Further information on the Parliamentary Business Resources framework is available via the following link: Parliamentary Business Resources framework.

Terms of Reference

Introduction
The Independent Review of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Support System will be conducted by Independent Reviewers who will examine the arrangements that support parliamentarians and their staff to ensure these continue to be fit for purpose and accord with community expectations.

Parliament is critical to Australia's democracy and parliamentarians must be properly enabled to effectively serve their communities and the national interest.

Conduct of the Independent Review
The Independent Reviewers will consult widely and prepare a report containing findings and recommendations for the Special Minister of State within 18 months.

The report will be tabled in each House of Parliament.

A taskforce has been established in the Department of Finance to provide dedicated secretariat support to the independent function of the Independent Review.

Scope
The Independent Review will be wide ranging and will include:

- statutory reviews of the *Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017*, the *Parliamentary Workplace Support Service Act 2023* and the *Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984*
- a review of the implementation of the Australian Human Rights Commission's *Set the Standard* report; and
- a review of the arrangements that support the safety and security of parliamentarians and their staff.

The Independent Review will also consider recommendations arising from associated reviews, including the *Independent Review of Resourcing in Parliamentarian Offices*.

The Independent Reviewers will not make findings about any individual workplace conduct or expenses matter.

Objective of the Independent Review

The Independent Review is an opportunity to look at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Support System as a whole and consider what changes are required to ensure it better meets the needs of parliamentarians and their staff both now and into the future.

Previous reviews have looked at the system in part, often in constrained timeframes and in response to particular events.

The Independent Review's key objective is to recommend better ways to support Commonwealth parliamentarians and their staff with a modern, flexible and efficient system that helps keeps them safe, gives them the resources they need, helps them do their complex work in our democracy and meets the public's expectations for transparency and accountability.

Purpose of this Issues Paper

This paper has been published to assist the Independent Review to develop its thinking on key issues.

The paper has been designed to elicit views from current and former Commonwealth parliamentarians and staff, others with experience working in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces, agencies providing services under the current framework, academics and civil society groups with an interest in public administration, and members of the broader Australian community.

The questions asked in this paper are not an indication of any settled views of the Independent Review or a guide to the content of the final report.

Further Issues Papers may be published over the course of the Independent Review.

How to make a submission

There is an emphasis in this paper on some of the key questions that emerge from the Independent Review's terms of reference.

While submitters are encouraged to respond to some or all of the key questions in this paper, submissions are also welcome on all matters relevant to the terms of reference. In responding to the consultation questions in this paper, we encourage you to expand on your responses and provide examples or opportunities for improvement of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Support System where relevant.

Submissions that are not relevant to the terms of reference will not be considered.

Responses to this Issues Paper can be provided:

> Via our webform, which can be found here: Public Consultation on the Independent Review of the Parliamentary Support System | Department of Finance
>
> Via email to ParliamentaryReview@finance.gov.au; or
>
> Via letter to Independent Review of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Support System, Parliamentary Review Taskforce, Department of Finance, 1 Canberra Avenue, Forrest ACT 2603

We encourage submissions to be provided by close of business on **Friday, 21 August 2026**. The Independent Review will also accept relevant submissions after this date.

Publication of submissions

We intend to publish submissions at the end of the consultation period. We ask that you indicate whether or not you consent to publication when you provide your submission. Submissions received without express permission to publish will not be published.

You can provide a submission under your name or anonymously.

Respondents who would like part of their submission to remain confidential should provide this information marked as such in a separate attachment. We encourage you to contact ParliamentaryReview@finance.gov.au for further information and advice before submitting such material.

Notwithstanding the above, submissions may be subject to release including under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982,* or in response to requests from the Parliament. Personal information shared through the consultation will be treated in accordance with the *Privacy Act 1988*.

We reserve the right to not publish submissions that contain personal information, inappropriate or defamatory content, are not relevant to the terms of reference for the Independent Review or which may otherwise be unlawful to publish. We may also redact parts of published submissions if appropriate.

The Commonwealth Parliament

The Commonwealth Parliament is established under the Australian Constitution and comprises the King (represented by the Governor-General), the Senate and the House of Representatives.

The Commonwealth Parliament makes laws for the people of Australia, represents the diversity of views in the Australian community, and both forms the Government and holds it to account.

The Commonwealth Parliament has been at the centre of our democratic system of government for more than 125 years, helping Australia establish and maintain its status as one of the world's oldest, most stable and most successful democracies.

In 1910, Australia's second Prime Minister, Alfred Deakin, told a crowd in Ballarat, Victoria, that "all your governments are your government, and of your making". While making an argument that voters in the new Commonwealth should look beyond state loyalties, Deakin also expressed a fundamental truth of our democratic system – Governments, and the Parliaments in which they are formed, belong to the people.

It is in all our interests that every parliamentarian is supported to perform their democratic functions to the best of their ability.

The number of parliamentarians who sit in the Commonwealth Parliament has changed over time. There are 76 Senators representing six states and two territories in the Senate, and 150 Members representing individual electorates in the House of Representatives.

The role of parliamentarians has also changed over time, expanding to meet the needs and expectations of citizens, the growth in our population and the complexity of Australia's economy and society in a changing world.

Commonwealth parliamentarians are asked to address the issues that affect individuals, families and businesses, provide support to local community organisations, and translate local needs into national legislation and funding programs.

They are also expected to participate in public debate on local, national and international issues in the Parliament and in a 24-hour media environment, while publishing informative and engaging social media content.

We expect them to set out a vision and design policies for Australia's future, while working to solve problems for constituents by navigating a complex bureaucracy, providing advice and assistance on matters like pensions, child support, immigration and tax laws.

Ministers, shadow ministers and other office-holders shoulder additional responsibilities.

Commonwealth parliamentarians are supported by staff who work for them in their electorate and parliamentary offices, and as they travel around the country and internationally. All parliamentarians are provided with the same number of electorate staff. The Government determines how many additional personal staff are provided for ministers, shadow ministers, additional office holders and crossbench parliamentarians.

These staff play a unique and important role supporting their employing parliamentarian to perform their responsibilities as elected officials. Staff of parliamentarians are critical in addressing often-complex issues raised by constituents in their electorates as well as helping their parliamentarian engage in issues of national interest.

Like parliamentarians, staff roles have changed over time and have become increasingly complex. These roles are necessarily different to the roles of others in the system, like members of the Australian Public Service. Staff roles are often demanding, particularly for staff playing a frontline role in electorate offices, and in offices in remote or regional areas, far from Canberra. Despite these challenges, staff often consider these roles to be rewarding and value the opportunity to support their parliamentarian in making a difference for the Australian community.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Support System

In order to meet the needs of their communities and constituencies and perform their roles as national law-makers, Commonwealth parliamentarians are required to be visible, accessible, informed and able to communicate effectively.

The places where parliamentarians work range from offices in their electorate and Parliament House, to parliamentary chambers and committee rooms, public streets

and local small businesses, school grounds and graduation ceremonies, community listening posts in local halls, and political party events where they debate and decide policy and raise campaign funds. Like many Australians, the home office or the dining table can be their workplace too.

Stakeholder meetings take place in Parliament, offices, business premises, community buildings and homes. Parliamentary committee hearings take place in the Australian Parliament, other Parliaments, local government offices and hotel function rooms around the country. Media interviews can be in studios, on street corners and on sports fields.

Commonwealth parliamentarians and their staff travel to Canberra for a significant part of each year for parliamentary sittings. Ministers, shadow ministers, other party leaders and spokespeople and their staff all engage in even more travel around the country. Cars, airports and aeroplanes become workplaces while travelling. Being away from family and friends for extended periods has its own cost for every parliamentarian and staff member.

Being visible and accessible demands that parliamentarians and their staff are protected from threats to themselves and their families. Parliamentarians and their staff must be and feel safe when going about parliamentary business.

Because politicians are elected by the Australian people, their jobs and those of their staff are inherently, and deliberately, insecure. They can lose their jobs after an election, or when ministries and shadow ministries are reshuffled.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Support System describes the web of laws, frameworks and agencies that support the work of Commonwealth parliamentarians and their staff to conduct parliamentary business. These support services include remuneration, staff, travel allowances, provision of electorate offices and Commonwealth Parliamentary Offices, allowances to maintain their electorate office and its activities, security, insurance and legal assistance.

This system matters because it enables Senators and Members to represent their communities and perform vital democratic functions as parliamentarians, parliamentary office holders, ministers and shadow ministers.

In accordance with the terms of reference, the Independent Review is specifically examining the operation of the *Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017*, the *Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984*, the *Parliamentary Workplace Support Service Act 2023* and associated regulations.

The way these Acts interact with other legislation, such as the *Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority Act 2017* and the *National Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2022*, is of interest to the Independent Review.

The multiple agencies that provide services to Commonwealth parliamentarians and their staff are also part of the system subject to the Independent Review. Like parliamentarians and their staff, administrators are also grappling with the complexity of the system and the impact of this complexity on service delivery to parliamentarians and their staff.

The Independent Review has also been asked to examine and report on the implementation of recommendations made in the landmark *Set the Standard* report by the then Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins AO, and current arrangements for managing the safety and security of Commonwealth parliamentarians and their staff. Both of these matters are fundamental parts of the support system that enable parliamentarians to perform their role and are inextricably linked to the broader subject matter of the Independent Review.

The Independent Review has been asked to consider recommendations arising from associated reviews, including the *Independent Review of Resourcing in Parliamentarian Offices,* noting the important contributions made by current and former staff and parliamentarians to those reviews, and any actions taken since to address the recommendations.

Consultation Questions

System overview

1. Is the Commonwealth Parliamentary Support System working effectively as a whole?

2. What parts of the system work well and what parts of the system require improvement?

3. Is the current system meeting community expectations?

4. What changes need to be made to the existing system to ensure it can meet the needs of parliamentarians and their staff into the future?

Parliamentary Business Resources

A range of resources are provided to parliamentarians to enable them to do their jobs. Most, but not all, are provided under the Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017. The policy intent of the Act is to establish a principles-based framework that governs the use of public resources by parliamentarians in connection with their parliamentary business.

5. Is the system that provides resources to parliamentarians (including the *Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017* and associated instruments) fit for purpose?

6. Does the framework enable parliamentarians and their staff to access the right support, at the right time, including when their roles change, such as entering and leaving the Parliament?

7. Is the framework easy-to-understand by parliamentarians, their staff and citizens alike?

8. Is the "principles-based" system operating as intended? Would strengthening the framework's principles-based approach better respond to rapid changes in society, technology and community expectations?

Staff

Staff appointed under the Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984 support parliamentarians in all aspects of their work, including in electorate offices. Ministers, shadow ministers and parliamentary office holders are also supported by staff. The role of all parliamentarians' staff has grown more complex and demanding over time.

9. Do current employment arrangements within the *Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984* and its associated regulations and framework reflect the best practice of modern Australian workplaces?

10. Does the framework appropriately support the life cycle of a staff member, including commencement, development, retention and termination?

11. Does the current framework support staffing as a professional career pathway?

12. Does the current framework provide sufficient support and training for staff in electorate offices? Are these arrangements working in practice?

13. Does the framework provide sufficient support for Commonwealth parliamentarians in their role as employers?

Safe workplaces

Every Australian is entitled to a safe workplace. The safety of Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces has been the subject of intense scrutiny in recent years, including during the conduct and implementation of the Set the Standard inquiry and report.

14. Are Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces, in all their forms, safe places to work?

15. Are Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces safer as a result of the implementation of the *Set the Standard* report recommendations?

16. Is the Commonwealth Parliament now setting the standard for the prevention and handling of bullying, sexual harassment and sexual assault?

17. Has the establishment of new institutional arrangements, such as the Parliamentary Workplace Support Service, the Independent Parliamentary Standards Commission and parliamentary codes of conduct, made a difference to those who work in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces?

18. Do arrangements that assess and address the safety of Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces meet the expectations of those who work in them and the broader Australian community?

19. The *Set the Standard* report included specific reference to the experiences of women, First Nations people, people of colour, the LGBTQI community, people with disability, and other marginalised groups in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces. If you are member of one or more of these groups, how do you view your safety as a Commonwealth parliamentarian or member of staff?

Security arrangements

Parliamentarians and their staff work in an environment of robust debate but must be safe from threats and acts of physical and psychological harm, including at their electorate offices, online and at public events.

20. Do Commonwealth parliamentarians and their staff feel safe from external threats when working at APH, in their electorate offices, when travelling on official business, at public events and at home?

21. How have online threats, intimidation and harassment impacted the ability of parliamentarians and their staff to do their jobs?

22. Has the security environment for Commonwealth parliamentarians and staff changed and have safety and security arrangements kept pace? What do you see as the drivers of any changes to the security environment?

You have reached the end of the document. For further information on the Independent Review of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Support System, visit https://www.finance.gov.au/publications/parliamentary-services-reports-reviews/independent-review-commonwealth-parliamentary-support-system