

Paid maternity leave

everyone benefits



Acknowledgements

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Funky Femme Designs is the joyous creative outlet of Tanja Kovac. Tanja is an ASU member. In another life, she works as a plaintiff lawyer at Slater & Gordon.

Paid maternity leave – the ASU commitment

The most equitable system of paid maternity leave for Australian workers would be via a government funded universal system. This is what happens in most countries around the world.

In most countries around the world women have access to paid maternity leave (PML). Here's a snapshot of who gets what:

- ♦ Algeria – 14 weeks -100% salary
- ♦ Angola- 90 days – 100% salary
- ♦ Argentina – 90 days – 100%
- ♦ Austria - 16 weeks – 100%
- ♦ Bangladesh – 12 weeks – 100%
- ♦ Brazil – 120 days – 100%
- ♦ Cameroon – 14 weeks - 100%
- ♦ Canada 18 weeks – 55%
- ♦ China – 90 days – 100%
- ♦ Ethiopia – 90 days -100%
- ♦ Guatemala – 12 weeks – 100%
- ♦ India – 12 weeks – 100%
- ♦ Indonesia – 3 months – 100%
- ♦ Iraq – 62 days – 100%
- ♦ Japan – 14 weeks – 60 %
- ♦ Morocco – 12 weeks – 100%
- ♦ New Zealand – 12 weeks – 100% up to \$ 325 per week
- ♦ Pakistan – 12 weeks – 100%
- ♦ Singapore – 8 weeks – 100%
- ♦ Spain – 16 weeks – 100%
- ♦ Ukraine – 126 days – 100%
- ♦ United Kingdom – 26 weeks –flat rate up to 90%
- ♦ Venezuela – 18 weeks – 100%
- ♦ Vietnam 4-6 months – 100%

Source: International Labour Organisation (ILO)



What about Australia?

No universal system of paid maternity leave exists. In the main, paid maternity leave has been achieved by enterprise bargaining.

The Australian Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner has recommended to the Federal Government that it introduce a national tax payer funded paid maternity leave scheme. The system proposed provides a minimal payment for all working women.



What does the Australian Government say?

The Federal Government hasn't indicated what it intends to do although a number of prominent Ministers, including Tony Abbott, have indicated that they oppose even this minimalist proposal. Anything the government offers will be minimal. If we want our members to have decent maternity rights we will have to bargain for them.

What does your Union say?

We will continue to lobby for a fair system for all Australian women workers. In the meantime, we will seek improvements by bargaining.

The ASU is committed to achieving decent standards of PML through enterprise bargaining. It's a central plank of the ASU's strategy to ensure members can balance

their work and family commitments. It's also an issue of pay equity for our women members.

If we don't bargain for paid maternity leave our members will fall behind others who have paid maternity leave. If we don't bargain for paid maternity leave now, future women workers will miss out on this entitlement

The ASU has helped to ensure that a number of our members have access to PML. The ASU website contains a list of organisations where the ASU has been successful in achieving paid maternity/parental leave. How does your organisation match up?

We must bargain to achieve paid maternity leave and extend and improve on the amounts we currently have.

How much is enough?

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) recommends a minimum of 14 weeks paid maternity leave as a minimum standard. The World Health Organisation recommends 16 weeks as a minimum to ensure the health of the mother and new born child.

Commonly stated reasons to oppose PML

- ◆ We didn't have it when I was having my children and I did alright.
- ◆ If you choose to have a baby you should pay for it.
- ◆ It's too expensive – our employer can't afford it.

Do the above reasons sound familiar? Let's unpack these arguments and have a look at why they are wrong and based on misunderstandings.

This is the 21st Century

Have you ever wondered why we have paid annual and long service leave but we don't have paid leave to allow women to give birth?

Some people argue that we don't need to fight for PML because they managed to have children without it. If we followed this line of argument we would never see any improvements in our conditions of employment. We'd still have children working the mines!

If you're not going to support achieving PML for yourself do it for your sister, daughter or granddaughter!

This argument also ignores the fact that today, in Australia, most families are dependent on two incomes. Loss of a woman's income at this time has a major impact. Paid maternity leave is a financial necessity for working families.

So now you're arguing for your brother, son and grandson too!

Workplace equity

It's a fact that women work and they give birth. Women are the only ones (so far) that can biologically give birth. It's reasonable to expect that they will need to have at least a small amount of time to recover from this process. Australians acknowledge the logic of this need for a recovery period but the majority of Australian workplaces still require this leave to be unpaid. This is inequitable.

Many women workers face a range of disadvantages associated with their pregnancy. The 1999 National Pregnancy and Work Inquiry carried out by Human Rights and Equal Opportunity (HREOC) found that pregnancy discrimination was rife in Australian workplaces.

The absence of paid maternity leave compounds other forms of discrimination that pregnant women experience.

Health of mother and child

A minimum period of 14 weeks leave will allow women to recover physically, psychologically and emotionally from pregnancy & birth. It's important to note that Australia has the highest incidence of birth by caesarean section in the world. This makes the requirement for a recovery period even more urgent. This minimum period will also promote the establishment of a healthy feeding regime and care arrangements for babies.

Leave at this time reduces absenteeism from the workplace (sick leave) because the establishment of healthy breastfeeding regimes and a proper recovery promote good health in the mother and child.

Paid leave also ensures that this recovery and establishment period can occur free of the stress of concerns about family budgets.

Good for families

Australia has a declining birth rate and more women are giving birth later in life – a time when more complications with pregnancy and birth are apparent. One of the reasons why women are having babies later is the fact that costs of child birth (including unpaid leave from work) are significant. Providing for paid maternity leave will assist families to make the decision to have children at a time of their choosing not when the budget allows for it!

It also means that families can enjoy and treasure the experience of birth and care without the added financial pressure of losing family income at this time.

With the added costs associated with childbirth this is the worst time to be losing income!

The business case – it's good for employers too

The Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner has recently found that:

“While there are significant social and family based benefits to be gained from providing support to new mothers, employers also benefit from supporting their employees to accommodate work and family responsibilities. Apart from increased productivity through enhanced employee loyalty, research shows that paid parental leave can reduce attrition rates, particularly for women, and encourage women to return to the workforce earlier. For many employers this enables them to retain women staff who may otherwise have decided not to return to work.”

Source: HREOC Valuing Parenthood: Options for Paid Maternity Leave: Interim Paper 2002

In 1996 Westpac Banking Corporation calculated that replacement costs were \$40,000 for a staff member with eight years experience and \$60,000 for a senior manager. As the age at which women have their first child increases, replacement costs are likely to rise.

Even in less skilled positions, recruitment costs are significant. A major retailer has found that it costs a minimum of \$3,800 to recruit a new full time employee. This does not include calculations for training costs or loss of experience.

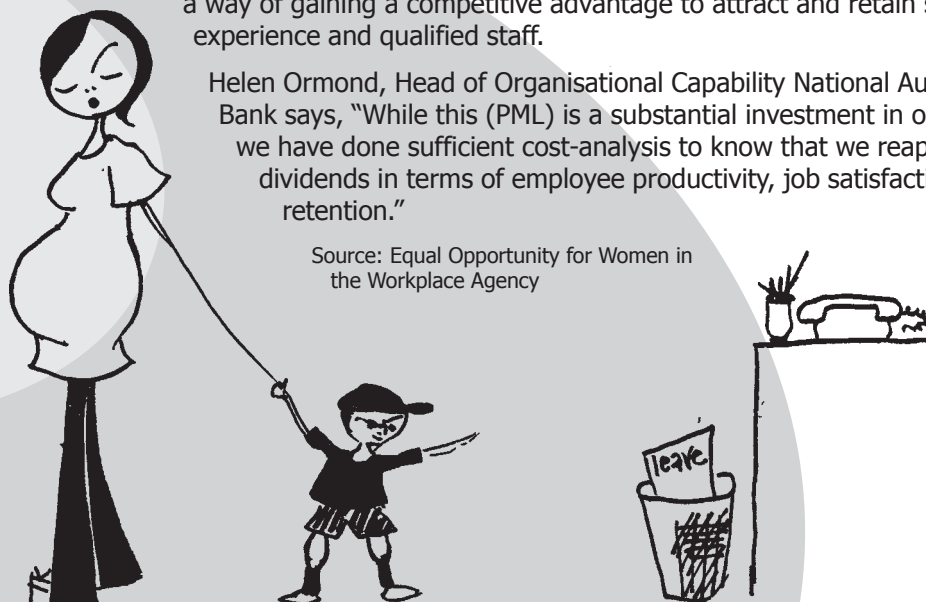
Source: HREOC Valuing Parenthood: Options for Paid Maternity Leave: Interim Paper 2002

Employers of choice

Increasingly employers are using the provisions of paid maternity leave as a way of gaining a competitive advantage to attract and retain skilled, experience and qualified staff.

Helen Ormond, Head of Organisational Capability National Australia Bank says, “While this (PML) is a substantial investment in our people, we have done sufficient cost-analysis to know that we reap the dividends in terms of employee productivity, job satisfaction and retention.”

Source: Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency



Responsible member of the community

A number of organisations are discovering the business benefits of having a positive profile within the community. They are using the fact that they offer work & family balance and provide for paid maternity/parental leave to demonstrate their bona fides as good corporate citizens.

By recognising and valuing the role of parenthood your organisation can demonstrate that it is a responsible corporate citizen.

Not a cost

On average the introduction of paid maternity leave at a rate of 12 weeks paid leave costs less than one per cent of payroll. Averaged over the life cycle of an employee this is a small 'cost' probably less than your organisation pays on training, attendance at courses or other incentives for individuals over time. One group of ASU members calculated that introducing PML in their organisation would cost less per year than the organisation spent on stationery!



But everyone will run out and get pregnant!

Let's face it the decision to have a child involves a number of factors.

Household Expenditure Surveys conducted by the ABS suggest that a family budget for a two-parent family needs to increase by about 18 per cent to accommodate a first child without diminution in the standard of living. This figure is greater for single parent families.

No body is going to run out and get pregnant just for 14 weeks pay!

Any cost to the employer associated with the introduction of paid maternity leave is offset by the substantial benefits employers get from attracting and retaining skilled employees and the kudos they gain within the community.

Good for blokes too



Paid maternity leave is not a "women's" issue. Most households now rely on two incomes just to get by. The loss of one income at any time, but particularly when costs increase, is now about the family budget and a question of survival.

Arguing for and achieving paid maternity leave will also make it easier to argue for parental leave too.

The ASU Authorities & Services Branch in Victoria has negotiated an agreement at Port Phillip Council where either partner (whoever is the primary care giver) will have access to 13 weeks paid leave. This leave also covers adoption circumstances.

ASU standards

If you're bargaining here are some minimum entitlements that you could bargain for:

- ◆ A commitment from the organisation to value the role of parenting and to the introduction of a suite of entitlements that reflects this commitment. This suite of entitlements should take into account the needs required to care for children at various ages/stages of their development.
- ◆ A commitment to no discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy/ childbirth and specific measure to educate and combat against this form of discrimination.
- ◆ Paid leave to attend ante natal appointments for both partners.
- ◆ A minimum of 14 weeks paid maternity leave. Push for limited qualification periods (i.e. no more than twelve months service - less would be better). This minimum entitlement should be extended to long term casual employees.
- ◆ Paid paternity leave. If you can, get the same amount as maternity leave. If not get as much as you can and keep improving it over time.
- ◆ The right to return to work part-time following the birth of a child.
- ◆ The provision of breast feeding/lactation breaks and facilities that allow this to occur in privacy. These are also great facilities to have available to the community.
- ◆ Support and assistance from the employer to find and fund childcare upon return to work.
- ◆ Guarantee that the employer will not reduce entitlements if a government funded scheme comes into operation. (Anything the employer provides will be on top of what the government provides.)

Want more information?

For more information, links to other resources and examples check out the ASU's PML campaign web page at www.asu.asn.au/campaigns/maternityleave.html

You can speak to an ASU official in your State/Territory the numbers are listed below. Or contact our ASU national expert Lisa Heap at lheap@asu.asn.au.



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**All ASU contact information in its most up to date form can be found at:
www.asu.asn.au/contact**

Notes



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