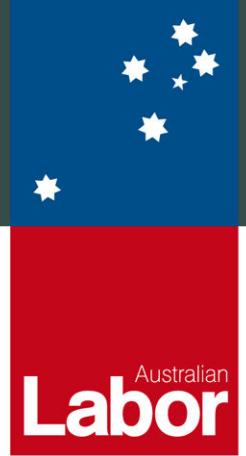




New Leadership.



Fresh ideas for Work and Family

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Overview

Only Federal Labor is committed to effective measures that will help all working parents balance their work and family responsibilities. Only a Rudd Labor Government will be committed to helping businesses manage their workforce to achieve greater participation and productivity.

Federal Labor's existing commitments in this area include:

- more flexible parental leave;
- flexible working arrangements for parents;
- a new Office of Work and Family;
- new child care centres; and
- reinvigorated National Work and Family Awards.

Federal Labor is also announcing new measures to support and assist those small businesses wanting to develop family friendly practices, including:

- small grants funding for small business to pursue family friendly measures;
- distribution of industry specific information in work and family practices; and
- making experts available to help small businesses develop new work and family arrangements in their workplace.

Parental leave

Under Federal Labor's industrial relations policy, *Forward with Fairness*, parental leave is included in Labor's 10 National Employment Standards that will apply to all employees.

Under a Rudd Labor Government, it won't be possible to reduce or exclude these Standards in a workplace agreement.

Under Federal Labor's Parental Leave Standard, each parent will be entitled to separate periods of up to 12 months' unpaid parental leave to be taken in conjunction with the birth of their child. This will give families the choice of having a parent at home for the crucial first two years of a child's life.

Where a family would prefer one parent to take a longer period of leave, that parent will be entitled to request from their employer up to an additional 12 months' unpaid leave.

The employer will be able to refuse an employee the additional leave in excess of 12 months on reasonable business grounds.

There will be no third party involved in determining whether the employer has reasonable business grounds for refusal of additional parental leave. The employer will only have to provide the reasons for refusal in writing.

The United Kingdom experience has shown that this approach has been extremely successful in meeting the needs of parents and businesses.

Under a Rudd Labor Government families will have more choice about how to best balance work and family life following the birth of a child.

Flexible work for parents

Federal Labor's 10 National Employment Standards will also include a right for parents to request flexible work arrangements from their employer until their child reaches school age.

Flexible work arrangements might include part-time work, non-standard start or finish times, working from home, working "split shifts" or job sharing.

Again, the employer will only be able to refuse such a request on reasonable business grounds.

Once again, there will be no third party involved in determining whether the employer has reasonable business grounds for refusal of flexible work arrangements. The employer will only have to provide the reasons for refusal in writing.

Once again, the UK experience has shown that this approach has been extremely successful in meeting the needs of parents and businesses.

Office of Work and Family

Federal Labor will work to continuously improve policies that help to relieve the pressures on Australian working families as they juggle work and family responsibilities.

This policy development will be driven by an Office of Work and Family that will be established within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

The Office of Work and Family will be placed inside the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to ensure that the formulation of policies to get the balance right between work and family life takes place at the highest level and is central to all Rudd Labor Government policy decisions.

One of the first tasks of the Office of Work and Family will be to work with child care providers and the states and territories to:

- provide parents with helpful information about local child care centres such as vacancies, their accreditation status and fees so parents are better informed about quality and price;
- develop a strong quality accreditation and ratings system, that drives quality improvement and informs parents about the standard of care, including any breaches of quality standards;
- ensure child care services provide parents with notice about proposed fee increases; and
- examine options to improve child care affordability, including increasing workplace-based child care so that parents can be closer to their children.

New child care centres

Federal Labor is committed to developing up to 260 new child care centres on school sites and other community land to provide convenient child care places in areas where there are shortages. This will help to reduce waiting lists and contain the costs of child care.

Using school locations, where possible, is one way of assisting parents with the morning rush as they attempt the “double drop-off” of getting children to school and child care before the working day begins.

National Work and Family Awards

A Rudd Labor Government will create incentives for businesses to make family-friendly changes in their workplace by supporting the further development of the existing National Work and Family Awards.

A Rudd Labor Government will expand the number of available awards by offering separate awards for the leaders in various industry sectors, such as retail, mining, hospitality, manufacturing and finance. This will help businesses to identify innovative arrangements and best practice for their industry sector.

Following each year’s awards ceremony, a Rudd Labor Government will fund full page advertisements in the employment pages of major newspapers right across Australia. Those advertisements will list the winners of the awards and highlight their special achievements.

A Rudd Labor Government will also fund and support the development of a special symbol that can be used by winners in print and online job advertisements for a period of three years from winning the award. That symbol will assist businesses to attract skilled job-seekers as a result of the commitments they have made to assist its employees to achieve work-family balance.

As part of the National Work and Family Awards, Federal Labor will accredit all employers that obtain certain standards (as determined by the judging panel of the awards) in relation to the achievement of work-family balance.

Such accreditation would be available each year and, for that year, accredited employers would be able to use a special but different symbol in print and online job advertisements.

Helping small businesses be family friendly

In addition to previously announced measures, a Rudd Labor Government will also provide targeted support to smaller businesses to pursue practices that help employees balance their family obligations, and that assist parents who return to work to better balance their career and caring responsibilities.

There is a need to provide targeted support to smaller businesses to pursue practices that help employees balance their family obligations because this leads to:

- better productivity as workers have reconciled their work and family obligations;
- better retention of workers resulting in lower costs for employers; and
- better workplace health and safety.

In the absence of these policies, national surveys of work life outcomes tell us that long, unsocial hours of work, a lack of quality part-time work and traditional leave arrangements make it difficult for both men and women to balance work and family life. According to demographer Graeme Hugo, women in their prime working age are taking on multiple roles, including paid and unpaid work, and voluntary work. He has recognised that the implications of this are often serious, including health related issues arising from work load stress.

Small businesses often lack the time and resources to pursue such measures even when their benefit can be readily identified.

To assist small businesses and families, a Rudd Labor Government will invest \$12 million in a national initiative that will:

- provide small grants to small businesses to pursue family friendly measures;
- distribute business and industry specific information and support work-based family friendly practices; and
- employ experts in each state and territory office of Federal Labor's Fair Work Australia offices to liaise with local small businesses, local government and business and community groups, providing a source of support, expertise and advice for small business and community organisations wanting to pursue family friendly arrangements in their workplace.

Part of this \$12 million commitment will include small grants, generally ranging from \$5,000 to \$15,000 for small businesses to implement innovative family friendly workplace programs or initiatives, including:

- getting assistance to draw up rosters based on school terms and alternative "core hours", for example, 10am to 3pm;

- developing workplace policies on unpaid leave for carers and workers who have children with a disability;
- providing facilities for employees with young children such as family rooms and lactation breaks; and
- workplace mentoring.

Federal Labor's program will begin in the 2008-09 financial year with the full program up and running from 1 January 2010.

Federal Labor understands that to maintain an economy with high levels of productivity and participation there must be support for parents to balance their caring responsibilities with their careers.

According to the ABS, women are the largest group of underemployed workers, either looking for a job or for more hours. The biggest barriers to women finding a job or the extra working hours they seek are their caring responsibilities.

Almost 50 per cent of women not in the labour force were prevented from seeking the job they wanted due to child care, pregnancy or other caring responsibilities.

For parents and working women, this Rudd Labor Government initiative will also:

- help meet the needs of working families;
- provide for continuity of employment;
- ensure greater attachment to the workforce; and
- improve career opportunities due to longer term attachment to one firm/business.

If Australia is to stay competitive and productive, more parents, carers and groups with special needs will need to participate in the labour market. Flexible working initiatives attract such employees.

According to the UK experience with promoting family friendly work practices, 68 per cent of employers believe that the opportunity to work flexibly has had a positive effect on employee attitudes and morale.

For small businesses and, in particular, those with fewer than 15 employees, this Rudd Labor Government initiative will:

- help them retain skilled workers;
- reduce the additional costs associated with high employee turnover;
- assist in attracting workers in a tight labour market; and
- maintain workforce motivation, which results in demonstrably higher level of productivity.

Similar initiatives funded and administered by the Victorian Government and community based organisations are having an impact on local small businesses and, in particular, those businesses owned and managed by women. The Victorian initiative involved 10 small businesses, employing 90 employees, and achieved tangible results for both small businesses and workers, including:

- helping to develop employee choice rostering practices;

- the introduction of family rooms and job sharing arrangements;
- the development of purchased annual leave clauses;
- pride in business and greater motivation of workers; and
- increased business viability.

With the right encouragement and support, small businesses can be endlessly creative about the means of driving change. By facilitating change and creating the incentives for change, Federal Labor's fresh approach will help Australians balance work and family life.