



**Submission to the  
Paid Parental Leave Bill Inquiry**

**14 December 2023**

## Equality Rights Alliance

The Equality Rights Alliance (ERA) is one of the six National Women's Alliances funded to advise the Office for Women on gender policy in Australia. ERA is Australia's largest network of organisations advocating for gender equality, women's economic security, women's leadership, and recognition of women's diversity. We are advised by our 67 members, who are national-level or expert NGOs with a focus on the impact of policy or service delivery on women.

ERA acknowledges and thanks Women with Disabilities Australia and the National Foundation for Australian Women for their expertise and input in developing this submission.

This submission has been specifically endorsed by the following ERA member organisations:



## Summary of position and recommendations

ERA supports the *Paid Parental Leave Amendment (More Support for Working Families) Bill 2023*, particularly:

1. the increase in available leave to 26 weeks;
2. the extension to the reserved period for partnered claimants;
3. the increase in the number of days that can be taken concurrently by multiple claimants in relation to the child to 4 weeks by 1 July 2025; and
4. the use of gender-neutral language in the Bill.

ERA additionally recommends:

5. that administration of PPL remains the responsibility of employers, regardless of the size of the business;

ERA also makes the following recommendations about further refinements to the PPL scheme:

6. a further incremental increase to the PPL the entitlement to 52 weeks;
7. extending superannuation payments to government-funded parental leave;
8. increasing the rate of pay to match either wage replacement or the Average Weekly Ordinary Time Earnings;
9. supporting the existing amendments through targeted campaigns encouraging men to access the scheme and share unpaid care work more equally;
10. that the government support research into the unique needs of parents experiencing adverse birth outcomes and the potential role for PPL in addressing those needs;
11. that the government support research into the uptake of PPL by people in heterodox relationships and by transgender people, gender fluid

people and people who do not identify on the gender binary, in order to identify barriers to accessing PPL for these populations; and

12. that the government support research into the uptake of PPL by CALD and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and men, in order to identify barriers to accessing PPL for these populations.

## Introduction

Equality Rights Alliance welcomes this opportunity to provide input on the *Paid Parental Leave Amendment (More Support for Working Families) Bill 2023*.

ERA views these amendments as significant advances in the promotion of Australian women's economic security. The amendments are equality enabling (supporting and encouraging behaviour change within households) and are consistent with the government's broader commitment to promoting women's economic security.

The present Bill is also consistent with Australia's commitments under the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Australia has committed to provide social protection schemes which support parents and carers, with a view to recognising and valuing unpaid work and care:

*"Ensure access to social protection for unpaid caregivers of all ages, ..., and in this regard strengthen social protection schemes that promote, as appropriate, the economic, social and legal recognition of unpaid care and domestic work..."*<sup>1</sup>

Several of the amendments follow ERA's recommendations from previous pre-budget submissions, bringing Australian Paid Parental Leave (PPL) closer to international standards.

The original introduction of the PPL scheme in 2011 greatly improved Australia's Gender Equality Index score.<sup>2</sup> However, Australia continues to fall behind other comparable nations in the provision of PPL. ERA welcomes the gradual increase of PPL entitlements to 26 weeks in the Bill, but notes that, according to OECD data, the global average of paid leave entitlements for mothers is 54.1 weeks.<sup>3</sup>

We note in passing that the present Bill does not address adequacy of payments, which is one of the key discrepancies between Australia's PPL scheme and international PPL standards. The International Labour Organisation's Maternity

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<sup>1</sup> General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development - Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*, (5.4), A/RES/70/1, available at [https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&referer=http://www.un.org/en/documents/in dex.html&Lang=E](https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&referer=http://www.un.org/en/documents/in dex.html&Lang=E)

<sup>2</sup> S Blum et al (2018), *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2018*. [http://www.leavenetwork.org/lp\\_and\\_r\\_reports](http://www.leavenetwork.org/lp_and_r_reports)

<sup>3</sup> OECD Family Database, [https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF2\\_1\\_Parental\\_leave\\_systems.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF2_1_Parental_leave_systems.pdf)

Protection Convention (ILO C183) stipulates that PPL should be *‘not less than two thirds of the woman’s previous earnings’*<sup>4</sup> and should be sufficient to ensure *‘that the woman can maintain herself and her child in proper conditions of health and with a suitable standard of living’*.<sup>5</sup> Australia has not yet ratified ILO C183, and the present Bill does not bring Australia into line with this standard.

## ERA’s submission

*On the amendment to extend the Paid Parental Leave scheme by 2 weeks each year from 1 July 2024 to reach 26 weeks from 1 July 2026.*

**ERA supports the increase in available leave to 26 weeks.** There is considerable evidence to support the extension of paid parental leave to 26 weeks. The Productivity Commission’s 2009 report on PPL acknowledged the considerable body of research supporting the benefits of primary carer leave for the developmental health of children. The report noted that longer periods of parental leave are associated with improved infant health outcomes and lower rates of infant mortality, emphasising the importance of primary carers for early brain development. In its report, the Productivity Commission quoted the OECD’s position:

*“Taking stock of the evidence, it seems that child development is negatively affected when an infant does not receive full-time personal care (breastfeeding issues aside...) for at least the first 6 to 12 months of his/her life.”*<sup>6</sup>

Further, for women and parents who wish to breastfeed, the World Health Organization’s guidelines recommend 26 weeks of leave for optimal infant breastmilk feeding.<sup>7</sup>

While some parents receive 26 weeks of leave through a combination of Commonwealth and workplace-support entitlements, this is not the case in all sectors or for all employees. Providing 26 weeks of leave through the Commonwealth scheme will ensure equality of access across industries.

This increase will also bring the scheme in line with recommendation 2 of the Review of the *Maternity Leave (Commonwealth Employees) Act 1973* by the Australian Public Service Commission,<sup>8</sup> levelling the playing field for parents across sectors. The amendment is consistent with recommendations from ERA’s federal pre-budget submission for 2022-23, and the recommendation of many other advocates including

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<sup>4</sup> ILO [Maternity Protection Convention 2000 \(No. 183\)](#) article 6(3)

<sup>5</sup> ILO [Maternity Protection Convention 2000 \(No. 183\)](#) article 6(2)

<sup>6</sup> Productivity Commission 2009, *Paid Parental Leave: Support for Parents with Newborn Children*, Report no. 47, Canberra at 4.41

<sup>7</sup> World Health Organization (WHO), (2011) *Exclusive breastfeeding for six months best for babies everywhere*, NP: WHO, available from: [https://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/statements/2011/breastfeeding\\_20110115/en/](https://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/statements/2011/breastfeeding_20110115/en/), accessed 27 February 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Australian Public Service Commission [Review of the Maternity Leave \(Commonwealth Employees\) Act 1973](#) 20 June 2023

the CPSU<sup>9</sup> and Chief Executive Women.<sup>10</sup> This increase is also in line with the Business Council of Australia's PPL model, which recommends a 26-week scheme for private sector employers.<sup>11</sup> As noted above, the Productivity Commission's 2009 report on PPL outlined the considerable body of evidence in support of 26 weeks leave as a baseline for healthy child development.<sup>12</sup>

*On the amendment to extend the reserved period for certain claimants who are partnered at the time of their first effective claim by one week each year from 1 July 2025 to reach 4 weeks from 1 July 2026.*

**ERA welcomes this extension to the reserved period for partnered claimants as a positive step to encourage secondary carers to take a greater share of caring responsibilities.** According to data from HILDA, unpaid work distribution in heterosexual couples is shared relatively equally prior to having a first child. Following the birth of a first child, however, the prime load of unpaid care shifts to the female partner.<sup>13</sup> PPL is therefore a critical opportunity to redistribute unpaid caring responsibilities across genders and establish a more equal distribution of unpaid care within the family unit.

From its inception, Australia's PPL scheme was designed to encourage women to continue to participate in the workforce and promote equality between men and women, and the balance between work and family life.<sup>14</sup> Despite this, Australia's PPL scheme has been predominantly used in a way that sharply reinforces women's primary carer role.<sup>15</sup> The current model operates on an assumption that men will be the primary breadwinner and women the primary caregiver.<sup>16</sup>

Because the PPL scheme is used overwhelmingly by mothers, men and non-birth parents are not being given the opportunity to learn the parenting skills necessary to share effectively in child raising activities. Generous PPL schemes, along with high quality and accessible early childhood education and care (ECEC), contribute to the development of the dual earner/dual carer model in the Nordic countries. For

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<sup>9</sup> The Community and Public Sector Union 2023, [Maternity Leave Act recommendations reflect the realities of modern parenting.](#)

<sup>10</sup> Chief Executive Women 2023, [Pre-Budget Submission 2023-2024.](#)

<sup>11</sup> Business Council of Australia 2023, [A framework for women's economic advancement and national prosperity.](#)

<sup>12</sup> Australian Government (2009), Paid maternity, paternity and parental leave.

<https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/parental-support>

<sup>13</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA), Towards gender balanced parental leave – Australian and international trends Insight Paper, Sydney: Australian Government, 2017

<sup>14</sup> See Paid Parental Leave Bill 2010 (Cth) subsections 3A(1) (c) and (d)

<sup>15</sup> Ramona Vijayarasa, 20 January 2021, "Evaluation: Paid Parental Leave Act 20109, Australia, Lender Legislative Index, <https://www.genderlawindex.org/laws/5283a7bc-1a5d-4245-b4ba-?d8555207f34> Vijayarasa also notes there is also not enough access to information about carers' rights, which may be a barrier for marginalised women in understanding their entitlements.

<sup>16</sup> The primary and secondary caregiver distinction embedded in the policy makes the equal sharing of leave and care responsibilities so difficult that women currently take 99.4% of primary carer leave. Lucie Newsome, Parental Leave scheme marred by 1950s sentimentality - BroadAgenda, 19 February 2020. <https://www.broadagenda.com.au/2020/leave-scheme-marred-by-1950s-sentimentality/>

example, in Iceland, the introduction of specific periods for each parent on a ‘use it or lose it’ basis has led to a substantial increase in fathers taking parental leave.<sup>17</sup>

The priority for the PPL scheme should be on supporting and enabling diverse families to care for children and each other, while creating the conditions for a more equitable distribution of caring work across the genders.

*On the amendment to increase the number of days that can be taken concurrently by multiple claimants in relation to the child to 4 weeks by 1 July 2025.*

**ERA welcomes this amendment as a mechanism for parents to share caring responsibilities more equitably and facilitate further support for recovering birth parents.** ERA also welcomes the limitations on the number of days that may be taken concurrently, to encourage fathers and partners to take on independent caring responsibilities. The latest WGEA Gender Equality Scorecard demonstrates that Australian men still seem reluctant to utilise paid parental leave, with male dominated industries less likely to offer universally available leave.<sup>18</sup>

Encouraging men to take on more active caretaking roles aids women’s participation in the workforce, promoting increased economic security and well-being for new mothers. Put simply - women’s earnings increase when fathers use leave entitlements.<sup>19</sup>

### *Administration of the PPL scheme by employers*

**ERA recommends that employers continue to administrate their employees’ leave.** While the Senate report on *Potential impacts of the Commonwealth Paid Parental Leave Scheme on small businesses and their employees* raised concerns regarding the impact on PPL on small businesses,<sup>20</sup> ERA supports the position of the accompanying dissenting report. The report summarised the findings of the Department of Social Services PPL Evaluation as follows:

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<sup>17</sup> Arnalds, Ásdís Aðalbjörg, Guðný Björk Eydal, and Ingólfur V. Gíslason, ‘Paid Parental Leave in Iceland: Increasing Gender Equality at Home and on the Labour Market’, in Caroline de la Porte, and others (eds), *Successful Public Policy in the Nordic Countries: Cases, Lessons, Challenges* (Oxford, 2022; online edn, Oxford Academic, 20 Oct. 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192856296.003.0018>, accessed 23 Nov. 2023.

<sup>18</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency (2023), Australia’s Gender Equality Scorecard, <https://www.wgea.gov.au/publications/australias-gender-equality-scorecard>.

<sup>19</sup> Johansson, Elly-Ann (2010), The effect of own and spousal parental leave on earnings, Working Papers – Institute for Evaluation of Labour Market and Education Policy. <http://hdl.handle.net/10419/45782>

<sup>20</sup> Report of the Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment Potential impacts of the Commonwealth Paid Parental Leave Scheme on small businesses and their employees, August 2023 [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Education\\_and\\_Employment/PaidParentalLeave/Report](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Education_and_Employment/PaidParentalLeave/Report).

*“The overwhelming feedback from the PPL Evaluation was that employers reported administering PPL payments was easy and required minimal time and money, [and] that this rang true regardless of business size or sector...”<sup>21</sup>*

Given that employers are reporting the pressure of administering PPL is not an issue, there is no benefit to shifting the administration arrangement. In fact, doing so may undermine the goal of normalising PPL and encouraging employers to develop their own schemes. Because small and medium businesses do not fall within the remit of WGEA, they do not receive active external encouragement to develop and offer their own PPL schemes. Administering PPL centrally through government could result in small and medium businesses viewing PPL as the business of government only.

One of the major employee-related burdens on small to medium businesses is recruitment, training and induction. Policies which promote the retention of existing staff are therefore an important measure to help small and medium business. WGEA specifies that best practice for retaining employees after parental leave includes establishing a *‘keep-in-touch program or process’*.<sup>22</sup> Many large businesses have established fairly elaborate schemes for maintaining contact with employees on PPL, but this is unlikely to be achievable for small and medium businesses with limited HR support. As an alternative, requiring employers to administer PPL entitlements encourages continued contact between employers and staff on leave as part of a system which has been assessed by employers as ‘easy’. This arrangement also avoids double handling between employees, employers and government, lessening the burden on new parents to inform multiple parties of any change in their circumstances. Placing administrative responsibilities with employers also ensures that they are aware of the ongoing needs of staff.

### ***Gendered Language***

ERA recognises and distinguishes between gender neutrality and gender equality. The language of the bill should not undermine the space for women to recover from birth, bond with their baby, and breastfeed. However, gendered language can also contribute to gendering parenting roles in a manner which reinforces an unequal distribution of unpaid care between men and women.

**ERA recommends that the bill use gender neutral language where appropriate** to reflect the diverse nature of families in Australia, including same sex couples, grandparents with primary care of a new baby, and couples with one or more non-binary, gender diverse or non-gendered person. However, it is critical that this language does not undermine PPL’s role in providing space for women to recover

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<sup>21</sup> [Dissenting Report from Government Senators and Greens Senators.](#)

<sup>22</sup> WGEA *Developing a Leading Practice Parental Leave Policy A guide for employers* February 2022 at 6 <https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/WGEA-Leading-Practice-Parental-Leave-Policy-Guide.pdf>



from birth, bond with their baby, and breastfeed, and we support the use of appropriate biological language alongside neutral language in these contexts.

### Further considerations and next steps

While ERA welcomes the current amendments to PPL, we recommend that this important initial work is subsequently expanded upon to meet the needs of the community and to come into line with international standards.

### *On the amendment to extend the Paid Parental Leave scheme by 2 weeks each year from 1 July 2024 to reach 26 weeks from 1 July 2026*

ERA welcomes the increase in leave in the current Bill and further **supports the Women's Economic Equality Taskforce recommendation to incrementally increase the entitlement to 52 weeks.**<sup>23</sup> Implementing this recommendation would bring Australia closer to international standards. Continuing to expand PPL entitlements will help promote the principle of equality of opportunity, treatment, and the distribution of unpaid care work between women and men.

### *Superannuation*

In line with our previous submissions, ERA recommends that the present Bill be supported with additional changes to superannuation. **ERA recommends extending superannuation payments to government-funded parental leave.**

Regular workforce engagement is critical to Australia's superannuation system. This often means that taking PPL to care for children contributes to an intractable cycle of poverty for women across the life cycle. The Productivity Commission's 2009 report into PPL recommended the eventual inclusion of superannuation into PPL, while the 2013 Australian Human Rights Commission Report *Investing in Care* found that the time had come to extend the superannuation guarantee to PPL.<sup>24</sup> The Australian PPL scheme has fallen behind the standards of employers, with WGEA data showing that 86% of employers that offer employer-funded parental leave pay superannuation on that leave.<sup>25</sup>

It is important to note that PPL is both the only type of workplace leave directed predominantly at women and the only type of workplace leave that does not include superannuation guarantee payments. By permitting this discrimination, the Australian PPL scheme inadvertently reinforces the unconscious devaluing of

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<sup>23</sup> The Women's Economic Equality Taskforce (2023), *Women's Economic Equality: A 10-year plan to unleash the full capacity and contribution of women to the Australian economy*.

<sup>24</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, *Investing in Care: Recognising and valuing those who care* Volume 1 Research Report, Sydney, 2013, 15.

<sup>25</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency (2023), *Australia's Gender Equality Scorecard*, <https://www.wgea.gov.au/publications/australias-gender-equality-scorecard>

women's work and contributes to a sense that women's retirement incomes are unimportant. As of late 2022, there is a median retirement savings gap between men and women of 23.4 per cent.<sup>26</sup> Extending superannuation to PPL provides an additional financial incentive for carers to access their leave entitlements and sends the message that women's economic security is just as important as men's.

### *Rate of pay*

Despite the economic benefits to women and families noted in this submission, the rate of pay under the new amendments remains at the federal minimum wage. This is very low compared to international standards. Many comparator nations now provide for full replacement wages, keeping close to the benchmark established in ILO Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183).<sup>27</sup>

As a first step, ERA recommends that the rate of pay should be increased to match either wage replacement or the Average Weekly Ordinary Time Earnings, whichever is the lesser. While this will increase the cost of the scheme, it will reduce women's lifetime earnings deficit and encourage more men to access the scheme and reap the benefits of increasing their caring roles. We note that this increase could be gradually introduced over time to reduce the immediate cost increase.

### *Men's participation*

One of the key limitations of the paid parental leave scheme to date is men's reluctance to access their leave entitlements. The Australian Government Department of Social Services notes that "...the proportion of men who use primary carer parental leave in Australia is very small (0.5 per cent of parents using the scheme in 2017-18 were men)." The department also observes that in 2020-21, less than 90,000 fathers and partners received Dads and Partners Pay, accounting "...for only around 30% of births each year, and around 35% of all PPL claimants".<sup>28</sup>

Men's early and ongoing responsibility for care of their children has been shown to have significant benefits for family functioning and gender equality, without compromising their own labour market attachment.<sup>29</sup> Continuing to increase reserved periods for fathers as the payment period increases to 26 weeks is an important step forwards in encouraging men to share unpaid care work more equally, and to take primary care for infants.

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<sup>26</sup> WGEA, Gender equality workplace statistics at a glance 2022, February 2022

<sup>27</sup> OECD (2023), *Joining Forces for Gender Equality: What is Holding us Back?* OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/67d48024-en>

<sup>28</sup> Department of Social Services (2022), *Boosting Parental Leave to Enhance Economic Security, Support and Flexibility for Australia's Families Regulation Impact Statement 2022*.

<sup>29</sup> Tamm, M. (2019), 'Fathers' parental leave-taking, childcare involvement and labor market participation', *Labour Economics*, vol. 59, pp. 184-197.

As the overall length of paid parental leave periods increases, fathers and partners should be actively encouraged to access the scheme through effective and targeted campaigns. **ERA recommends that the amendments to the bill be supported by targeted campaigns to encourage men to access the scheme and share unpaid care work more equally.** We note these campaigns could be incorporated into broader work to advance the forthcoming Gender Equality Strategy.

### *Disability and PPL*

ERA acknowledges that the current scheme is best positioned to support families and parents without complex needs, and that future improvements to the scheme should be informed by research into community needs.

We note that work and care are extremely complicated concepts for women with disability, many of whom are denied the right to perform parental care by being deemed (generally arbitrarily) unable to raise their own children or being denied their sexual and reproductive health rights through forced sterilisation or forced contraception. Others are denied the right to work through bias, discrimination, or a lack of access to supports and infrastructure enabling participation in inclusive education and open employment opportunities. This discrimination in turn denies them access to workforce-based entitlements, such as paid parental leave. We note that many women with disability exclusively work in their own businesses,<sup>30</sup> meaning they are often excluded from research on parental leave practices. A significant number of women with disability are also unpaid carers for disabled family members, and are therefore less likely obtain paid employment (and associated entitlements) due to caring responsibilities.

The nature and duration of leave required can also be impacted by disability. Women with disability are more at risk of experiencing adverse outcomes in relation to pregnancy and birth,<sup>31</sup> and are therefore more likely to need additional leave or adjustments. Parents (with or without disability) who have a child born with disability may also require additional leave, flexibility, or other support.

### *Adverse outcomes and complicated births*

The current government PPL scheme is not designed to support parents experiencing challenges such as traumatic birth, stillbirth, pregnancy loss and grief, or premature birth. Recent research has found over one in ten Australian women report experiencing obstetric violence.<sup>32</sup> Women with birth trauma are more likely

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<sup>30</sup> Women with Disabilities Australia (2021), [WWDA's response to the Consultation on the review of the Workplace Gender Equality Act](#).

<sup>31</sup> Caroline Signore, Maurice Davis, Candance M. Tingen, and Alison N. Cernich (2021). 'The Intersection of Disability and Pregnancy: Risks for Maternal Morbidity and Mortality', *Journal of Women's health*, vol. 30, no.2.

<sup>32</sup> Keedle H., Keedle W., and Hannah G. Dahlen (2022), 'Dehumanized, Violated, and Powerless: An Australian Survey of Women's Experiences of Obstetric Violence in the Past 5 Years', *Violence Against Women*.

to suffer from PTSD<sup>33</sup> or post-natal depression,<sup>34</sup> and are therefore more likely to require extended leave periods.

In cases of premature birth, parents may use up their full paid leave entitlement before they are able to bring their child home from the hospital. Survey data shows that having a child in hospital has significant emotional and financial impacts, limiting parents' opportunities to bond with newborns.<sup>35</sup> These additional strains are recognised in international PPL schemes. In New Zealand parents of preterm babies can access additional leave payments for a maximum of 13 weeks, while the Canadian 'Parents of Critically Ill Children' benefit allows for up to 35 weeks of additional benefits in certain circumstances.<sup>36</sup>

Parents experiencing such challenges may also require greater support from family and friends. The current scheme does not recognise the need for additional carers in complex situations, only acknowledging primary and secondary carers.

**ERA recommends that the government support research into the unique needs of parents experiencing adverse birth outcomes and recognise that current leave entitlements will not be sufficient for all families.**

### *Same sex and non-binary parents*

Throughout this submission ERA refers to 'women' and 'men', and often assumes a heteronormative relationship between adults. We acknowledge that the question of division of parenting labour can be significantly less clear cut and more complex for people in heterodox relationships, and for transgender people, gender fluid people, and people who do not identify on the gender binary. People of marginalised genders experience multiple, diverse, and intersecting forms of discrimination. In some circumstances they may be actively prevented or discouraged from engaging in the types of parenting work which cis women are expected to perform in heterosexual relationships. There is limited research on this subject; we encourage the Committee to note this fact and recommend further research is done in this area. In the interim, the use of non-gendered language in the present Bill is welcomed, as is the flexibility to use leave in a manner which meets the needs of particular couples.

**ERA recommends that the government support research into the uptake of PPL by people in heterodox relationships and by transgender people, gender fluid**

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<sup>33</sup> Martinez-Vazquez S., Rodriguez-Almagro J., Hernandez-Martinez A., and Juan Miguel Martinez-Galiano (2021), 'Factors associated with postpartum post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) following obstetric violence: A cross-sectional stud', *Journal of Personalized Medicine*, 11.5.

<sup>34</sup> Souza K. J. D., Rattner D. and M. B. Gubert (2017), 'Institutional violence and quality of service in obstetrics are associated with postpartum depression', *Revista de Saúde Pública*, 51.69.

<sup>35</sup> Eeles, A. and Alicia Spittle (2023), 'Parents of Premature Babies Are Being Left Behind', University of Melbourne, <https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/parents-of-premature-babies-are-being-left-behind>.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

**people and people who do not identify on the gender binary, in order to identify barriers to accessing PPL for these populations.**

### *Race, culture, and parenting*

The experience of performing care work and the social norms around the performance of parenting work by women can be highly culturally specific. Women from migrant and refugee backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women may also experience multiple, diverse, and intersecting forms of discrimination (such as racism) or other barriers which significantly complicate the relationship between care work and paid work. ERA notes that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families share caring responsibilities beyond parents and grandparents. The current PPL scheme does not acknowledge kinship systems or anticipate extended family taking on significant caring roles.

We also note that the 2022 HILDA report found that ‘main carers’ are disproportionately immigrants from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds or Indigenous Australians. CALD immigrants account for 20.6% of main carers, but only 18.2% of non-carers; Indigenous Australians account for 3.6% of main carers, but only 2.2% of non-carers.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, CALD women also have a significantly lower rate of workforce participation compared to CALD men (47.3% compared with 69.5%).<sup>38</sup>

**ERA recommends that the government support research into the uptake of PPL by CALD and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and men, in order to identify barriers to accessing PPL for these populations.**

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<sup>37</sup> Roger Wilkins, Esperanza Vera-Toscano, Ferdi Botha, Mark Wooden and Trong-Anh Trinh (2022) The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey: Selected Findings from Waves 1 to 20. Melbourne Institute: Applied Economic & Social Research, University of Melbourne at 29

<sup>38</sup> ABS, Labour Force, Detailed - Electronic Delivery, Feb 2017, cat. no. 6291.0.55.001, 12-month average of original data, persons aged 15 years and over. Available at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/6291.0.55.001Main%20Features4Dec%202017>