

A paid parental leave scheme of six to twelve months will provide babies with the best possible start in life, ensure that every adult is given the opportunity to lead a fulfilling work and family life, and safeguard Australia's future prosperity.

Who is currently getting paid parental leave? Who is missing out?

Australia's Place in the World

- Australia and the United States are the only two OECD countries that do not offer paid maternity leave. In fact, some of the world's poorest countries recognise the need to take care of children and families, and are giving far more support to new parents than Australia.
- Canada offers women 50 weeks leave, the United Kingdom offers 39 weeks, and European models are even more generous, with France, Sweden and Estonia offering 18 months full pay. Even Tanzania pays 14 weeks paid maternity leave, and the Republic of the Congo offers 15 weeks.

Parents' place in Australia

- In the absence of a government legislated scheme, paid parental leave in Australia is left to market forces. This means that only those employees in a strong bargaining position are able negotiate paid parental leave.
- Currently two-thirds of Australian women have no access to paid maternity leave.
- In the retail and hospitality industries, which are dominated by women, only 8% of women have access to paid maternity leave.
- Usually, private paid maternity schemes exclude employees with less than 12 months service (24% of women of child-bearing age) and casual employees.

Benefits to children

Impact on brain development

- Research shows the continuous interaction between baby and parents in the baby's first twelve months of life shapes the brain wiring – affecting how a child regulates their emotions, communicates, solves problems, thinks logically and reacts to the world.
- When children are involved in loving and continuous one-on-one interactions with their parents during this crucial period, their brains develop in a healthy manner. When a baby is barely noticed, touched or talked to, it lowers their ability to withstand stress, to learn, to control emotions and to develop into healthy adults.
- If parents are always at work, their children – our country's future – are severely disadvantaged.

Impact on physical health

- The World Health Organisation and UNICEF both recommend that babies be breastfed, where possible, for the first six months of life.
- Australia has one of the lowest rates of breastfeeding at 6 months (14%). This low rate is going to make a significant contribution to the poor health of a range of individuals, and will put pressure on our health system via increased hospital visits pharmaceutical costs.
- Paid parental leave ensures that women won't be financially penalised for breastfeeding.

Benefits to parents

Paid parental leave would:

- give parents time away from work to physically recover from birth and bond with their babies;
- relieve some of the stress on families by reducing the likelihood that having a child will cause them financial hardship; and
- provide assistance to parents that wish to maintain a long-term attachment to the workforce. with the associated benefits improved lifetime earnings, education, experience and training, higher job levels, and retirement incomes.

Benefits to the economy

Research shows that the introduction of paid parental leave will be good for Australia's economy. This time, what is good for productivity and the Australian economy is also the right thing to do!

- Australia has one of the lowest levels of workforce participation for women aged between 25 and 44 in the OECD. We are ranked 23 out of 24 OECD nations.
- If more women are in the workforce this puts downward pressure on inflation and improves productivity by increasing the labour supply at a time of serious skills shortages.
- According to employers, the cost of replacing staff - including recruitment and training - appears to be at least \$10,000, and more for higher salary/skilled areas.
- Overseas experience shows that women with paid maternity leave are more likely to return to work (up to 90%) than those without, giving employers a real saving on the bottom line.
- Increasing the use of the economic resources of the country – including women's labour – will produce greater economic activity.

How will it be funded?

The Productivity Commission will release a draft report soon, and will invite comment on what funding models should be used. In many countries, the government pays the minimum wage and the employer pays the rest. We believe that the first step toward an adequate paid parental leave system is the determination of the length of the leave period, and we believe that this should be calculated on the basis of the needs of the child.

There are three basic funding models on the table:

- A scheme funded by government;
- A scheme funded by business; and
- A scheme funded by contributions from both government and business.

When thinking about who could pay for this system, there is one thing that we must keep in mind at all times: it should not be the babies that pay.

Is the campaign directed at maternity leave, or maternity and paternity leave?

GetUp believes that the question of who takes leave to care for a newborn baby should be a matter for parents to decide. We believe that the primary care giver should have access to paid parental leave, regardless of their gender.