

28 July 2009

Media release

Polling reveals Australian attitudes towards federalism

Seven in 10 Australians support a Commonwealth takeover of public hospitals, according to polling released by The Australia Institute today.

There is also widespread public support for the federal government to take full responsibility for environmental protection (including water), infrastructure, public schools and even gambling.

Rural respondents were more likely than city dwellers to support a takeover of hospitals.

The representative survey of 1,000 adult Australians is part of the Institute's wider program of research into the role of government.

"The federalist system was designed more than a century ago when there were much greater differences between states," said Institute Research Fellow Josh Fear.

"Our polling shows Australians are questioning the sense of having eight separate systems in crucial areas of government responsibility. While we should expect national consistency, by definition some states fare worse than others under the current arrangements."

The survey results suggest that the notion of 'cooperative federalism', under which the states and Commonwealth work effectively together on common problems, is a temporary fix rather than a permanent solution.

"There has been a polite silence from the states on critical issues at COAG for some time now," said Mr Fear.

"There appears to be an unwillingness to challenge Commonwealth policy decisions that will affect state budgets in vital areas such as health and education. For example, the proposed Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme offers the states no compensation for the additional costs it will impose on them.

"With 70 per cent of Australians supporting a Commonwealth takeover of public hospitals, state premiers may be quick to rediscover their voice at the next COAG meeting," concluded Mr Fear.

Notes for editors

1. Survey result tables are provided overleaf
2. A recent paper by The Australia Institute, *State of Denial: the impact of the CPRS on state government budgets*, revealed that the CPRS will impose around \$2.1 billion worth of costs per year on the state governments

3. 72.1% of rural/remote respondents support Commonwealth takeover of *public hospitals* compared to 68.6% of metropolitan respondents
4. 55.2% of rural respondents support Commonwealth takeover of *water* compared to 65.8% of metropolitan respondents

In your opinion, should responsibility for these issues be transferred to the Federal Government from State Governments?

	Environmental protection	Public hospitals	Major infrastructure, like roads and ports	Water	Public schools	Poker machines and other forms of gambling	Public transport
Yes	73.2%	69.7%	64.1%	62.5%	57.7%	47.5%	42.6%
No	17.6%	22.4%	28.0%	28.6%	34.2%	37.3%	48.1%
Not sure	9.2%	7.9%	7.9%	8.9%	8.1%	15.2%	9.3%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Support for Commonwealth takeover

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas*	ACT*	NT*	Aus
Environmental protection	74.6%	66.9%	76.0%	74.3%	73.3%	73.9%	93.8%	80.0%	73.2%
Public hospitals	72.8%	66.9%	75.0%	56.4%	66.7%	78.3%	68.8%	70.0%	69.7%
Major infrastructure, like roads and ports	67.9%	65.7%	64.0%	52.5%	58.7%	60.9%	62.5%	70.0%	64.1%
Water	68.8%	61.7%	58.0%	54.5%	68.0%	39.1%	68.8%	50.0%	62.5%
Public schools	60.9%	53.6%	62.0%	51.5%	54.7%	60.9%	50.0%	60.0%	57.7%
Poker machines and other forms of gambling	46.5%	49.6%	47.5%	39.6%	54.7%	60.9%	37.5%	40.0%	47.5%
Public transport	50.2%	41.1%	37.0%	38.6%	38.7%	39.1%	31.3%	40.0%	42.6%

* Due to small cell size results from Tasmania, ACT and Northern Territory are not necessarily statistically representative

For media enquiries, please contact:

Serena Rogers 0421 759 262