

Gender equitable parental leave

A guide for organisations

The uptake of parental leave by fathers and partners in Australia remains low. Employers play a key role in normalising the uptake of parental leave and flexible working arrangements for fathers and partners to enable them to meet their caring responsibilities. This leading practice guide provides evidence based recommendations for creating more equitable parental leave policies.

Designing parental leave policies

Organisations can take various steps to ensure gender equitable access and utilisation of parental leave. When designing a policy, organisations should consider the following:

Gender neutral parental leave policies

Design parental leave policies that contain gender-neutral wording, focusing on parental leave for parents. This means removing primary and secondary carer labels in policies and in communications.

Accessibility

Ensure that all parents including women, men and partners, have access to equitable parental leave entitlements.

Flexibility

Develop policies that enable all employees to take parental leave within a generous timeframe. This allows parents to take leave when it suits their family needs. Research suggests parental leave policies that enable employees to take time off flexibly result in higher rates of men taking parental leave. For instance, a flexible parental leave policy could establish that leave can be accessed anytime within the first 24 months of the birth, adoption or placement of a child.

Duration of leave period

Organisations should provide parents, with a sufficient period of leave. Research suggests that parental leave policies that are longer in duration lead to greater uptake by men and partners.



Supporting men and partners taking parental leave

Organisations need to ensure that men and partners feel supported in using parental leave. To support their employees, organisations should:

Create a supportive workplace culture



Organisations committed to gender equality create a family supportive workplace culture. By offering a comprehensive set of family leave and flexible working benefits, including the option of flexible scheduling and working from home, organisations set a strong signal that work-family balance is valued.

In addition, employers can address potential fear of stigma by communicating and celebrating when partners and fathers take parental leave and by making leave approval decisions systematically across the organisation as opposed to parental leave being based on managerial discretion.

Increase awareness of gender-neutral parental leave

Increase awareness of gender-neutral parental leave by including the information in employee 'on boarding' material, team meetings and annual review meetings. Highlighting case studies of men and partners taking parental leave in organisation-wide publications, events and internal communications also increases awareness among the workforce.

Provide incentives for fathers and partners

Incentives have been shown to increase father's and partner's uptake of parental leave. Organisations can offer incentives such as targets for fathers taking parental leave, generous parental leave policies and financial bonuses.

Develop transition plans before uptake of parental leave

Organisations can ease transitions by having a process in place for: (1) documenting expected leave timing and duration; (2) identifying employees that can assist with coverage; (3) creating project transition plans and (4) developing communication expectations and procedures.

Provide a 'keep in touch days' return to work program

Offer 'keep in touch days' and a return to work program for employees who take parental leave. The transition to return to work can be improved by keeping employees informed of any changes or updates in the workplace. 'Keep in touch days' could include participating in a planning day, training or attending a conference. For more information visit: [Fair Work Ombudsman](#).

Provide return to work training for employees and manag-

Offer return to work training for managers and employees. Return to work training helps employees and managers meet any challenges they may encounter upon returning to work. This could include additional training and mentorship to help with new skills and changed workplace requirements.

Offer flexible working arrangements for all employees

Flexible working arrangements are a key enabler of gender equality. Flexibility is becoming increasingly important as employees and managers balance competing priorities in life, including family and caring responsibilities. Flexible working arrangements usually encompass changes to the hours, pattern and location of work. For more information, visit our [website](#).