



Australasian Men's Health Forum

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Lack of paid paternity leave 'disappointing'

Australia's peak body for men and boys has congratulated the Federal Government for introducing the nation's first Paid Parental Leave (PPL) Scheme in this month's Federal Budget, but has raised a number of concerns about the scheme.

Greg Andresen from the Australasian Men's Health Forum (AMHF) said today, "the Government's 18-week PPL scheme goes a long way towards supporting the needs of working Australian families, but differs significantly from the one proposed by the Productivity Commission by omitting the recommended two-week paternity leave component as a cost-saving measure. The Commission found that paternity leave has emotional benefits for fathers, positively effects children's emotional and educational achievement and provides support for the mother," said Mr Andresen.

Currently around 72 per cent of fathers who take leave around childbirth rely exclusively on non-parental types of leave. The most common reasons given by fathers for this are that paid paternity leave wasn't available (46 per cent) or that they weren't eligible for paternity or parental leave (22 per cent). Mr Andresen said, "We are disappointed that the Government, by not offering paid leave to fathers, appears to be happy with this status quo – apparently ignoring the obvious benefits to families of having both mum and dad at home immediately after birth of a new child".

In their submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry, the Family Action Centre at the University of Newcastle argued that "Fathers develop their own attachment relationships which are important for their children's healthy development. It should not be assumed that the best model of parental leave is one which recognises only the 'primary carer' and precludes mothers and fathers taking time together. Indeed, when up to one in five mothers may be experiencing postnatal depression it will be important to allow families to chose an arrangement which allows a father to support the mother and at the same time, form a crucial secure attachment with his infant."

The AMHF is also concerned that:

- The language used in the scheme is likely to confuse Australian parents. The scheme refers to parental leave, which may be assumed to apply equally to mothers and fathers. The AMHF is asking the Government whether in actual fact parental leave will only be available to mothers, who may then only transfer their leave to their partner if they so choose. By focusing upon maternity leave (labelled as parental leave) in this way, the government hasn't yet sufficiently explained what the actual impact of the scheme will be upon fathers.
- The scheme appears to be inflexible for parents who wish to share their paid work and child minding responsibilities. The AMHF is asking the Government to clarify whether parents will be able to access PPL if both parents wish to work part-time and care for their child part-time. Likewise, will parents receive PPL if for example, due to work or family circumstances the mother wishes to care for the child full-time for 6 weeks, dad for the next 6 weeks, then mum for the following 6 weeks?
- Separated parents will most likely suffer under the scheme. The AMHF is asking the Government whether, by only offering PPL to the 'primary carer' (by default the mother), will non-resident parents (most often fathers) be able to take paid parental leave to care for their children?
- By assuming that one parent is always the 'primary carer' (rather than supporting those parents who wish to 'share the care' of their children), the scheme appears to be designed to only support traditional family structures with a strict division of labour into full-time homemaker / breadwinner.

"We are hopeful that the Government will consider these issues as the details of the scheme are ironed out over the coming months," Mr Andresen said.

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