



Australian Government

Equal Opportunity for  
Women in the Workplace Agency

## media release

26 May 2008

### **Paid maternity leave on the rise but too many miss out**

The provision of paid maternity leave has increased from 23.7% in 2001 to 48.9% in 2007 among medium to large organisations according to latest research released today by the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency and sponsored by Alcoa.

The percentage of organisations providing 12 weeks or more in line with both the recommendations of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) has increased to 40% compared to just 27% two years ago.

The research will be used to inform the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Paid Maternity Leave, when the Agency makes its submission next week.

Despite the increase and now record level there are significant disparities across industry sector occupations and organisational size, which supports the introduction of a universal scheme.

Based on data collected from the annual EOWA Survey, many (63%) organisations that provide paid maternity leave do not make the benefit available to all staff. 84% confirmed it is not available to casual employees or contractors. Other disadvantaged groups include non-managerial employees, those under a particular award or category or women who do not meet the eligibility minimum service criteria.

Among the 51.1% of organisations that do not provide paid maternity leave are sectors that have a high number of women workers, particularly the retail, accommodation and food services sectors. Together, these sectors employ nearly a third of all women covered by the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act.

In addition, figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) show that women professionals are twice as likely to use paid maternity leave as women who were employed as clerical, sales or service workers<sup>1</sup>.

Only 19% of small and medium enterprises provide paid maternity leave<sup>2</sup>.

Anna McPhee, EOWA Director says "EOWA's research clearly demonstrates that there is a solid business case for a universal paid maternity leave system to address the inequities. Paid maternity leave is important to assist mothers to fully recuperate after birth as well as supporting ongoing workforce participation by maintaining long-term attachment to the workplace".

The benefits of a universal paid parental scheme for employers will improve retention and long-term attachment, whilst also reducing the large cost of recruitment, replacement and training of new employees. This saving far outweighs the cost of paid leave. In addition, increased

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<sup>1</sup> Paid maternity leave was used by six in ten (60%) women employees who were Professionals, almost double the proportion of women whose last main job while pregnant was as an Intermediate clerical, sales and service worker (31%) Source: ABS Social Trends 2007 4102.0

<sup>2</sup> *Better Conditions, Better Business* – A Report on carer and family friendly provisions in Australian small and medium enterprises. Published by The Office for Women, 2007

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attachment will improve gender equity by raising women's total workforce participation; will have a positive impact on national productivity and increasing of the tax base"

The EOWA paid maternity leave figures were based on information collected as part of the 2007 EOWA Survey, sponsored by Alcoa, which examines paid maternity and paternity leave, flexibility and part time work. The full survey will be released in August.

The EOWA's full submission to the Productivity Commission will be available on June 2.

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