

Unions and Super Fund Announce Major Research into Paid Reproductive Leave

The Health and Community Services Union (HACSU), Health Services Union (HSU), Queensland Council of Unions (QCU), and Aware Super have jointly commissioned new research on the costs and benefits of paid reproductive health and wellbeing leave for Australian workers.

The research, to be conducted by the Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, will model the impacts of introducing a minimum 12 days paid reproductive leave entitlement in workplaces across the country. It will examine the prevalence of reproductive health conditions, projected leave utilisation, costs to employers, and potential productivity benefits.

Unions are calling for the Albanese government to introduce paid reproductive health and wellbeing leave to the National Employment Standards, to ensure universal access for all workers.

HACSU Assistant State Secretary Kate Marshall, who has spearheaded the union's campaign for reproductive leave since 2019, said the research is a crucial step towards achieving this important workplace right: "HACSU made history as the first union to campaign for reproductive leave in enterprise bargaining in 2020. Now we're taking it further by quantifying the case for a universal minimum entitlement of 12 days paid leave for all workers dealing with reproductive health issues."

"Reproductive health issues like endometriosis, menopause, IVF treatment and more impact workers' wellbeing and ability to fully participate in the workforce. Dedicated paid reproductive leave would provide crucial support during these challenging times and help remove barriers to economic equality," said Marshall.

The research will draw on multiple data sources including surveys of employers and workers on current leave provisions and attitudes towards reproductive leave. It will provide a comprehensive evidence base to guide advocacy efforts by the partner organisations.

"Too many workers, especially women, are forced to use regular sick leave or go without pay to manage reproductive health matters," said HSU National Secretary Lloyd Williams. "This groundbreaking research will show that a dedicated reproductive leave entitlement is not only fair, but makes economic sense for businesses and the broader community."

Queensland unions recently won paid reproductive leave for 265,000 public sector workers across the state. QCU General Secretary Jacqueline King emphasised the wide-ranging benefits of such a policy: "Reproductive leave promotes gender equality, improves workplace productivity and participation, and supports work-life balance. The Queensland union movement is proud to partner on this vital research."

Aware Super Group Executive Communications & Advocacy, Katrina McPhee, said the fund's involvement reflects its commitment to advancing workers' economic security and gender inequity. "We have a strong focus on addressing the systemic issues that contribute to the gender retirement savings gap, and recognise the importance of initiatives that help to attract and retain women in the workforce, which is why we introduced menopause leave for Aware Super employees in 2023. The insights this research will identify have the potential to help shape meaningful improvements to industrial policy. Inadequate workplace support for reproductive health, including menopause, is one

of those issues that disproportionately affects women at work, which is why this independent research by the Bankwest Curtain Centre is so important."

The research findings are expected to be released in late 2024.

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HACSU is a trade union comprising over 11,000 members across Victoria. HACSU has represented Victorians employed in mental health, disability, and alcohol and drug services, across the public, private, and non-profit sectors, for over 100 years. Its members include mental health nurses, social workers, occupational therapists, health professionals, disability support workers, peer workers, admin workers and more.