



PRESS RELEASE
from The Work +Family Policy Roundtable

Government attack on new mothers

The Federal government's proposed changes to the Australian paid parental leave scheme are an outrageous and unwarranted attack on a very modest scheme that was developed carefully after years of consultation and evidence gathering.

This government is unravelling the scheme before our eyes and in the process has launched an extraordinarily offensive attack on all women and their families. The proposed changes are a complete reversal from the policy they went to the election with and they have no mandate to make these changes. There is no foundation or research evidence for the changes and recent evaluations of the scheme have been positive.

This is policy on the run with no thought for the consequences for mothers, children, families or employers.

The Treasurer Joe Hockey, Minister Scott Morrison and other Government ministers have accused Australian mothers of 'double-dipping', 'rorting' and 'fraud'. These accusations are disgraceful and completely wrong. They are verbal attacks on Australian mothers. The Ministers should apologise.

The comments demonstrate that Ministers of this government do not understand the way the current policy works.

Australian women with new babies are legally entitled to access their employer provided paid parental scheme - if they have one - and complement this with the universal government scheme paid at the minimum wage for 18 weeks. This is not 'double dipping'. Complementarity between the two systems was part of the original design of the Australian system and is a legal entitlement for new mothers to help them achieve a longer period of paid parental leave than would otherwise be possible. The World Health Organisation recommends new mothers spend 6 months on paid leave away from the workforce to promote child and mother well-being. The current system was implemented with an expectation that it would be improved upon through negotiation with government and employers eg. Lengthening the period of paid leave to 26 weeks and adding superannuation contributions. These are the minimum standards internationally and the Australian system requires further improvement not the slashing of standards included in this budget announcement.

This government has double-crossed Australian women. They stood for election promising one of the world's most generous paid parental leave schemes and have now taken that off the table and slashed the current system which recent evaluations have shown has improved overall access to paid parental leave for Australian mothers, has improved the health of mothers and babies and lifted female workforce participation.

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What is the Australian Work + Family Policy Roundtable?

The Roundtable is made up of researchers with expertise on work and family policy. Its goal is to propose, comment upon, collect and disseminate research to inform good evidence-based public policy in Australia.

The W+FPR held its first meeting in 2004. Since then the W+FPR has actively participated in public debate about work and family policy in Australia providing research-based submissions to relevant public inquiries, disseminating current research through publications for public commentary and through the media.

The Roundtable is a network of 29 academics from 16 universities and research institutions with expertise on work, care and family policy.

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Key Principles of the W+FPR

The W+FPR has 12 key guiding principles to inform its work and comment. We believe that in principle, work and family policy proposals should:

1. Recognise that good management of the work-life interface is a key characteristic of good labour law and social policy.
2. Adopt a life-cycle approach to facilitating good work-family interaction.
3. Support women and men to be workers as well as mothers, fathers and carers, and actively encourage fathers as carers.
4. Facilitate employee voice and influence over work arrangements.
5. Ensure sustainable workplaces and workers (e.g. through 'do-able', quality jobs and appropriate staffing levels).
6. Ensure gender equality, including pay equity.
7. Protect the well-being of children and other dependants.
8. Ensure predictable hours, earnings and job security.
9. Promote social justice and the fair distribution of social risk.
10. Treat individuals fairly, regardless of their household circumstances.
11. Ensure flexible working rights are practically available to all workers through effective regulation, education and enforcement.
12. Adopt policy and action based on rigorous, independent evidence.

See <http://www.workandfamilypolicyroundtable.org> for details of the W+FPR and its activities.