



Submission to Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs

*Paid Parental Leave Amendment (More support for
working families) Bill 2023*

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-  106 Victoria St, West End Q 4101
-  GPO Box 1289, Brisbane Q 4001
-  (07) 3840 1444
-  (07) 3844 9387
-  qnmu@qnmu.org.au
-  www.qnmu.org.au

submission

Contents

Introduction	2
Response to proposed amendments.....	3
Additional recommendations	3
References.....	4

Introduction

The Queensland Nurses and Midwives' Union (QNMU) thanks the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs for the opportunity to comment on the *Paid Parental Leave Amendment (More Support for Working Families) Bill 2023* (the Bill).

Nursing and midwifery is the largest occupational group in Queensland Health (QH) and one of the largest across Queensland. The QNMU is the principal health union in Queensland covering all classifications of workers that make up the nursing and midwifery workforce including registered nurses (RN), midwives, nurse practitioners (NP) enrolled nurses (EN) and assistants in nursing (AIN) who are employed in the public, private and not-for-profit health sectors including aged care.

Our more than 71,000 members work across a variety of settings from single person operations to large health and non-health institutions, and in a full range of classifications from entry level trainees to senior management. The vast majority of nurses and midwives in Queensland are members of the QNMU. As the Queensland state branch of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, the QNMU is the peak professional body for nurses and midwives in Queensland.

Through our submissions and other initiatives, the QNMU expresses our commitment to working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to achieve health equity and ensure the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives are heard. The QNMU supports the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the call for a First Nations Voice enshrined in our Constitution. The QNMU acknowledges the lands on which we work and meet always was, and always will be, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land.

The QNMU commends the Federal Government for introducing amendments to this Bill. We support the overarching aim of these amendments which include:

- Extending parental leave pay to 26 weeks
- Extending the reserved period for partners
- Increasing the number of days that may be taken concurrently and
- Extending the work test exception for fathers and partners of children born prematurely.

Response to proposed amendments

The QNMU supports the proposed Schedule 1 Amendments to this Bill, which include:

- Extending the Paid Parental Leave (PPL) scheme by two weeks each year from 1 July 2024 to reach 26 weeks from 1 July 2026.
- Extending 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.
- Increasing the number of days that can be taken concurrently by multiple claimants in relation to the child to 4 weeks by 1 July 2025.
- Amending Part 2-3 of the *Paid Parental Leave Act* to clarify the eligibility criteria for claimants in exceptional circumstances, including claimants who are gaining parents in a surrogacy arrangement.
- Extending the exception to the work test for fathers and partners who are prevented from performing paid work, and meeting the current work test, because their child is born prematurely.

With regard to the last dot point, the QNMU supports the extension of the work test exception so that fathers and partners are not disadvantaged in their eligibility to receive parental leave pay due to the premature birth of their children. The QNMU appreciates that fathers and partners will have the flexibility to decide whether to apply for parental leave pay during a premature child's time in hospital and/or following discharge.

Additional recommendations

The QNMU notes that the core policy intent of one of this Bill's amendments is to engage both parents in caring for a child, with the introduction of a greater 'reserved period' for fathers and partners. Fathers and partners are more likely to use parental leave that is quarantined for use by them, when it is paid, and also paid at rates equal to or approaching their regular pay. While some fathers and partners may have access to paid parental leave at wage replacement rates from their employer, this is often limited in length to 1-2 weeks paid leave. In the QNMU's experience, employers negotiating Enterprise Agreements covering members of the QNMU generally do not have an appetite for an increase to paid partner leave (however described).

For this reason, while beyond the scope of this Bill, the QNMU considers that an increase to the rate of PPL, would go a significant way towards addressing a core policy intent of encouraging fathers and partners to take periods of leave, including reserved leave. Paying a PPL rate that is closer to parents' replacement wage will also contribute to improving financial security for mothers/birth parents (QNMU, 2022). We reiterate previous related recommendations (QNMU, 2022), including that the Federal Government:

- Considers extending the PPL period beyond 26 weeks
- Pays superannuation on the PPL scheme. Sufficient superannuation is critical to women's financial security in retirement. The QNMU notes that the 'motherhood penalty' is not merely the penalty of reduced or forfeited wages during parental leave, and the wage penalty arising from a reduction of hours of work during childrearing years, but the cumulative impact of reduced or no superannuation contributions during all those periods. The current policy setting contributes to a significant detrimental impact on the lifetime economic security for mothers in particular.

We note and endorse similar recommendations made recently by the Women's Economic Equality Taskforce (2023, p. 25), including that the Federal Government:

- Legislate the payment of superannuation on all forms of PPL.
- Extend the PPL scheme by phasing the entitlement up to 52 weeks and boosting the quantum to reach a replacement wage.

References

Queensland Nurses and Midwives' Union. (2022). *QNMU Submission - Work and Care Inquiry*.

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Work_and_Care/workandcare

Women's Economic Equality Taskforce. (2023). *A 10-year-plan to unleash the full capacity and contribution of women to the Australian economy 2023 - 2033*.

<https://www.pmc.gov.au/resources/10-year-plan>