



# 2014 Resources for Supporting Working Parents

## PROJECT FACTSHEET

### Resources for Supporting Working Parents

In July 2014, Elizabeth Broderick, Sex Discrimination Commissioner, on behalf of the Australian Human Rights Commission, released the Report of the *Supporting Working Parents: Pregnancy and Return to Work National Review*. The National Review examined the prevalence, nature and consequences of discrimination in the workplace related to pregnancy, parental leave and return to work following parental leave through the collection of national benchmark prevalence data and extensive qualitative research.

Despite longstanding prohibitions against pregnancy/return to work discrimination, the National Review found that it is pervasive. One in two (49%) mothers reported experiencing discrimination in the workplace at some point. Further, over a quarter (27%) of the fathers and partners surveyed reported experiencing discrimination related to parental leave and return to work despite taking very short periods of leave.

The National Review identified that the strategy with the highest impact in reducing discrimination in this area is to address the gap that currently exists between the law and its proper implementation within organisations. A critical strategy in bridging this gap is the dissemination of clear, comprehensive and consistent information that will assist employers and employees to increase and enhance their understanding of obligations and rights, and how they should be applied in the workplace.

Given this ongoing problem, the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet has funded the Australian Human Rights Commission to develop resources for employers and employees on obligations, rights and entitlements in relation to pregnancy, parental leave and return to work in the workplace.

### Some background

In conducting the National Review, the Commission collected both quantitative and qualitative data. This included a National Prevalence survey providing the first nationally representative benchmark data in Australia, as well as a wide-ranging consultation and submission process.

The National Review team conducted more than 50 face-to-face group consultations meeting with over 430 individuals, employers, and representatives of community organisations, unions, employer associations and business and industry peaks. In addition, over 440 written submissions were received from these stakeholders. This enabled the voices of both employees and employers to be heard directly, providing an insight into their experiences and the challenges they faced in the workplace.

Throughout the National Review's consultations with employers, many employers shared the difficulty they encountered in understanding their legal obligations – from the multiplicity of legislation with which they must comply, through to challenges in implementing their obligations. This was particularly evident in relation to accommodating the specific needs of pregnant employees, managing return to work for parents after parental leave (such as managing flexible work), and shifting ingrained stereotypes and attitudes that can impede the successful implementation of policy for, and management of, working parents. Pregnant workers and working parents also shared the challenges they faced in locating clear and consistent information on their rights and entitlements.

The National Review identified that employers and employees need clear, comprehensive and consistent information that will assist them to increase and enhance their understanding of their obligations and their rights and how they should be applied in the workplace. The National Review also identified that the information needs to cover all relevant jurisdictions and explain the interaction of obligations under different laws

## Aims of the Project

This project aims to maximise the participation of women in the workforce, through development of a practical resource on employers' legal obligations, employees' rights and leading strategies on how to best manage and support working parents through pregnancy, parental leave, and on return to work after parental leave.

## Methodology

Drawing on the work of the National Review, the project will identify existing resources and leading practices and strategies for supporting working parents.

The Commission will collaborate with the following government and statutory agencies to produce and disseminate this information and guidance material:

- Department of Social Services
- Fair Work Ombudsman
- Fair Work Commission
- Safe Work Australia and relevant state and territory regulators
- state and territory anti-discrimination and equal opportunity authorities.

The Commission will also consult with other key stakeholders including business and industry and unions, to develop and test the resources for supporting working parents in the workplace.

## Timeframe

Mapping of existing resources	2014
Consultations and testing	2014 - 2015
Launch of Resources	June 2014

## Contact details

If you have any queries or would like to contact the Commission about this project please email: [info@humanrights.gov.au](mailto:info@humanrights.gov.au)

The *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth) (the SDA) makes it unlawful to treat a person unfairly because of their sex, family responsibilities or because they are pregnant. The SDA can also provide some protections to people wanting to return to work after parental leave. If you would like more information about what might be covered by the SDA or you would like to make a complaint to the Australian Human Rights Commission, you can contact our Complaint Information Service on:

Complaint Info Line: 1300 656 419  
Email: [complaintsinfo@humanrights.gov.au](mailto:complaintsinfo@humanrights.gov.au)  
Fax: 02 9284 9611  
TTY: 1800 620 241  
NRS: 133 677

If you need an interpreter you can call 131 450 and ask to be connect to the Australian Human Rights Commission.

You can make a complaint online by going to <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/complaints/lodging-your-complaint>.