

Fatherhood and Paternity Leave



What is the parental leave situation in Australia?

Parental leave is employment-protected paid and/or unpaid leave for employed parents after the birth or adoption of a child. The availability of parental leave in public policy is designed to support mothers and fathers/partners to care for their children in the first 12 months.

Types of paid parental leave available in Australia:

- The Commonwealth Government's Parental Leave Pay (primary carers). Up to 18 weeks at minimum wage.
- The Commonwealth Government's Dad and Partner Pay (secondary carers). Up to 2 weeks at minimum wage.
- Employer-funded paid parental leave schemes.

To be eligible for Parental Leave Pay, parents need to meet certain criteria. Even if parents meet the criteria, they do not always access the benefit, particularly men.



1 in 20

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), only one in 20 fathers take primary parental leave.

What holds men back from accessing parental leave?

- **Financial Barriers** – the gender pay gap in Australia means that fathers traditionally earn more, therefore, it often makes financial sense for fathers to continue working.
- **Career Stigma** – According to the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), 27% of Australian fathers experience workplace discrimination for taking parental leave and returning to work. Men may feel that taking parental leave will signal a lack of commitment to their career, or result in them being overlooked for future promotions.
- **Cultural & Language Complexities** – The use of the terms 'primary carer' and 'secondary carer' in the Government's paid parental leave schemes assumes that one parent will be more involved in caregiving than the other, which entrenches the outdated 'breadwinner vs homemaker' family model.
- **Lack of Awareness** – Support for men's participation is often not actively promoted in workplaces. In addition, eligible Australian fathers may be unaware that they're entitled to take parental leave.



5%

of Australian employees who take primary carer's leave are men¹



46%

of Australian companies provide paid primary parental/paternity leave²



95%

of Australian employees who take secondary carer's leave are men³

Parental leave and the prevention of men's violence against women

Government and employer-funded parental leave policies provide fathers with opportunities to bond with their children, share caregiving responsibilities with their partner and empathise with the experiences and challenges that their partner faces in caregiving.

Supporting and encouraging fathers to engage with their families by taking care of young children can help to strengthen family relationships.

Men who maintain a healthy engagement with their children are less inclined to be depressed, suicidal or violent. Men taking parental leave also supports women's health. [A recent study from Sweden](#) found that mothers whose partners were offered flexible paid leave in the year after a child's birth, were less likely to need antibiotics and anti-anxiety medication.

Men sharing the care is empowering for women. Globally, women spend significantly more time than men – sometimes up to ten times as much – on unpaid childcare and domestic work.

Where can I find more information on accessing Parental Leave Pay?

Department of Human Services (Centrelink):

www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/parental-leave-pay

Where can I find more information on accessing Dad and Partner Pay?

Department of Human Services (Centrelink):

www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/dad-and-partner-pay

For best practice parental leave guidance for employers, visit:

www.parentsandcarersatwork.com and www.aplen.com.au

¹WGEA (2018), Developing a Leading Practice Parental Leave Policy, A guide for employers, (p. 4).

²WGEA (2018), Australia's gender equality scorecard, Key findings from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency's 2017-18 reporting data, (p. 11).

³ABS (2018), 4125.0 - Gender Indicators, Australia, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs>.