

Paid Parental Leave: Support for Parents with Newborn Children

Submission in Response to the Productivity Commission Draft Inquiry Report

November 2008



**on behalf of:
Working Women's Centre South Australia
Northern Territory Working Women's Centre
Queensland Working Women's Service**



About Working Women's Centres

The Working Women Centres (WWC's) in South Australia and the Northern Territory and the Queensland Working Women's Service are community-based not-for-profit organisations that support women employees whatever their age, ethnicity or work status by providing a free and confidential service on work related issues. All three Centres are small agencies that rely on funding from the Commonwealth (SA and NT), State (SA and Qld), and Territory governments (NT).

The Working Women's Centres opened in 1979 in South Australia and in 1994 in the Northern Territory and Queensland. Since their beginnings, the Centres have worked primarily with women who are not represented by a union, their own lawyer or other advocate. We provide advice, information and support in lodging complaints and claims. We refer women with legal needs to appropriate legal services. Many women who contact our Centres are economically disadvantaged and work in very precarious areas of employment.

WWC's also conduct research and project work on a range of issues that women experience in relation to work. These have included access to child care, Repetitive Strain Injury, outwork, family friendly practices, OHS&W, workplace bullying, the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island women, pregnancy and parental status discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Community Development Employment Project (CDEP), work/life balance, pay equity and the impact of domestic violence on women workers and their workplaces. Although some of the issues have changed for women since the Centres began operation, the work that we do remains consistent with the philosophy that all women are entitled to respect, to information about their rights and equal opportunity in the workplace.

In 2007 the three Centres provided information to over 6000 women.

The Working Women Centres in South Australia and the Northern Territory and the Queensland Working Women's Service are extremely interested in the outcome of the Productivity Commission's Draft Inquiry Report, 'Paid Parental Leave: Support for Parents with Newborn Children' and make the following submission to the Inquiry.

In this submission Case Studies are included to elaborate on points made. As our Centres offer a confidential service, identifying details have been changed or removed to protect our clients. Clients are advised that case studies may be cited in submissions and research but that no identifying details will be included.

Please contact the following for any further comments:

Rachael Uebergang/Anna Davis
Co-Coordinators
Northern Territory

GPO Box 403
Darwin NT 0801
mob: 0422 896 551
p: (08) 8981 0655
f: (08) 8981 0433
e: admin@ntwwc.com.au

Kerriann Dear
Director
Queensland

PO Box 10554
Adelaide Street
Brisbane QLD 4000
mob: 0423 435 285
p: (07) 3211 1440
f: (07) 3211 1449
e: qwws@qwws.org.au

Sandra Dann
Director
South Australia

PO Box 8066
Station Arcade
Adelaide SA 5000
mob: 0409 693 286
p: (08) 8410 6499
f: (08) 8410 6770
e: wwc@wwc.org.au

This submission represents the views of the Working Women's Centres (WWCs). The WWCs would like to congratulate the Productivity Commission on its significant work in this area so far. In general, we see the proposed scheme as an adequate starting point, which nevertheless could be substantially improved, and we would like to make the following submissions on the detail of the scheme.

Who paid leave should apply to

Paid maternity leave for mothers:

The WWC's unequivocally support paid maternity leave for mothers. As the Commission points out, there are many reasons for providing paid maternity leave. These include the health, wellbeing and happiness of the child and parents, and the need to ensure that parents can afford to take the appropriate length of time off work to recover from birth and establish routines with their newborn. Another is gender equity, recognising that family responsibilities, particularly around the time of childbirth, have a significant effect on women's lifetime earnings relative to those of men, and compensating them for that loss of income. A further reason relates to women's workforce and career attachment. There are also benefits for the wider community of childbearing and child rearing. Child bearing can be seen as a human right and society should accommodate it by protecting families against serious financial barriers.

Paid leave for fathers and other caregivers:

WWC's believe that paid leave for fathers is an essential part of any paid parental leave system. We believe that this leave should also be available to the **other primary carer** for the child, who may be the father, but may also be the mother's partner, or another relative nominated by the mother or her guardian (e.g. aunt or grandmother). This is particularly the case for many indigenous families, where, although the mother and father are present, grandparents or aunts raise babies. In these circumstances we would advocate 6 weeks for the mother, and then the primary caregiver to be entitled to the balance of paid leave. There would need to be certain requirements and assessments made in such circumstances but these need to be considered for paid parental leave to be culturally inclusive.

Case Study No 1

Jess and her husband Kim live in a remote town in the top end of the Northern Territory. They have one daughter who is away at boarding school in Qld.

Both Jess and Kim work full time doing long hours. Jess travels regularly for her job, which is a middle management position, and her husband works 12-hour days operating machinery.

Jess's brother had been in a relationship with his partner for many years. During that time he developed a mental health problem. He physically assaulted his partner over the years and recently turned his violence on the eldest daughter who is 9 years old. They have between them 4 children between the ages of 1 and 9 years of age and his sister in law is pregnant with number 5 child.

When Jess's brother physically assaulted her eldest niece the police were called and with them EACS who informed Jess's sister in law that if she couldn't find any family members to take the children, they would be placed into foster care. No-one put their hand up except Jess. She said she wouldn't let them go to foster carers and possibly be separated,

she loved them too much for that.

The children were flown over to Jess and Kim and she had to take 2 weeks of her recreation leave to do everything that needed to be done to relocate the children. This included enrolling into school, after school care, child care, getting their sleeping arrangements sorted (finding beds and mattresses), school uniforms, and counselling for the trauma they have experienced. This happened 6 months ago and the children are still in her care.

Jess says it has been very hard but its something she didn't think twice about. She only wishes she didn't have to use her own recreation leave to settle the children. She says that paid parental leave is also needed for Uncles, Aunties and Grandparents taking on the care of children in need of a safe home with love and support to grow into healthy adults.

Case Study No 2

Scott began a relationship with Lisa when they were just 15 years old. They had two little girls. When the children had reached 2 and 3 years of age the parents had grown apart and split up and Lisa took the girls down to NSW while Scott stayed close to his parents. Lisa's family contacted Scott's Mum and Dad and asked them to come and get the girls because Lisa had dumped them on family and hadn't come back for a few weeks. She had also began another relationship which was not a good environment for the girls. Scott was only 18 and not in any position to house and raise the children. So Scott's parents who were both working at the time went to get the girls. Scott's Dad ended up leaving his job to look after the girls during the day while his Mum worked full time. If he had been able to take leave he could have perhaps sorted out childcare etc. After a while Scott's Dad started working again and his Mum stayed home with the kids. This happened 7 years ago and Scott's parents still have the girls with them. Scott works on a mine and sends money for their care to his parents.

Additionally single mothers require support at the time of birth but cannot access the paid paternity leave entitlement of 2 weeks. Single mothers should be able to allocate the paid paternity leave to a sister/mother/close friend etc. i.e. the 2 weeks paid paternity leave should be attached to the baby and transferable to an alternative significant carer if there is no father around to support the new mother. They should also have the option of retaining the extra 2 weeks leave to overcome some of the additional barriers faced by single mothers.

It is important that there is an option for other primary carers of children to take paid leave for many reasons:

- It is important to involve both parents in the early post-natal period to bond with the baby and to support the mother;
- There may be times when the mother is unable to care for the child (for example in the case of depression or other illness) and in those situations there should be the opportunity for other primary carers to take paid leave.

Paid leave for the other primary carer for children should be in addition to any paid leave for mothers, and should be systematic, officially sanctioned and written into contracts and awards.

Where there is any dispute about entitlement to paid parental leave it is essential that mothers are given priority in paid leave.

Should it be a separate entitlement or shared between parents?

The system needs to be flexible enough to reflect each parent's needs and allow parents choice. For some families this may mean a leave sharing entitlement. WWCs believe that both parents should have a guaranteed minimum leave time, with a quarantined period specifically for mothers. We support a quarantined period for fathers or other primary carers to encourage them to be involved in child rearing duties, particularly at the start of a child's life, but it is essential that the woman be guaranteed a period of paid time off immediately after the birth (eg 6 weeks) unless there were special circumstances such as death of the mother. This will ensure that the risk of a controlling partner taking all the leave will be removed. The draft report states that "Where both parents are eligible, it is the mother who decides who can take paid leave. This avoids the need to arbitrate where there is disagreement between parents about leave arrangements". While, in a perfect world, a decision that the father or other partner was to be the primary caregiver and take the paid leave would be the result of consensual agreement between mother and father/caregiver there is no guarantee that some mothers may not be forced by an abusive partner into 'deciding' who takes paid leave. The WWC's recommend that a period of quarantined leave for mothers is essential in ensuring mothers will always be allowed to access physically necessary leave for a period of time immediately after birth.

We also believe that the option of sharing paid parental leave could help to discourage discrimination against women.

As above it is important to note that the other primary carer may not be the father.

Who should be included?

The Productivity Commission report emphasises that the introduction of a paid parental leave scheme is an important element in so far as the normalisation of childbearing and paid work is concerned. It is therefore appropriate that the scheme applies to caregivers in paid work. As other workplace entitlements, such as long service leave and personal leave, apply to employees in paid employment only, it is consistent that a paid parental leave scheme also applies to employees in paid employment only.

A paid parental leave scheme should be considered a normal workplace entitlement and not treated differently because of the profound affect that it will have on the lives of women.

Women on CDEP

The issue of women on CDEP needs to be examined more closely, and all recommendations on paid parental leave should apply equally to women on CDEP. In the past, women who have been in CDEP positions for up to 12 years have accumulated no long service leave, no access to annual or personal leave and are only entitled to 2 weeks annual leave if the host employer allows for this. We believe that women participating in CDEP schemes should have the same entitlements as all other women in the paid workforce.

Women on 457 visas

The scheme should also apply to women on 457 visas, as they can still satisfy their visa requirements and have a baby if they take some leave. The following case study highlights the additional pressures faced by women in these situations.

Case Study No 3

Jina travelled from her own country in Africa with her husband to study nursing in the

United States. Her husband trained as a doctor in the US. When Jina applied to come to Australia on a 457 visa she indicated on her application form that she was pregnant.

Jina was accepted to come to Adelaide on a 457 visa. She reported to her new employer on a Friday for an introduction to her new worksite. She was measured for her uniform. That afternoon she and her husband received a call telling them to report back to the hospital. Jina and her husband responded that given the time surely the matter could wait until Monday. The hospital was insistent and sent a taxi and paid the fares to enable them to get there. The organisation then asked Jina if she was pregnant. When she told them she was they informed the couple that they were withdrawing their support and their offer of work no longer stood. By now it was 5 o'clock on a Friday afternoon. They were told they had to leave the country and were given an authority to go to a travel agent the next day to organise their fares back to Africa, not the US. They were told that if they had not left the country by Monday the Immigration Department would be contacting them.

Jina and her husband had no money for bus fares and began to walk the streets asking where they might go to get some help. They eventually found their way to the Working Women's Centre, to seek help with a pregnancy discrimination claim. They had to give up their home and lost their bond. There was added expense with having to cancel contracts for the home phone, electricity, gas and water.

Jina had had no pre natal checks since arriving in Australia as she didn't qualify for any health entitlements and had no money to pay the full cost of care.

What recent employment record, if any, should be the criterion for eligibility?

We agree with draft recommendation 2.4 that criteria for eligibility should be having worked an average of at least ten hours a week on a continuous basis for 12 months or more prior to the birth of their child. There should also be accommodation for circumstances where women have been unemployed but actively looking for work during this period. This is mainly because some women have their employment terminated at the initiative of the employer before they are ready to take maternity leave. It also recognises the nature of short term contracted employment that many women work under.

There needs to be clarification regarding the term “continuous employment” for 12 months - in particular for contract workers who may have quiet periods, those with seasonal employment, and also people who may have changed jobs, or taken some leave for a period. “Continuous employment” must not be confused with ‘regular and systematic’ work (as casual employees must be engaged in for the purposes of unfair dismissal laws). Casual employees who, for example, have worked 30 hours in one week, 5 in the following and 10 in the next for over 1 year, may not be seen to be performing ‘regular and systematic’ work, but are certainly engaged in *continuous* work. The scheme must address the risk that some rogue employers may dismiss employees who are pregnant and intending to take parental leave, leaving them out of ‘continuous employment’ before the birth. To this end there should be (i) clear rights for women who are dismissed from their employment within a certain window of time before the birth to receive paid parental leave with the government acting as paymaster; and (2) a new head of unlawful dismissal in the relevant industrial relations legislation making it unlawful to dismiss an employee because they are intending to take paid parental leave.

The WWCs have encountered many cases of women being dismissed prior to taking maternity leave. It would be disappointing if the introduction of a universal paid scheme in any way encouraged the dismissal of women prior to birth, thereby heightening their financial insecurity.

Should adopting families be treated the same way?

Adopting and fostering families should have a right to the same entitlements. In these situations the age of the child should not be a consideration as children come into their foster homes at many different ages, and time is required by the foster parents to settle this child in. In some jurisdictions the baby bonus is given to foster parents so it should follow that parental leave is also available.

What about those with stillborn children or those whose baby dies?

The same entitlements should be made available as for live births.

Duration of leave

What duration of paid leave do you think is appropriate?

Psychological research indicates that the first 24-36 months of an infant's life are critical in determining cognitive, emotional and relational patterns in children. Much research points to the important role of primary caregivers during this period.

From an understanding of the research coupled with our own experiences as well as feedback from our clients, Working Women's Centres assert that **a minimum of 12 months** is the optimum period of time for paid leave given the importance of breast feeding for establishing good health and a strong relationship with the mother.

Parents should also be able to return to work within the first 12 months part time and continue to receive the remainder of their paid parental leave as this is a positive step toward achieving optimal benefits for the child as well as maintaining the parents' connection to the paid workforce.

Working Women's Centres believe that the provisions for protecting existing leave with employers who already fund paid parental or maternity leave should be clearly spelt out and encouragement should be made for employers not to abandon existing schemes. These may not disappear overnight but the risk is as agreements are re-negotiated that existing employer provided paid maternity leave will default to the tax payer funded model only.

The start date – should it allow for time off before the birth?

Women should be able to start their leave prior to the expected date of delivery, but this should not be mandated. Women need to be given the choice in their specific circumstances. However if time off before the birth is required for health reasons then this leave should be separate to any paid parental leave and not eat into it. In the normal course of events mothers should be entitled to paid parental leave 6 weeks prior to the estimated due date. However, pregnant women who, on the basis of a medical certificate, are unfit to work prior to this, ought to be able to begin their paid parental leave earlier. Similarly, pregnant women, who are fit to work later than 6 weeks prior to the estimated due date ought to be able to continue in their employment for as long as they are fit to do so. Employers should have the right to request a medical certificate to ensure the health of the employee at or after 6 weeks prior to the estimated due date.

Should it be able to start later than the six months cut-off proposed by the Commission?

Yes. In the instance that employees have accrued leave that is in excess of 6 months then those employees ought to be able to take such leave entitlements in their entirety prior to commencing a period of paid parental leave. Any accrued leave entitlements that support a new mother, or other primary caregiver, to spend time with their new baby, adopted or foster child ought to be supported.

Should people be able to use sick leave, recreation leave or partly accrued long service leave to extend the period of paid leave? In your experience will low income women especially have enough accrued leave to bring their period of paid leave up from the 18 weeks to the six months accepted as the desirable minimum?

Women should have the option of using their leave entitlements in whatever ways they see as appropriate for their family situation. However women should never be required to take sick leave, annual leave, or LSL. These are employee entitlements and not relevant to pregnancy.

The issue of the duration of leave must be considered in conjunction with the scheme's objectives, one of which is enhancing maternal and child health and development (at 1.4 of the draft report) (an objective that the WWC's support). The report's rationale for not providing paid parental leave for this entire 6 month period is that parents can use many options (other than specific paid parental/maternity leave) to fund a period of leave, including, presumably, annual leave, sick leave, long service leave and personal savings. The WWC's are of the belief that this presumption is problematic for the following reasons:

- casual employees have no access to leave entitlements on which to draw to 'top up' a paid leave period, and
- the reliance on other forms of leave to top up finances during unpaid leave periods means that women will have reduced amounts of those forms of leave (such as sick and carer's leave) that they will need more than ever with the birth of children. Women with other children or in key carer's roles commonly use all their leave entitlements to provide care for sickness or for school holidays and may not have leave available at this time.

It is extremely unlikely that most women, particularly low income women, will have enough accrued leave to bring their period of paid leave to six or twelve months. It's precisely the women who already have pressures in their lives and as such need support to care for their newborn babies, that will often not have additional accrued leave to top up the 18 weeks to 6 months. This is likely to be the case for women who already have children and is especially true for Indigenous women, who already need to take much of their leave to care for family and will not have additional accrued leave to top up the 18 weeks to 6 months.

Payment level

What level of payment is appropriate, e.g. minimum wage, replacement, replacement capped at a certain level, other?

WWCs believe in an income replacement scheme, capped at the same rate as other government policies (e.g. Medicare). Currently that would mean that paid parental leave would be income replacement with a cap at \$79 000 or \$150 000 as a couple. 50% of workers who currently have access to paid maternity leave have it on an income replacement basis. No one should receive less than the minimum wage; that is, the minimum level of payment should be equivalent to the full

time minimum wage.

WWCs are concerned about arrangements for those on low wages (below-minimum wages) specifically juniors and apprentices/trainees where it is recommended that the rates be set administratively. We think it would be discriminatory for younger women to be paid less for their parental leave. It also needs to be recognised that older women may be earning less than minimum wages if they are apprentices or trainees despite the fact they may be working full time. This should be carefully considered to recognise the objectives of paid parental leave in the first place. A trainee's baby or a junior worker's baby costs no less than a full-time worker's baby.

It is essential that employers who are offering entitlements like full wage replacement do not reduce what they currently offer, if the new scheme offers less time or money. There needs to be a no-disadvantage mechanism built in to ensure that the introduction of the scheme does not mean that anyone loses entitlements they currently have.

Do you think it should be means tested?

No, the scheme shouldn't be means tested as it is a social equity scheme and acknowledges community responsibility for children.

System funding

How do you think the leave should be funded?

The scheme should be government funded. This will ensure equity, universal introduction, and help to address discrimination against women of child bearing age by employers.

The idea of a HECS style scheme is not supported as it increases future debt for women and therefore discriminates against them.

The WWCs are not averse to a universal levy, which would highlight the fact that parenthood and work are both in the national interest. However, we believe that it would be simpler to fund the scheme through general taxation.

As discussed above there is concern that those employers with current paid parental leave arrangements will withdraw or reduce them. Proposals for incentives for employers to sustain parental leave arrangements and/or introduce them could be considered.

We propose a whole scheme review after 2 years, to measure the impact on women and employers, and ensure that employers have not cut back on the paid parental leave provisions they offered previously. We strongly recommend that adequate resources are made available to conduct research on this issue.

Should employers be required to continue to pay super entitlements?

It is imperative that entitlements continue, given that women are already disadvantaged in terms of superannuation. This can put women in a position of increased dependency in old age.

Superannuation should be paid at a 9% minimum.

The issue of superannuation requires further clarification. Employers should not be prevented

from contributing more than 9% superannuation should they elect to do so. The current Draft Inquiry Report states that superannuation will be capped at 9%. Any cap of 9% superannuation for employees on paid parental leave disregards the significant superannuation disadvantage that women already experience due to lost time in the workforce.

Another issue arises for women with multiple employers who do not qualify for superannuation, only the minimum wage. If women are doing hours with multiple employers including 10 hours a week with one of those employers our view is that those women should be paid super.

In addition, women on CDEP programs should be entitled to superannuation.

Should a Government funded scheme be paid through employers or direct by Government, eg Centrelink?

For women who are already in the workforce we support employers administering the payments. This would reinforce the worker's attachment to their workforce.

The Productivity Commission makes the point in the Draft Inquiry Report that the introduction of a paid parental leave scheme provides 'a strong signal that having a child and taking time out of the paid workforce for family reasons is viewed by the government and the community as part of the normal course of life, and work, for parents, rather than a nuisance.' A scheme that intends to signal such normalcy should be structured like other normal leave arrangements, such as those for recreation, illness and long service leave, rather than being structured as a social welfare measure. WWCs support this view and would see it as contradictory and sending a mixed community message should the scheme be paid through government e.g. Centrelink.

Should small-medium employers receive a payment to compensate them for the costs of short-term replacement hiring? If so, how much?

Small-medium employers do not receive a payment to compensate them for the costs of short-term replacement hiring when employees access entitlements to long service leave, personal leave, leave without pay or study leave. WWCs support the view that a paid parental leave scheme be treated the same way as other workplace entitlements and therefore do not see it as necessary that small-medium employers receive a payment. We do however note with interest the current UK system whereby employers may be entitled to an additional payment of 10% for the costs of managing the payment as well as the costs of short term replacement hiring and believe this merits further examination.

Would you support the option of an income contingent loan in addition to the Commission's recommended scheme? (A loan where the parents did not have to start repaying until their income reached a certain level).

We would definitely not support this; it would set up low income families for future debt and reduce parenting to a 'commodity'.

How leave can be taken

Should the leave be able to be taken part-time? In more than one period? (the practicality and merit of allowing paid parental leave to be taken part-time)

Parents should be able to determine the most appropriate way to take leave, including extending leave over a part time period.

What would be the effect on employers of parents extending their leave?

This issue is not new to the Productivity Commission's proposed scheme as parents currently have the right to extend unpaid parental leave. We support an option for parents to extend their leave. The reluctance of many employers to keep positions open for women on extended leave requires ongoing education. Our experience is that employers often do not want to hold a job open for a worker on unpaid leave and try to get rid of them from the workforce before then. There is of course advantages to employers in retaining current employees – they have staff who are already trained, attached to and usually more loyal to the workplace.

Case study No 4

Kate planned to return from maternity leave in June 2008. Kate was told that her position was no longer available to her. She was offered another position but was told that it was full time and that she would not be able to take time off if her baby was ill or stressed. Kate's employer told her he believed that she would not be able to cope with the workload.

Case study No 5

Sue went on maternity leave in January 2008. In June 2008 she advised her employer she wanted to return in 1 month's time. Sue requested part time work but was given no response. Before she had any response about this request, or about her return to work, Sue was simply told her job was no longer available as someone else had taken it.

Employers need incentives to provide family friendly work arrangements; such as part time and flexible work hours. The combination of a financial incentive with free access to expert help in how to structure workplaces to meet these needs would work towards ensuring that employers were able to offer family friendly workplaces.

Should other forms of leave (sick, recreation, long service) accrue while the employee is on paid parental leave?

We support the ongoing accrual of all benefits and leave. We understand that this may represent additional costs to the employer, as they will already be paying for replacement staff, and support the employer being reimbursed for sick leave and personal leave.

Other issues

'Keeping in touch' provisions:

The WWCs support the 'keeping in touch' provisions outlined in draft recommendation 2.10. However this 'keeping in touch' must be at the request of the employee, not demanded by the employer. Furthermore, any work done during this time must be paid at the employee's *normal rate of pay*.

What other Government policy changes should be made, along with or complementing the proposed scheme?

We support the development of a policy that ensures that raising a family can be the primary focus of parents' lives and work being of at least equal focus and importance – the nation will benefit in the long run.

WWCs recommend that there be a requirement to ensure employers give serious consideration to flexible return to work arrangements and family friendly work practices. e.g. via the introduction of bonus payments to employers.

WWCs also support recommendation 2.11: The Australian Government should provide more resources to allow effective support for breastfeeding during the first six months of an infant's life, with a focus on the post-initiation stage.

A significant number of concerns reported to the Working Women's Centres by women returning to paid work after maternity leave relate to difficulties negotiating the conditions of their return to work. These include:

- requesting part time work
- requesting flexible work arrangements to accommodate caring responsibilities
- requesting changes to rosters to allow for childcare/school pick-ups and drop-offs
- access to carer's leave
- being 'restructured' out of the workplace while on maternity leave
- the ability to continue breastfeeding after returning to paid work.

Clients of Working Women's Centres are most often amongst the most vulnerable of employees, are not members of unions, and have little or no negotiating power in the workplace. Without any "right to request" legislation, that is backed up by adequate enforcement, these women experience significant difficulties on returning to work after having a baby. Working Women's Centres strongly support clear legislated rights in regard to such requests that are shifted from a right for the employee to request to an obligation for the employer to provide.

It is also our experience that women returning from maternity leave are at the most risk of bullying, harassment and discrimination in the workplace. The lack of any right to request regulations contribute to these incidents of bullying and discrimination by putting vulnerable women workers in the even more vulnerable position of having to 'beg' their employers for family friendly provisions. Further, these women are often most at risk of unlawful termination. WWCs are concerned at the proposed amendments to the Workplace Relations Act which would allow women a mere 7 days (from the current 21) to lodge a claim to the AIRC regarding their unlawful termination. Our statistics show that this change would especially impact upon indigenous women and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Case Study No 6

Eleanor took unpaid leave from her full time position for the birth of her baby. She worked in a clerical position for a church-based community organisation that employed approximately thirty people and claimed to have strong community values. On her return Eleanor requested part time work. She had already discussed this with the person employed to replace her while on maternity leave and together they presented a job-share arrangement to their employer they felt met both their needs and the organisation's needs. Despite this the organisation said they did not believe the position was suitable for job-share although they did not provide information as to why this was the case. They also refused to negotiate on how the arrangement might be altered so that it would suit their requirements. Eleanor tried to negotiate part-time work elsewhere in the organisation but was told it was not 'viable' for the organisation to employ part-time workers.

Workplaces need to be encouraged and educated about the benefits of introducing family friendly

policies. Such an educational program needs to be funded by Government.

What are the implications of the Commission's proposal for breastfeeding?

The Productivity Commission acknowledges the World Health Organisation recommendation of 6 months exclusive breastfeeding. There is evidently a discrepancy between this and the 18 weeks paid leave recommended by the Commission, leaving a shortfall of at least 6 weeks for women attempting to achieve the minimum of 6 months exclusive breastfeeding as supported by WHO. The WWCs reiterate our support for a proposed scheme of a minimum of 12 months paid leave, in order to comply with the WHO recommendation and the Commission's endorsement of WHO's position on this issue.

WWCs believe that the current proposal for 18 weeks parental leave would probably only have minimal if any impact on an increase in overall breastfeeding rates. However, it is the experience of WWCs that there are many very financially disadvantaged women who are forced back to work within a few weeks of the birth of their child because of financial pressures. These women will be advantaged by the 18 weeks leave. The ability to be able to take paid parental leave for such women may have a profound impact on breastfeeding in the first 18 weeks of the newborn's life.

In addition breastfeeding needs to be positively encouraged for the health and wellbeing of the child. Incentives for workforces to enable working mothers to continue to breastfeed need to be developed and implemented in line with those proposed by the Australian Breastfeeding Association.

A final note...

The WWCs note with concern reports that the implementation of any paid parental leave scheme may be delayed for financial reasons. We believe that funding for the scheme must be included in the next Budget and should not be delayed.