



## **More women get paid maternity leave, but lower income earners still missing out**

Many more Australian employers are paying maternity leave according to a new survey of organisations that report to the Federal Government's Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA).

The EOWA Work Life Survey 2003 found that 36 percent of surveyed employers now provide paid maternity leave, up from 23 percent in 2001, an increase of 55 percent in just two years.

Nevertheless, paid maternity leave continues to be far less common in industries like retailing (17 per cent) and hospitality (6 per cent) which have a high concentration of less-skilled, lower-paid and casual female employees.

EOWA Director Fiona Krautil welcomed the increase in the number of organisations providing paid maternity leave but argued that the business community needs to do more to ensure that it is generally available to all women employees. 'From our survey results it is evident that larger organisations are leading the way (44 per cent with 1000+ employees) and that the smaller companies are lagging behind (33 per cent with 250-499 employees),' said Ms Krautil

"Many employers are now aware of the benefits they get from paid maternity leave and other workplace flexibility initiatives, particularly the ability to retain good employees and keep them productive,' noted Ms Krautil.

The survey found that paid maternity leave is most common in industries with high numbers of skilled female employees and / or government involvement (such as accreditation processes): finance & insurance (45 per cent), education (71 per cent), health and community services (43 per cent).

"These results show the important role government continues to play in establishing paid maternity leave as common practice in Australia", said Ms Krautil.

Women in the ACT (70 percent) are most likely to be offered paid maternity leave, while women in the most populated states, Victoria (41 percent) and NSW (35 percent), do better than their colleagues in Queensland (28 per cent), WA (29 per cent), SA (29 per cent) and Tasmania (29 per cent).

The majority of organisations (72 per cent) providing paid maternity leave said they offered it for at least 5 weeks, while the most popular duration for paid maternity leave were 5-6 weeks (35 per cent) and 9-12 weeks (23 per cent).

A total of 1595 organisations were surveyed by EOWA on their paid maternity leave provisions, retention rates, flexible working arrangements and attitudes to managers working part-time. This represents 63 percent of all organisations due to report to EOWA in 2003.

The organisations surveyed employ over 1,268,000 people. Of the 1595 surveyed, 139 had female CEOs (8.7 per cent).

Under the provisions of the *Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act (1999)*, organisations with more than 100 employees are required to report to the Agency on their initiatives to advance women in the workplace. Organisations need to demonstrate they have identified the issues affecting their employees, particularly women, in their workplace and are taking action to address them. The survey data on paid maternity leave was collected as part of this process.

#### Notes

1. 2,545 organisations reported to EOWA in 2003.
2. The information was collected through telephone conversations between EOWA report assessors and the reporting organisations.
3. 1,595 organisations were surveyed, comprising 63% of all reporting organisations in 2003.
4. Caution should be exercised when extrapolating the data as the companies surveyed are not representative of all companies in Australia, only those that report to EOWA.

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