

Polling - School chaplains

November 2023

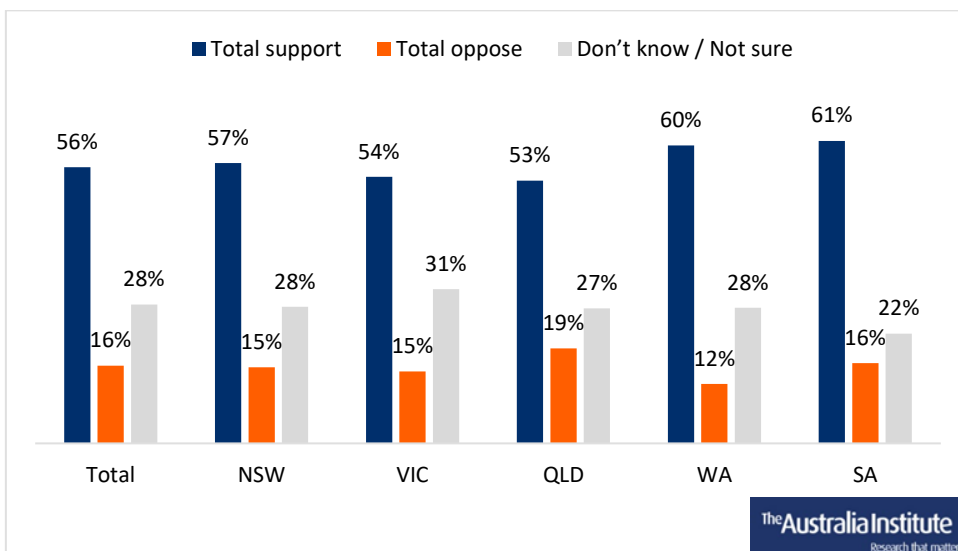
Key results

The Australia Institute surveyed a sample of 1,379 Australians about the hiring conditions for pastoral care workers in Australian public schools.

The results show:

- Seven in 10 Australians (71%) do not know the Federal Government funds a program in which people providing pastoral care services to students are hired on the basis of religion.
- Two in three Australians (66%) agree that pastoral care workers should be employed on the basis of qualifications and experience only, and not be required to have the endorsement of a religious group (18% disagree).
- Over half of Australians (56%) support their state or territory hiring pastoral support workers directly – rather than through a third-party agency – which may impose religious belief or faith conditions on employment.
 - More Australians don't know or are unsure (28%) than disagree with the proposal (16%).

Figure 1: Schools should employ pastoral support workers directly, by state



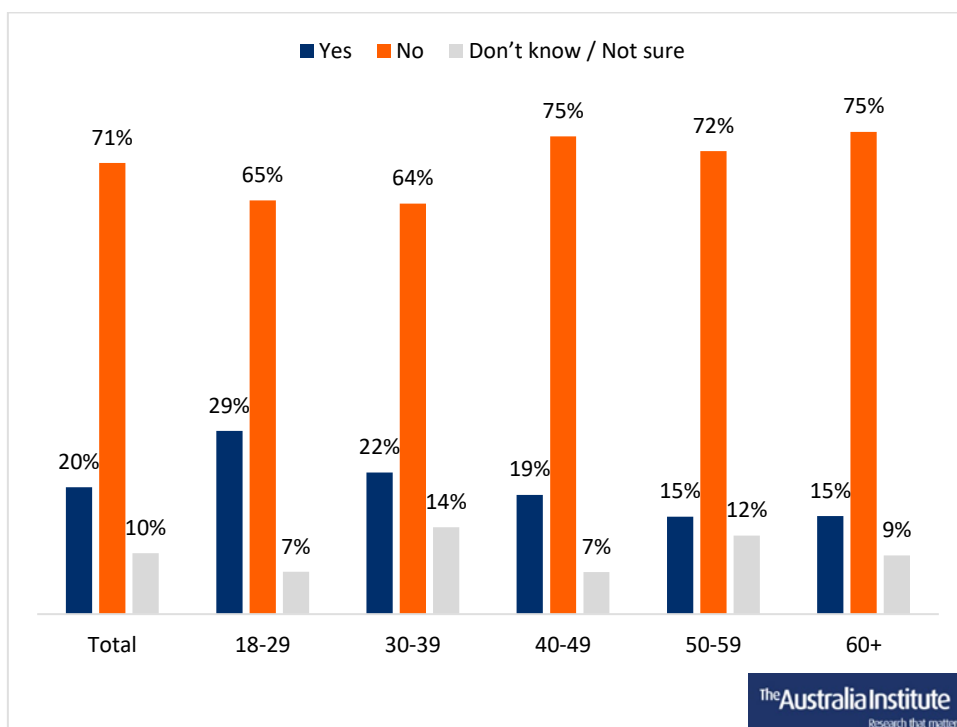
Respondents were shown the following:

The Federal Government’s National Student Wellbeing Program funds schools to employ a part-time person to provide pastoral care services to students. Schools can choose to call these workers either a ‘chaplain’ or a ‘student wellbeing officer’: they do the same work and the only difference is that a chaplain must be endorsed by a religious group. The job description makes it clear the role is not a religious one.

They were then asked if, before now, they knew the Federal Government funds a program in which people doing non-religious work in public schools are hired on the basis of religion.

- Seven in 10 respondents (71%) say they did not know the Federal Government funds a program in which people providing pastoral care services to students are hired on the basis of religion.
- One in five respondents (20%) say they did know the Federal Government funds a program in which people providing pastoral care services to students are hired on the basis of religion.
- Knowledge of the program was highest amongst younger age groups. 29% of those aged 18–29 say they knew about the program (65% say they did not), but only 15% of those aged 50 and older say they knew about it (over 70% say they did not).

Figure 2: Knowledge of workers in public schools hired on the basis of religion, by age

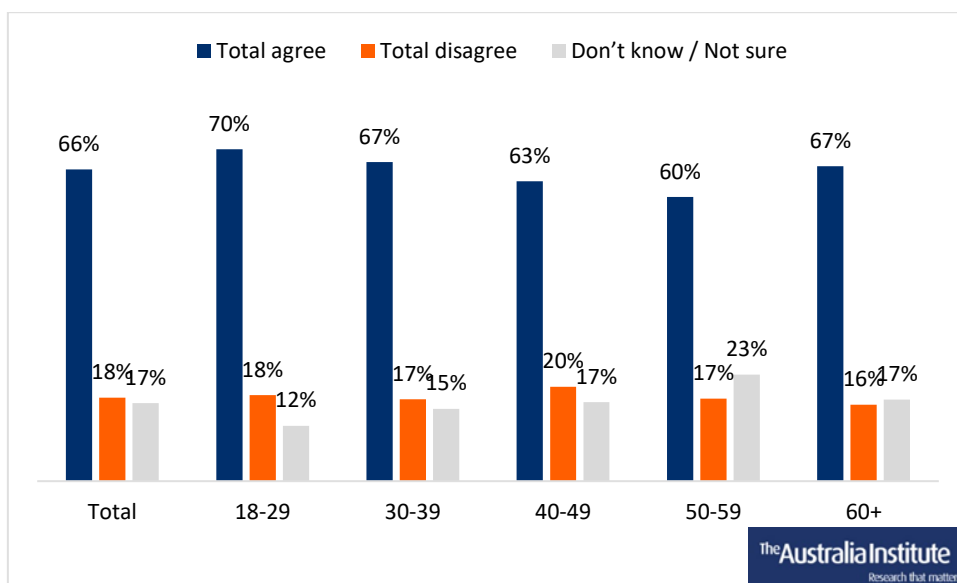


Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with each of three statements relating to pastoral care workers being required to gain religious endorsement in order to work in public schools.

“Public schools should hire pastoral care workers on the basis of qualifications and experience only, and not require them to have the endorsement of a religious group.”

- Two in three Australians (66%) agree that pastoral care workers should be employed on the basis of qualifications and experience only and not be required to have the endorsement of a religious group.
 - One in five (18%) disagree.
- The results are largely consistent across age groups (60–70% agree).
- Across all voting intentions, a majority of voters agree, with Labor voters showing the most agreement (70%), followed by Green and Independent/Other voters (both 65%), Coalition voters (63%), then One Nation voters (59%).

Figure 3: Pastoral care workers should not require religious endorsement, by age



“Pastoral care workers should be endorsed by a religious group before they are allowed to work in a public school.”

- Just under half of Australians (48%) disagree that pastoral care workers should be endorsed by a religious group before they are allowed to work in a public school.
 - One in three Australians (32%) agree.

“There should be no religious requirement for public school jobs that are funded by the Federal Government.”

- Three in four Australians (75%) agree that there should be no religious requirement for public school jobs that are funded by the Federal Government.
 - One in seven (14%) disagree.

The first and second statements concerned the same question – whether there should be a religious endorsement/requirement for employment in public schools – but framed in opposite ways. In both cases, more respondents agreed that no endorsement should be required than the opposite, but the effect was less pronounced when expressed in the negative (66% agree public schools should not require pastoral care workers to have the endorsement of a religious group; 48% disagreed that pastoral care workers should be endorsed by a religious group).

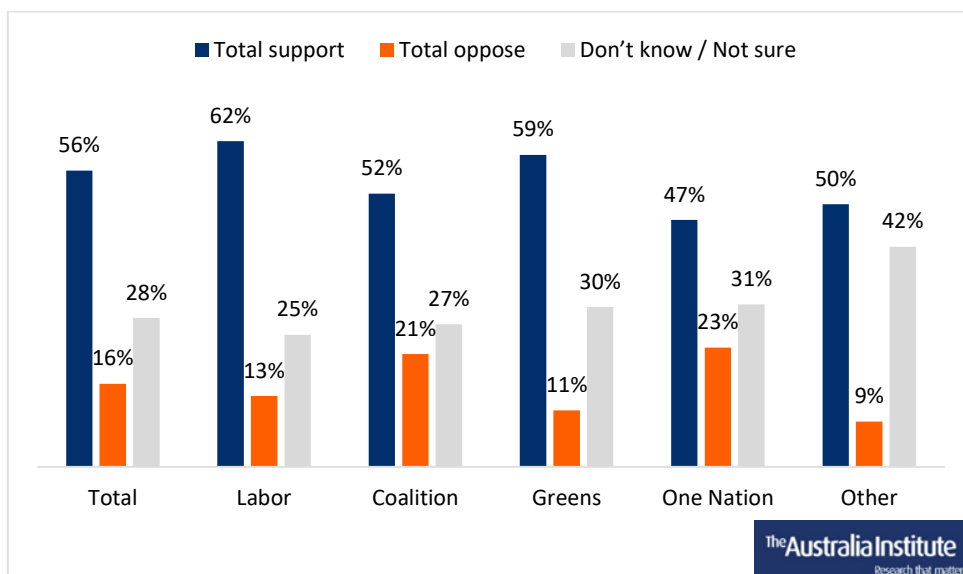
Respondents were shown the following:

The ACT Government requires its public schools to hire pastoral care workers directly – rather than through a third-party agency – to ensure that applicants are not subject to conditions that may be imposed by agencies, including religious belief and faith conditions.

They were then asked whether they support or oppose their state or territory public schools being required to hire pastoral care workers directly rather than through a third-party agency.

- Over half of Australians (56%) support their state or territory public schools hiring pastoral support workers directly – rather than through a third-party agency – to ensure that applicants are not subject to conditions that may be imposed by agencies, including religious belief and faith.
 - More Australians don't know or are unsure (28%) than disagree with the proposal (16%).
- There is majority support in all five larger states: 61% in South Australia, 60% in Western Australia, 57% in New South Wales, 54% in Victoria and 53% in Queensland.
- Support across voting intentions is highest from Labor voters (62%), followed by Greens voters (59%), then Coalition voters (52%), with the lowest amount of support coming from One Nation voters (47%). Support amongst Independent/Other voters is 50%, yet 42% do not know or are unsure (the highest of any voting intention).

Figure 4: Schools should employ pastoral support workers directly, by voting intention



For this question, a high number of respondents answered “Don’t know / Not sure”. This may suggest that this is an issue that most Australians have not yet engaged with (even some of those who answered that they support or oppose the proposal).

Method

Between 31 October and 3 November 2023, The Australia Institute surveyed 1,002 adults living in Australia, online through Dynata's panel, with nationally representative samples by gender, age group and state/territory. A further 377 South Australians were sampled to produce more precise results, but weighting was used to ensure that people from this state were not over-represented in national results.

Voting crosstabs show voting intentions for the House of Representatives. Those who were undecided were asked which way they were leaning; these leanings are included in voting intention crosstabs.

Furthermore, between 31 October and 6 November 2023, 526 adults living in South Australia were surveyed online through Dynata's panel, with representative samples by gender and age group. This resulted in an effective sample size of 586. 377 of those adults contributed to the national totals. The margin of error (95% confidence level) for the state results is $\pm 4\%$. Voting crosstabs show voting intentions for the House of Representatives. Those who were undecided were asked which way they were leaning; these leanings are included in voting intention crosstabs.

The research is compliant with the [Australian Polling Council Quality Mark standards](#). The long methodology disclosure statement follows.

Long disclosure statement

The results were weighted by three variables (gender, age group and state or territory) based on Australian Bureau of Statistics "[National, state and territory population](#)" data, using the raking method. Those who answered the gender identity question as "Non-binary", "I use a different term", or "Prefer not to answer" had their responses included with females for the purpose of reporting, due to constraints from weighting data availability. This resulted in an effective sample size of 1,059.

The margin of error (95% confidence level) for the national results is $\pm 3\%$.

Results are shown only for larger states.

Voting intention questions appeared just after the initial demographic questions, before policy questions. Lower house voting intention was asked first, followed by upper house voting intention. Respondents who answered "Don't know / Not sure" for voting intention were then asked a leaning question; these leanings are included in voting intention crosstabs. "Coalition" includes separate responses for Liberal and National. "Other" refers to Independent/Other, and minor parties in cases where they were included in the voting intention but represent too small a sample to be reported separately in the crosstabs.



**Australian
Polling Council
Quality Mark**

Detailed results

No preceding questions in the poll are expected to have influenced the results of the questions published here.

The Federal Government’s National Student Wellbeing Program funds schools to employ a part-time person to provide pastoral care services to students. Schools can choose to call these workers either a ‘chaplain’ or a ‘student wellbeing officer’: they do the same work and the only difference is that a chaplain must be endorsed by a religious group. The job description makes it clear the role is not a religious one.

Before now, did you know that the Federal Government funds a program in which people doing non-religious work in public schools are hired on the basis of religion?

	<i>Total</i>	Male	Female	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA
Yes	20%	23%	17%	21%	16%	15%	24%	29%
No	71%	68%	73%	69%	74%	77%	68%	59%
Don't know / Not sure	10%	9%	10%	11%	10%	7%	8%	12%

	<i>Total</i>	Labor	Coalition	Greens	One Nation	Other
Yes	20%	21%	20%	24%	13%	10%
No	71%	69%	69%	69%	77%	79%
Don't know / Not sure	10%	9%	10%	6%	10%	11%

	<i>Total</i>	18–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60+
Yes	20%	29%	22%	19%	15%	15%
No	71%	65%	64%	75%	72%	75%
Don't know / Not sure	10%	7%	14%	7%	12%	9%

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

“Public schools should hire pastoral care workers on the basis of qualifications and experience only, and not require them to have the endorsement of a religious group.”

	<i>Total</i>	Male	Female	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA
Strongly agree	33%	32%	34%	29%	30%	35%	38%	39%
Agree	33%	34%	32%	35%	38%	27%	30%	35%
Disagree	10%	10%	10%	10%	8%	11%	9%	9%
Strongly disagree	8%	10%	6%	10%	8%	8%	7%	7%
Don't know / Not sure	17%	14%	19%	17%	16%	18%	16%	11%

	<i>Total</i>	Labor	Coalition	Greens	One Nation	Other
Strongly agree	33%	38%	25%	46%	19%	28%
Agree	33%	31%	38%	20%	40%	37%
Disagree	10%	9%	12%	11%	8%	4%
Strongly disagree	8%	6%	9%	9%	15%	11%
Don't know / Not sure	17%	16%	17%	15%	17%	20%

	<i>Total</i>	18–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60+
Strongly agree	33%	33%	34%	33%	32%	32%
Agree	33%	37%	33%	30%	28%	34%
Disagree	10%	12%	9%	10%	10%	8%
Strongly disagree	8%	7%	8%	10%	8%	9%
Don't know / Not sure	17%	12%	15%	17%	23%	17%

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

“Pastoral care workers should be endorsed by a religious group before they are allowed to work in a public school.”

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>SA</i>
Strongly agree	12%	15%	9%	13%	11%	9%	8%	16%
Agree	20%	22%	19%	24%	20%	17%	21%	20%
Disagree	21%	18%	24%	21%	23%	25%	15%	23%
Strongly disagree	26%	26%	26%	24%	23%	31%	33%	25%
Don't know / Not sure	20%	19%	21%	18%	23%	18%	23%	16%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>One Nation</i>	<i>Other</i>
Strongly agree	12%	14%	13%	5%	18%	7%
Agree	20%	19%	25%	22%	13%	13%
Disagree	21%	21%	22%	14%	26%	26%
Strongly disagree	26%	27%	20%	41%	22%	31%
Don't know / Not sure	20%	19%	20%	19%	21%	23%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>18–29</i>	<i>30–39</i>	<i>40–49</i>	<i>50–59</i>	<i>60+</i>
Strongly agree	12%	21%	12%	11%	9%	9%
Agree	20%	29%	25%	18%	17%	14%
Disagree	21%	17%	19%	20%	23%	25%
Strongly disagree	26%	18%	24%	29%	27%	33%
Don't know / Not sure	20%	16%	20%	22%	25%	19%

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

“There should be no religious requirement for public school jobs that are funded by the Federal Government.”

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>SA</i>
Strongly agree	42%	41%	43%	40%	39%	43%	44%	46%
Agree	33%	36%	31%	33%	36%	33%	30%	32%
Disagree	9%	9%	9%	8%	9%	10%	16%	8%
Strongly disagree	5%	5%	4%	7%	3%	4%	3%	5%
Don't know / Not sure	11%	9%	13%	12%	14%	9%	7%	9%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>One Nation</i>	<i>Other</i>
Strongly agree	42%	46%	33%	59%	39%	38%
Agree	33%	34%	37%	25%	24%	34%
Disagree	9%	7%	13%	6%	10%	8%
Strongly disagree	5%	3%	7%	1%	18%	4%
Don't know / Not sure	11%	11%	11%	9%	10%	16%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>18–29</i>	<i>30–39</i>	<i>40–49</i>	<i>50–59</i>	<i>60+</i>
Strongly agree	42%	42%	42%	42%	40%	43%
Agree	33%	37%	33%	32%	33%	31%
Disagree	9%	8%	10%	8%	8%	10%
Strongly disagree	5%	3%	4%	4%	5%	6%
Don't know / Not sure	11%	9%	11%	13%	13%	10%

The ACT Government requires its public schools to hire pastoral care workers directly – rather than through a third-party agency – to ensure that applicants are not subject to conditions that may be imposed by agencies, including religious belief and faith conditions.

Do you support or oppose your state or territory requiring public schools to hire pastoral care workers directly rather than through a third-party agency?

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>SA</i>
Strongly support	23%	26%	20%	18%	22%	22%	29%	27%
Support	33%	33%	34%	39%	32%	32%	32%	34%
Oppose	9%	10%	8%	8%	10%	10%	8%	10%
Strongly oppose	7%	8%	5%	7%	5%	9%	4%	7%
Don't know / Not sure	28%	23%	33%	28%	31%	27%	28%	22%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>One Nation</i>	<i>Other</i>
Strongly support	23%	28%	19%	24%	19%	19%
Support	33%	34%	33%	35%	28%	31%
Oppose	9%	8%	13%	8%	8%	3%
Strongly oppose	7%	5%	9%	3%	14%	6%
Don't know / Not sure	28%	25%	27%	30%	31%	42%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>18–29</i>	<i>30–39</i>	<i>40–49</i>	<i>50–59</i>	<i>60+</i>
Strongly support	23%	23%	19%	23%	19%	27%
Support	33%	35%	37%	30%	32%	32%
Oppose	9%	14%	7%	11%	5%	9%
Strongly oppose	7%	5%	6%	7%	10%	6%
Don't know / Not sure	28%	24%	31%	28%	34%	27%