

Productivity Commission Inquiry into Paid Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave

Victorian Government Submission – Draft Inquiry Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- A.** The Victorian Government welcomes the Productivity Commission’s Draft Inquiry Report, and supports the introduction of a federally-funded paid parental leave scheme.
- B.** It is the view of the Victorian Government that paid parental leave:
- properly recognises the importance of the time after the birth of a child for the health and development of the child and wellbeing of families;
 - will increase women’s attachment to and retention in the labour force with real benefits for the competitiveness of the Australian economy;
 - compensates women in paid employment for their loss of income, including superannuation, and therefore helps to redress women’s financial inequality in employment and in retirement;
 - will increase the equity of access to paid parental leave for men and women in paid employment, particularly those on low incomes;
 - is consistent with current international practices; and
 - should be considered in the broader context of family-friendly workplace practices such as flexible workplace arrangements, purchased leave, unpaid parental leave, carer’s leave and access to quality affordable child care and maternal and child health services.
- C.** The Victorian Government submits that the final report should give due regard to the impact upon small and medium businesses of the administration and superannuation components of a paid parental leave scheme. It should consider the inclusion of sufficient administrative support for businesses during the implementation of such a scheme and its ongoing operation, with the goal of minimising and offsetting, wherever possible, the administrative burden on business associated with the proposal.

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- D.** The Victorian Government supports the Draft Report’s approach to a federally-funded paid parental leave scheme’s interaction with voluntary schemes (paid parental leave offered by employers through industrial instruments or contracts of employment). The ability for employers to respond to the introduction of a statutory scheme in various ways (including combining or offsetting current or planned arrangements) is likely to lead to positive outcomes for employees, by providing a new baseline from which employers will offer family flexibilities to attract and retain employees.
- E.** The Commission may wish to consider federally-funded paid parental leave in the context of recent instability in the global economy in its final report. For example, the Commission may wish to give due regard to paid parental leave’s role in stimulating productivity in the Australian economy.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Victorian Government is committed to assisting working families and welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the Draft Inquiry Report of the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Paid Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave (“the Inquiry”).
- 1.2 This submission responds to the Draft Inquiry Report including the rationale for paid parental leave. The submission provides information in relation to current paid parental leave arrangements, and details current Victorian Government policy and practice. It also provides a brief summary of the impact in Victoria of a federally-funded paid parental leave scheme on employers, and encourages consideration of the current economic environment.
- 1.3 A federally-funded paid parental leave scheme is an excellent initiative to further assist Australian working families at the time of the birth and/or placement of children.
- 1.4 The Victorian Government supports the inclusion of fathers, adopting parents and same-sex partners in a proposed paid parental leave scheme. Encouraging greater paternal and partner involvement in meeting the immediate caring needs of children will assist families to balance work and family responsibilities more effectively.
- 1.5 Although government initiatives to support mothers not currently in the paid workforce are outside the scope of the Inquiry, and therefore not detailed in this submission, direct financial support for all mothers at the time of their child’s birth is important. The significant contribution mothers not currently

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in the paid workforce make to community life should not be undervalued and any future scheme should not disadvantage this cohort of women.

- 1.6 The implementation of a federally-funded paid parental leave scheme is an important and practical initiative to meet two major objectives for Australia's future long-term prosperity. It will support the health and wellbeing of children, mothers and working families, and will support increased workforce retention, continuity and equity.

2. Why paid parental leave?

Health and Wellbeing

- 2.1 The Victorian Government believes that the health and wellbeing of the child, mother and family is of fundamental importance in supporting a federally-funded paid parental leave scheme.
- 2.2 In 2002, the Commonwealth Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), after wide consultation to which the Victorian Government contributed, released the publication *A Time to Value: Proposal for a National Paid Maternity Leave Scheme*.¹ This publication included evidence linking paid maternity leave to improved maternal health, bonding with the child, and infant and child health (including birth weight). Such benefits are gained through increased time for maternal recovery from birth, as well as maternal rest in late pregnancy, greater opportunity to establish breastfeeding and a good early feeding regime in general, and enhanced opportunities for child/parent bonding. These benefits have long-term

¹ HREOC (2002) *A Time to Value: Proposal for a National Paid Maternity Leave Scheme*, Sydney

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positive impacts on maternal mental and physical health, child health and development, and overall family wellbeing.²

2.3 There is also an important nexus between the time spent with a newborn after childbirth, in particular for breastfeeding, and the future health and development of the child and wellbeing of families. Early attachment has decisive and long-lasting effects on how people develop and learn, how they cope with stress, and how they regulate their emotions.³ Warm and responsive early care helps babies thrive and plays a vital role in healthy development. A strong, secure attachment to a nurturing parent, guardian or carer can have a protective biological function, helping a growing child withstand the ordinary stresses of daily life.⁴ This research strongly supports the implementation of policies such as paid parental leave that enable parents to form strong, secure attachments with their child in the early months of life.

2.4 The provision of paid parental leave strengthens the likelihood of a mother's ability to breastfeed. Research undertaken by Monash University, La Trobe University and the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, analysing 3700 women with six-month old babies, has shown that:

- the rate of breastfeeding was lower not only for those who had returned to work full time; it was also lower for women who returned part-time; and
- six months after giving birth, 56 per cent of women who were not performing paid work were breastfeeding. This compared with 44 per

² Ibid pp 51-61.

³ Shore R (1997) *Rethinking the Brain: New Insights into Early Development* (Revised 10/03), Families and Work Institute, New York

⁴ Ibid.

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cent of women who returned to paid work part-time and 39 per cent of those back at work full time.⁵

- 2.5 In broad terms, the Victorian Government considers a federally-funded paid parental leave scheme to be beneficial to children, mothers, and families and to long-term human capital development. There is strong evidence to demonstrate the critical nurturing and educational role of families toward their children, especially in the early stages of their lives.⁶

Retention and Equity

- 2.6 The Victorian Government believes a federally-funded paid parental leave scheme will increase the retention of skilled women in the workforce through increased female attachment to the workforce. A national scheme will also provide greater equity of access to the provision of paid maternity leave and address the economic disadvantage faced by women who take leave from the workforce to have children.

- 2.7 Evidence from Australian employers has shown that paid parental leave results in a higher rate of return to work by employees.⁷ Participation and retention of women in the workforce in their younger years also translates to ongoing participation of women as older workers. Specifically, research undertaken by the Victorian Office for Women's Policy and Workforce Victoria (formerly Industrial Relations Victoria) as part of the *Paving the Way for Older Women in the Workforce 2025 Project* found that a woman who did not participate in the labour market when she was younger was less

⁵ Nader C (2008) 'Part time work no friend of breastfeeding' *The Age*, Melbourne <http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/parttime-work-no-friend-of-breastfeeding/2008/04/27/1209234656192.html> (accessed 29 April 2008).

⁶ Gerhardt S (2004) *Why Love Matters: How Affection Shapes a Baby's Brain*, London, Palgrave Macmillan; OECD (2006) *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care*

⁷ Finance Sector Union (2002) *Submission to the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee*, Canberra, p 4

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likely to participate when she was in her late forties, regardless of her family and economic circumstances.⁸

Equity in superannuation

2.8 The Victorian Government welcomes the Draft Reports' recommended inclusion of the provision of compulsory superannuation contributions during paid parental leave. The many financial disadvantages already faced by women in the workforce when compared with men (pay inequity, reduced participation and a higher rate of part-time work) are well documented. Several studies focus specifically on the gender gap in projected outcomes from current superannuation provisions.⁹ On average, when women retire from the workforce they will have half as much superannuation as men.¹⁰

2.9 There are some indications that the impact of having a child is affecting women's superannuation less now than in previous years.¹¹ However, research has shown that the loss of superannuation for women increases rapidly with the second and third child, amounting to more than \$30,000 (compared with non-mothers) after the third child.¹²

2.10 As superannuation is becoming the central pillar of a self-funded retirement, women's financial disadvantage in retirement is felt strongly by those

⁸ Victorian Office of Women's Policy (2005) *Paving the Way for Older Women in the Workforce 2025 Project*, Melbourne

⁹ *Paving the Way – Chapter 3: Australian Women's Labour Market Participation and their Retirement Incomes: A Literature Review*

<http://www.business.vic.gov.au/busvicwr/assets/main/lib60079/wiwchapter3.pdf>

¹⁰ Olsberg D & Ferris S (2001) *MS...ing Out? Women and Retirement Savings*, Sydney, http://www.acst.mq.edu.au/research_papers/200101_women_and_retirement_savings.pdf

¹¹ ABS (2005) data shows that 40 per cent of women return to work before their child is nine months old, *Pregnancy and Employment Transitions*, Australia, Cat No 4913.0 November

¹² Ferris S, Mahutea S & Parr N (2007) 'The Impact of Children on Australian Women's and Men's Superannuation', Paper prepared for the HILDA Survey Research Conference 2007 held at the University of Melbourne 19-20 July

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women who have interrupted their paid work to look after children. The Victorian Government believes the inclusion of compulsory superannuation contributions in a federally-funded paid parental leave scheme will help address women's disadvantage through loss of superannuation when they stop work to give birth and care for children.

Access to paid parental leave

2.11 Access to paid parental leave varies widely by industry, occupation, income and sector. Men and women on lower incomes, in less skilled jobs and in the private sector are much less likely to have access to paid parental leave than those on higher incomes, in professions and management jobs, and in the public sector.¹³ Access to paid parental leave across Australian industry is deteriorating. Recent data released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics indicates a smaller proportion of employees were eligible for paid parental leave in October 2007 than in October 2006.¹⁴ The Victorian Government believes that providing access to a national federally-funded scheme of paid parental leave will provide equity of access for all Australian working women.

International standards

2.12 There are several international standards relevant to family-friendly work practices and paid parental leave.¹⁵ These standards reflect an international view that family-friendly measures, including paid parental leave, are essential to the promotion of equal opportunity and equal treatment for

¹³ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006) *Employee Earnings, Benefits and Trade Union Membership*, Australia, Cat No 6310.0, August

¹⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2007) *Forms of Employment*, Cat No 6359.0, November

¹⁵ These include the 1979 United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); ILO Convention 183 (C183), Maternity Protection 2000 (with associated Recommendations); and ILO Convention 156 (C156), Workers with Family Responsibilities, 1981, (C156 and Recommendations). Australia ratified C156 in 1990, CEDAW in 1983 with a reservation in relation to paid maternity leave, and has not ratified C183.

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women workers, and to substantive equality of opportunity and treatment between men and women with family responsibilities.

3. Victoria and parental leave

Victoria as employer

3.1 As a major employer the Victorian Government recognises the benefit of providing paid parental leave to attract and retain a skilled, committed and motivated workforce. There are approximately 254,000 Victorian public sector employees. The vast majority of women employed in the public sector are entitled to either 10 or 14 weeks' paid maternity/adoption leave, and fathers/partners, to one week paid paternity/partner leave.

3.2 Under the *Victorian Public Service Agreement 2006* covering approximately 29,500 permanent Victorian public service employees (the majority of whom are female), the Victorian Government currently provides the following entitlements to permanent employees who have had 12 months' continuous service:¹⁶

- 14 weeks' paid maternity/adoption leave at full pay (plus superannuation contributions), available at the birth of a child to the employee or the adoption of a child to the primary caregiver;
- one week paid paternity/partner leave at full pay (plus superannuation contributions) available to the father/partner at the birth of a child, and one week of paid adoption leave to the secondary carer;
- unpaid parental leave (not exceeding 52 weeks including any components of paid parental leave) for the primary care giver upon the birth or adoption of the child; and

¹⁶ See Clause 46: Paid parental leave.

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- leave without pay in addition to paid and unpaid parental leave, up to seven years' total leave, by agreement.

3.3 In addition to establishing a minimum standard for parental leave, the Victorian Government supports employees and their families in various forms of employment by providing flexible paid leave options. For example, paid parental leave can be taken at half pay or in combination with recreation leave to extend the duration of time taken overall. Other flexible options, such as an employee's ability to request part-time work on return from parental leave, or to purchase extra leave from their salary, can also support the parents' and child's wellbeing and financial circumstances in the early stages after giving birth.

Victorian initiatives to support parental leave

3.4 The Victorian Government further believes that men and same-sex partners must be financially and culturally supported with respect to playing an important role in caring for their children, and should have access to flexible working arrangements to be able to take on equal parenting and unpaid working responsibilities. Although the number of organisations providing paid paternity leave doubled from 15 per cent in 2001 to 32 per cent in 2005, 67 per cent of organisations only provided one week and 16 per cent provided two, with only 29 per cent of the private sector providing paid paternity leave at that time.¹⁷

3.5 Like other Australians in paid employment, Victorian men and women working in the public sector, in larger companies and in higher skill occupations are also more likely to have access to paid parental leave. With respect to women's entitlements, the Victorian Workplace Industrial

¹⁷ Australian Government study (2006) *The EOWA (Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency) Paid Paternity Leave*

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Relations Survey¹⁸ indicated that while just under two-thirds of workplaces had dedicated family or carer's leave, only 27 per cent had paid maternity leave. Workplaces in the mining and utilities industries were most likely to have paid maternity leave (35 per cent), while those in the accommodation, cafes and restaurant industry and in the retail industry were least likely to have paid maternity leave (21 per cent).

3.6 To help reduce this inequality, the Victorian Government supports all private sector employers that provide paid maternity or adoption leave. In 2002, the Victorian Government introduced a payroll tax exemption, in respect to wages, for those employers who voluntarily pay up to 14 weeks' maternity or adoption leave to their employees.¹⁹ Leave may be taken either before or after the birth or adoption and there is no specified minimum period of prior employment and no maximum wage restriction. The exemption took effect from 1 January 2003.

3.7 The payroll tax exemption provides savings to employers and underlines the Government's commitment to providing practical support for employers assisting the balance between family and work. **Attachment 1** summarises further practical support offered by the Victorian Government for working families with new-born children.

3.8 Subsequently in 2005, the Victorian Government, recognising that parents - and in particular women - who take maternity leave were being disadvantaged by the State's long service leave laws, amended the *Long Service Leave Act 1992* (Vic) so that continuity of service would not be

¹⁸ Industrial Relations Victoria (2008) *Victorian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey*, Melbourne.

¹⁹ The maternity leave applies to all employed women. The adoption leave applies to both women and men. The exemption does not apply to paid sick leave, annual leave, recreational leave, long service leave or similar leave taken while the employee is absent due to a pregnancy or adoption.

See Attachment 1 for further elaboration or refer to s. 53-55 *Payroll Tax Act 2007* (Vic).

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broken when a parent took any form of parental leave. Further, forms of paid parental leave including maternity, paternity and adoption leave were recognised as counting towards the accrual of long service leave.

4. Operation of a National Paid Parental Leave Scheme

Eligibility

- 4.1 The Victorian Government supports the Draft Report's proposed eligibility criteria for paid parental leave.
- 4.2 Paid parental leave, where it is available in Australia, is generally available where the employee has been employed with the same employer for a period of at least 12 months, including in the Victorian public sector. The Victorian Government considers that, consistent with the prevailing practice, an eligibility requirement of at least 12 months' participation in the workforce should apply to any national paid parental leave scheme.
- 4.3 It should be noted that the Victorian Government, in its submission to the Commonwealth Government in regard to the proposed National Employment Standards, welcomed the proposed parental leave Standard, with the recommendation that the Standard also apply to same-sex couples.

Duration

- 4.4 Fourteen weeks' paid maternity leave is the International Labour Organisation (ILO) minimum standard. The majority of countries that provide for paid maternity leave provide between 14 and 48 weeks. New Zealand provides 14 weeks' paid maternity leave, while the United Kingdom provides 39 weeks of statutory maternity pay. An Australian paid parental leave scheme should adequately support Australian working

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families in the time following the birth or placement of a child in a manner that properly furthers the objectives of the scheme. Future increases to entitlements should not be precluded.

Level of Payment

- 4.5 The Maternity Protection Convention (ILO 183) states that paid maternity leave is to “be at a level which ensures that the woman can maintain herself and her child in proper conditions of health and with a suitable standard of living”.²⁰ It is important to ensure that a federally-funded paid parental leave scheme provides a level of payment that meets the financial needs of new parents and provides adequate compensation for income and earnings forgone while at work. Such a scheme must also recognise the importance of superannuation contributions to a self-funded retirement.
- 4.6 The Victorian Government supports the Draft Report’s recommendation regarding the payment level of paid parental leave. This is consistent with the ILO standard and is subject to an annual assessment by the Australian Fair Pay Commission (or into the future, Fair Work Australia). The Victorian Government also believes that this approach will avoid the many administrative complexities associated with differentiated levels of payment.

5. Impact of a paid parental leave scheme on employers

- 5.1 Many Australian employers recognise the benefits flowing from family-friendly provisions such as paid parental leave and the positive effect they have on staff retention. These include savings on recruitment costs, training,

²⁰ ILO Convention 183 (C183), Article 6: Benefits.

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higher morale and improved productivity.²¹ This is why companies such as Holden, the National Australia Bank and Myer have introduced paid parental leave and other family-friendly provisions.

- 5.2 However, a national federally-funded paid parental leave scheme will enable Australian small businesses to maintain a competitive position in the market for a skilled workforce. Under a national scheme, small businesses will be better positioned to offer family-friendly incentives to attract prospective employees to the workplace, and to retain current employees.
- 5.3 The particular benefit to small businesses of a national federally-funded scheme will be the retention of the skills and knowledge invested in employees, without the eventual cost of retraining and replacing staff. Other benefits include businesses having the confidence to undertake long-term planning, and employees that find satisfaction in a stable working environment where their contribution is valued.
- 5.4 The Victorian Government notes the concerns of small businesses with respect to some elements of the Draft Report. In particular, many stakeholders are concerned that playing a "paymaster" role will have a negative effect on small/medium enterprises; in particular those that are currently experiencing disadvantage, such as those run by indigenous people and micro-businesses. Delays in processing reimbursement of a Commonwealth Government funded component may prevent such businesses from sourcing and training a replacement staff member for the relevant period, and/or could severely hamper their ability to trade.

²¹ Australian Industry Group (2002) *Submission to the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee*, Canberra, p 21; and Industrial Relations Victoria (2007) *Work and Family Balance Manual: better practices for better business*, Melbourne

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- 5.5 We submit that the Commission may wish to consider the efficacy of allowing small businesses (with less than 20 employees) to access Pay As You Go (PAYG) withholding tax credit for the Government-funded component of a national paid parental leave scheme in advance of the leave being taken. This could be implemented by the employer advising the Australian Taxation Office that a particular employee would be taking parental leave from a nominated date, and the employer then being given credit for the funded leave in advance. This measure would address cash flow concerns for the businesses that are likely to be most disadvantaged by delays in refunding the minimum wage component.
- 5.6 We recommend that the final report takes into account the particular financial and administrative demands that a national federally-funded paid parental leave scheme will place on this important sector of our economy, and that small business is not overly burdened. In particular, cash flow is of critical concern to small businesses and the impact of any delay in reimbursement should be taken into account.
- 5.7 The final report should also consider the provision of sufficient Commonwealth Government administrative support for businesses during the implementation of a new system, and ongoing support, particularly for those employers with limited time, knowledge and resources to implement the necessary changes, with the goal of minimising and offsetting, wherever possible, the administrative burden on business associated with the proposal. Moreover, it has become apparent that many small business people are not aware of the possible benefits to their business of paid parental leave, and this is an issue that should be addressed by the final report.

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5.8 The Victorian Government supports the approach in the Draft Report to the interaction of a national federally-funded scheme with voluntary schemes (for example, paid parental leave offered by employers through industrial instruments or contracts of employment). The ability for employers to respond to the introduction of a statutory scheme in various ways (including combining or offsetting current or planned arrangements) is likely to lead to positive outcomes for employees, by providing a new baseline from which employers can offer family-friendly flexibilities to attract and retain employees.

5.9 We note that the Draft Report does not propose the introduction of incentives for small/medium enterprises to implement best practice human resources policies, such as topping up a salary during the period of leave, and/or providing longer periods of leave, and other family friendly work practices. The Commission may wish to consider such incentives (both financial and non-financial) in its final report, as these would act to encourage best practice family-friendly policies in Australian workplaces.

6. Current Economic Circumstances

6.1 The Victorian Government notes that the economic climate has changed dramatically in recent times and since the release of the Draft Report. The Commission may wish to consider federally-funded paid parental leave in the context of such recent developments in its final report; for example, the role of a federally-funded paid parental leave scheme in stimulating productivity in the Australian economy.

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7. Conclusion

- 7.1 The Victorian Government supports a national federally-funded paid parental leave scheme, and supports the provision of paid parental leave as an employment-related entitlement that recognises the intrinsic health and wellbeing benefits that paid parental leave affords newborn children and their families.
- 7.2 Further, a national federally-funded paid parental leave scheme recognises and begins to address the many financial disadvantages facing women in employment who have children as well as the current inequity in the provision of and access to paid parental leave.
- 7.3 The Victorian Government looks forward to the final report of the Inquiry.

Victorian Government Programs Relevant to Parents of New Born Children

The following Victorian Government programs provide support to parents of new born children:

Payroll Tax Exemption - for wages paid to workers taking paid maternity or adoption leave

- The Victorian Government introduced a payroll tax exemption for employers from January 1 2003 in respect of wages (other than fringe benefits) paid to workers taking up to 14 weeks' maternity or adoption leave of up to 14 weeks on full pay. There is also provision for:
 - a period that is the equivalent of 14 weeks' leave on full pay, in the case of full-time employees who take leave on less than full pay; or
 - a period of 14 weeks' leave at part-time rates of pay, in the case of part-time employees.
- The maternity leave exemption applies in respect of all employed women. The adoption leave exemption applies in respect of both women and men. The exemption does not apply to paid sick leave, annual leave, recreational leave, long service leave or similar leave taken while the employee is absent due to a pregnancy or adoption.
- Leave may be taken either before or after the birth or adoption and there is no specified minimum period of prior employment and no maximum wage restriction.

Equal Opportunity Amendment (Family Responsibilities) Act 2008 (Vic)

- Amendments to the *Equal Opportunity Act 1995* (Vic) took effect from 1 September 2008 to protect working parents and carers against discrimination while trying to balance their work and family responsibilities.
- These amendments require an employer, a principal or a firm to not unreasonably refuse to accommodate the parenting or caring responsibilities of a person offered employment, an employee, a contract worker, a person invited to become a partner in a firm, or a partner in a firm.
- Guidelines to assist employers and employees understand these changes have been developed by the Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission of Victoria and Workforce Victoria in consultation with employer organisations, unions and non-government organisations.

Pregnancy, discrimination and workplace rights kit

- In 2007, the Office of the Workplace Rights Advocate commissioned research to examine the operation of anti-discrimination law and labour law provisions designed to protect working women who fall pregnant.
- Research recommendations included the development of an information pack on pregnancy discrimination and workplace rights for employers and women workers.
- The information pack is currently in development and will be launched and distributed in late 2008.

***ways2work* on-line toolkit**

- In 2007 the Victorian Government committed four years of funding to the development and implementation of an on-line toolkit for parents and carers.
- This toolkit provides information to parents and carers returning to work after time out of the paid workforce whilst caring for children or older dependents, as well as the employers who will employ them.
- Phase 1 of *ways2work* was launched in September 2008 and is available at ways2work.business.vic.gov.au.

Returning to Earning Program

- Returning to Earning provides support to help parents who have cared for children for over two years and who need to upgrade their skills to return to paid work.
- The program provides grants of up to \$1000 to pay for training-related expenses such as course fees, course materials and child care.

Quality Part-Time Work Project

- Undertaken by Workforce Victoria, in consultation with employer organisations and unions, the Quality Part-Time Work Project provides information to assist employers implement quality part-time work programs for parents returning to work after time out of the paid workforce.
- Outcomes from the project include industry-endorsed guidelines on how to improve the quality of part-time work in retail, hospitality, local government, law and health. www.irv.vic.gov.au

Work and Family Balance Manual – better practices for better business

- Developed by Industrial Relations Victoria (now Workforce Victoria), the *Work and Family Balance Manual* aims to assist employees and employers work in partnership to improve the balance between family and work in their workplaces.
- The manual includes information on relevant legislation, examples of strategies and policies, model clauses, as well as a step-by-step guide to implementation. www.irv.vic.gov.au

Victorian Public Service Agreement

- The *Victorian Public Service Agreement 2006* includes paid maternity leave of 14 weeks' duration (also applies where a miscarriage occurs after 20 weeks) which may be taken for double the period at half pay.
- Paid leave is available to a female employee other than a casual employee who has at least 12 months continuous service.
- The Agreement also includes paid paternity or partner leave of one week's duration.
- Parental leave combining paid and unpaid entitlements can be taken for a period of up to seven years.

Flexible Work Arrangements in the Public Sector

Policies in place across the Victorian public sector include:

- Access to Carer's Rooms which can be used by employees and their dependents in emergency situations, when a parent is unable to make alternative care arrangements for a child recovering from an illness which is not/no longer contagious, when normal childcare arrangements have broken down at the last

minute or when a family member requires a place to rest or recover after a medical appointment, before travelling home.

- Keeping in Touch programs which encourage employees to maintain contact with their workplaces during periods of extended leave, including parental leave, whereby managers send out newsletters, bulletins and other requested information, to employees on extended leave.
- Policies to encourage breastfeeding including the availability of a private room where mothers can express as required.
- Paid and unpaid parental leave entitlements, detailed in the body of the submission.
- Purchased leave policies enabling employees to purchase up to an additional 8 weeks' annual leave.

Victoria's Early Childhood Universal Services

- The following universal services are available across Victoria: maternal and child health, kindergarten, child care, out of school hours care, early childhood intervention, counselling and family and parenting services as either as stand-alone or co-located services, and in some areas in integrated Children's Centres.
- Children's Centres provide a 'one-stop-shop' of integrated kindergarten programs and child care together with a range of services such as maternal child health, early childhood intervention, counselling and family and parenting services.
- Parenting Support Services include a range of programs delivered by the Victorian Parenting Centre, nine Victorian Regional Parenting Services and Parentline, that encompasses research and resource development around parenting, and the provision of information, education, counselling and support to parents.
- Maternal and Child Health (MCH) is a universal program jointly funded by local government and the State government and delivered by local government. It is a free service for all Victorian families with children aged 0-6 years. The Service offers support, information and advice regarding parenting, child health and development, child behaviour, maternal health and well-being, child safety, immunisation, breastfeeding, nutrition and family planning. Parents can also join groups to obtain health information, and to meet other parents in their local area.