

I am responding to the Productivity Commission Draft Inquiry Report into Paid Parental Leave.

Firstly, I would like to commend the Australian Government for undertaking this most important inquiry. I hope that the outcomes will bring us more into line with many other western countries with respect to valuing and supporting families through a paid parental allowance.

The recommendations in the draft report do not go far enough. I believe that paid parental leave should actually be a paid parental *allowance* and be paid:

1. To ALL mothers whatever their employment status (F/T, P/T, Casual, Self, Non) and
2. For a minimum of 6 months (not just 18weeks).

My reasons are:

ALL parents are producers. They are producing the workforce for the future.

If we are to meet the challenges of our rapidly changing and unimaginable future we will need a healthy and intelligent workforce.

The most effective way to achieve this is to support exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months with continued breastfeeding to 2 years as recommended by the World Health Organisation. The surest way to achieve this is to allow mother and baby to stay together for 6 months.

Economic reasons (rising mortgages and living expenses) are forcing many women into the workforce soon after the birth of their baby, often earlier than they want to. A paid parental allowance would allow them to stay home with their babies.

18 weeks paid allowance is not enough to achieve 6 months exclusive breastfeeding. Returning to work before the baby is 6 months old leads in many cases to a premature cessation of breastfeeding.

Artificially fed babies are more prone to respiratory and ear infections. As children and adults they are more prone to many illness and diseases. Mothers of these children need to take more days off work to look after sick children, thus reducing their productivity.

Mothers returning early to work are also at risk of Post Natal Depression resulting from the stresses of juggling family and work commitments. PND reduces productivity.

The Costs:

To work out the costing of a paid parental allowance for 6 months for ALL mothers you need to consider more than changes in taxation and the baby bonus payment. You need to think about not what this program will cost the government but what it will SAVE.

A paid parental allowance for 6 months will promote and support exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months. If all Australian babies were exclusively breastfed until 6 months the government would experience the following savings:

- Reduced hospital costs for babies and young children
- Reduced health care costs resulting from the reduction in asthma, obesity, heart disease, and many other illnesses
- Reduced health care costs for the mothers resulting from a decreased risk of osteoporosis and many cancers
- Reduced dental health costs
- Reduced educational costs – breastfed children have fewer learning and language difficulties
- Reduced social costs resulting from reducing burnout in families with young children juggling work and home life

A 6 months paid parental *allowance* to ALL mothers will have many benefits for the Australian community. Breastfeeding mothers are producers. They are making milk for their babies who are our future workforce. They should ALL be paid for this product.

In other countries breastmilk is included in the country's Gross Domestic Product, and rightly so.

Again I commend the government for undertaking this Inquiry. I implore you to plan for the future and support a paid parental *allowance* for ALL mothers for a minimum of 6 months.

Yours sincerely,  
Ros Fleetwood