

PAID MATERNITY LEAVE

Most of the women who belong to the Older Women's Network are Age Pensioners and one might wonder why we should bother to make a submission for government funding for maternity leave. If granted, it will be too late to benefit us. However, had we received it when we had our children, some of us might not be dependent on the age pension now. Very few of us have had a lifetime of paid work, as have most men of our age. Most of those who were employed had several years out of the workforce because of bearing and caring for children. Almost none of them has superannuation except those who share the superannuation enjoyed by husbands. If their husbands die before they do, they will be lucky if they receive 5/8ths of the previous superannuation; although, if one were to die before her husband, he would continue to receive the full superannuation payment. Many of us have no partner. We all have a struggle to maintain a healthy lifestyle but those of us who have had children are the most disadvantaged because few have had continuous employment and most of whatever income they have had has been devoted to meeting the needs of their children.

Now those children have grown up and are facing the same problems as we did. Some of us are now caring for our grandchildren so that our daughters can continue with paid work. It is rather more than some of us can manage comfortably. In fact some of us could do with some help ourselves.

If the Government wants us to remain in our own homes for as long as possible, it should look ahead and provide adequate support for the "working families" which the Prime Minister is so fond of. Of course all women who have families WORK; but we think the PM means families who have at least two members engaged in PAID work. We urge the Federal Government to provide payment for a minimum of 14 weeks' maternity leave at the minimum wage rate for each of two births to each woman in Australia.

Since overpopulation is the main cause of destruction of our environment and since most environmental degradation is caused by the wealthiest countries, we suggest limiting the maternity benefit to two births per woman - thus replacing herself and her partner. Should one or both of these children die before adulthood, the mother should be eligible for further maternity leave payment for replacement.

Of course the next step should be the provision of good quality childcare by properly trained and qualified practitioners of childhood development. This should be part of our national, free, secular state education system. It is claimed by many that the most important years of learning are the first five. These years are too important to be left to non-experts - including most parents.