

States spend big on ballooning public-service wages

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Public-service numbers across the nation have risen to just fewer than two million, with the taxes of every five workers in the private sector going to support one public servant.

The Labor governments in Queensland and Victoria have ramped up recruitments, adding about 40,000 new positions over the past two years, while the federal government has cut its public-service numbers back to levels not seen since the Howard government.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics survey of public-sector employment shows Queensland has been the big spender, taking on more new staff, paying the highest salaries and awarding the biggest pay rises.

Queensland's public-service numbers have risen 8.1 per cent in the past two years while their salary bill has soared by 14.1 per cent.

The average salary for Queensland's 322,300 public servants is \$95,530 — 20 per cent more than the average \$79,720 paid by the NSW government and also much higher than the average \$87,880 paid to federal public servants.

Queensland spent \$25.5 billion on its public-service wages bill, which was only 4 per cent less than Victoria despite having a population 20 per cent smaller.

The federal Coalition government has cut public-service numbers from a peak of 251,200 under the Gillard government in 2010-11 to 239,800 in the latest financial year, the lowest level since 2006-7.

The federal government has also managed to cap its wage bill, which has risen only 2.7 per cent in the past four years.

The survey shows big variation in state recruitment trends.

NSW has not added any public servants to the payroll since 2013-14 while the numbers have barely changed in South Australia since 2012-13.

Western Australia, which faces a budget crises, has also held numbers steady over the past five years.

But Victoria's public-service numbers have increased 5.7 per cent in the past two years, and its salary bill has blown out, rising 20 per cent in the past three years.

The average income of public servants in Victoria of \$86,600 is just behind that of federal staff.

The average income of South Australian public servants is only \$67,700.

The survey does not include current estimates for Tasmania's public service.

The number of local government employees has held steady or has contracted in all states.

Across the nation, there are 189,500 local government workers, the number almost unchanged since 2009-10.