

Introducing Family-Friendly Practices

Why would you want to do it?

Introducing Family-Friendly practices to the workplace is just plain good business sense for any industry, but for Aged and Community Care – where about three quarters of the employees in any organisation are likely to be female – it's critical!

Including (or expanding) Family-Friendly practices has potential to:

- Provide a competitive advantage in recruitment campaigns
- Improve staff retention rates
- Reduce absenteeism
- Reduce OH&S incidents (by reducing the number of people working under stress)
- Improve morale (not just for those using the practices, but among other team members who will work within a reduced staff turnover; cope with fewer unexpected absences; and interact with co-workers under less pressure)
- Enhance the corporate image of your organisation – together with Aged and Community Care – as a progressive, enlightened and innovative employer.

How would you go about it?

The process can range from informal agreements for small businesses to negotiated contracts for larger organisations – but there are some general 'tips for success':

1 Accommodate the full workforce profile

Parent-friendly policies and practices have become reasonably common – and are often the first thought of employers wanting to be 'Family-Friendly'. However, if you have a mature-age workforce, your employees may have pressures from an entirely different family generation – such as ageing parents and spouses!

2 Identify the real needs before you develop policies or practices

Workforce surveys are often resisted because organisations find them time consuming and employees sometimes find them intrusive. However, in this instance, the objectives are likely to bring increased cooperation. Finding out about the family responsibilities of employees now – and those they expect in the future – is the best way to introduce practices to help them accommodate those responsibilities. A workforce survey will also help you track how family responsibilities affect Leave applications, unexpected absences and resignations – and also provide a baseline when you move to evaluate the effectiveness of your new practices.

3 Ensure buy-in from senior and frontline management

Policies will never turn into practices if you don't! The best way to ensure buy-in is to involve them in the decision making process – including building the 'business case'.

4 Ensure buy-in from the workforce

Continually promoting available Family-Friendly options is only a first step – people need to feel comfortable they won't affect personal career pathways by taking advantage of them! Best Practice involves encouraging people to access work-life initiatives – and the best way to do that can be for managers to set an example!

5 Evaluate the program

Evaluating Initiatives is included in the *Managing Initiatives* set of Fact Sheets. Taking the time to do this properly not only assesses the success of current programs, but builds a business case for other initiatives.

Initiatives you could consider

Many of the initiatives you could use to make your workplace more Family-Friendly are discussed in the *Initiatives for Mature-age Workers* and *Specific Initiatives for Parents* Information Sheets.

The suggested flexibilities in terms of work hours, leave arrangements and career breaks offer significant contributions to Family-Friendly planning. However, sometimes it's the little things that can make a real difference!

The following ideas – drawn from the Australian Government's *Workplace* website – cost very little; would be relatively easy to arrange; and can provide a kick-start to show employees you're serious about making changes!

- Schedule meetings within normal working hours
- Discourage 'overtime' except in exceptional circumstances
- Ensure your staff take their annual leave in the year that it's due
- Allow staff to 'have a say' in rostering arrangements
- Introduce 'make-up time' so staff can attend appointments without loss of income
- Allow staff to use their sick leave entitlements to care for family members
- Broaden the definition of 'family' (to include more distant relatives) for compassionate leave
- Provide information to help staff find nearby child care, school holiday care and elder/respite care
- Provide an access phone – maybe in a lunch room – for staff to 'check on' family members at home (elderly parents, unwell spouse or older child) without feeling they are interrupting the work of others
- Allow staff to use work mobile phones for reasonable family contact during their workday
- Allow staff to take annual leave in single days for family reasons
- Introduce a 'keep in touch' plan for staff on extended leave (maternity leave, carer's leave, career break)
- Hold a 'Bring your Family to Work' day (so parents, spouses and children understand the work environment)
- Organise a social event to involve families (such as a picnic day on residential grounds)
- Consider the needs of partners and families in any proposed work relocations
- Include a summary of your company's work and family policy in a letter of offer to new employees
- Ensure your company's work and family policy is well communicated among current staff

Based on: *20 cheap and easy family friendly ideas*, Australian Government
www.workplace.gov.au



Where you can find more information

- The Australian Government's *Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency* has an excellent website with comprehensive information about introducing, managing and evaluating Family-Friendly practices. The site includes a number of useful resources, case studies and guidelines.

A comprehensive *Benchmarking Tool* on the website allows you to assess your current level of Family-Friendliness – and therefore indicates where you could improve. Go to www.eowa.gov.au → *Research and Resources* → *Employment Matter Resources* → *EM4 Work Organisation* → *Work Life and Family Balance* → *Benchmarking tool for work life balance*.

- The Australian Government's *Workplace* website has a broad range of information about Work and Family, including a number of Fact Sheets which will help you plan and implement specific components of a Family-Friendly policy. Go to www.workplace.gov.au → *Programs* → *Work and Family* to find *Publications; Legislation & Policy; Work & Family Awards; Work & Family Research; and Work & Family Events* (conferences and seminars).

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Specific Initiatives for Parents

The *Introducing Family-Friendly Practices* and *Introducing Workplace Flexibility* Information Sheets both provide useful suggestions about supporting working parents – and explanations about why you would want to do it. Other Information Sheets such as *Setting Up Job-Sharing; About Home-Based Work*; and *Health and Wellbeing Programs* all discuss initiatives which have obvious applications for staff who have the care of children.

The purpose of this Information Sheet is to consider two specific groups often overlooked by employers when planning workplace family support:

- Working fathers and
- Breastfeeding mothers.

Why would you want to do it?

For working fathers:

- Social trends in Australia see more families today with both parents working; more lone fathers having at least part-custody of their children; and more fathers simply choosing to play a more active role in the care of their children.
- We know that employees who access workplace flexibility opportunities and work-life balance initiatives stay in their jobs longer; have fewer absences; and contribute more to a positive workplace culture (and that potential recruits are attracted to organisations that offer this type of support).
- Yet, research has shown that while three-quarters of working mothers access some form of workplace flexibility or support to help them achieve work-life balance, only one third of working fathers do. This means you ‘miss out’ on some of the benefits your family-friendly initiatives are meant to provide.

For new mothers:

- Maternity leave, flexible shifts, flexible leave and other initiatives outlined in this Information Sheet series all help mothers return to work – but the fact remains breastfed babies don’t wean themselves at the end of maternity leave!
- Much of the emotional stress associated with new mums returning to work is associated with breastfeeding issues – and mothers who know this needn’t be interrupted may return to work earlier.
- There’s also a ‘bonus benefit’ if you accept research suggesting babies breastfed for longer have fewer illnesses – helping staff to continue breastfeeding after they return to work could mean they have fewer absences to care for unwell children.

How would you go about it?

For working fathers:

Providing paid Paternity Leave isn’t the only way of supporting new fathers, although it’s certainly becoming more common in Australian workplaces.

Becoming a more father-friendly employer can simply be a matter of encouraging men to access the workplace flexibilities and support options you already have in place.

This may seem like a non-issue, but research has shown men often feel pressure from colleagues, managers – and even themselves on economic grounds – not to access their employer’s parent-friendly support mechanisms.

The work of James Levine and Todd Pittinsky (*Working Fathers: New strategies for Balancing Work & Family*) found that 70% of working fathers feel the same work/parenting conflict that mothers do – but that most do not feel comfortable raising these issues at work. Levine & Pittinsky also found that those men who do broach the topic often don’t receive the same level of acknowledgment and understanding afforded to women.

Implementation steps could therefore include:

- **Communicating** widely that family-friendly policies apply to fathers and are not ‘for women-only’
- **Targeting promotion** of existing policies by ensuring fathers receive copies of brochures and other documents as well as mothers. Hosting forums and workshops on the topic – joining with other organisations if you don’t have enough male employees – will help men realise their male colleagues share their work/family conflicts and that it’s ‘okay’ to make adjustments in their working life to accommodate time with their children.
- **Training managers and supervisors** in the benefits of being a father-friendly workplace and how to encourage men to feel comfortable in accessing options
- **Setting an example** by encouraging fathers in senior management positions to ‘lead the way’.

If all this seems a little unnecessary, ask:

- Have we ever *specifically said* our family-friendly policies are for men too? Or did we just assume everyone knew both mums and dads could access them?
- Do our male employees ever openly ask for leave/shift flexibility to care for children? Or do they just ‘call in sick’?
- Could our message be clearer if we used ‘mothers and fathers’ in documents instead of ‘parents’?

For breastfeeding mothers:

A truly mother-friendly workplace does more than accommodate options for ‘taking time off’ to care for children. The Australian Bureau of Statistics tells us more than 118,000 women return to work in Australia each year with a baby younger than six months. Developing practices which encourage a mother to continue breastfeeding her baby on return to work can include:

- Providing a physical environment where a mother can feed her child (if childcare arrangements can provide this access) or express milk for later use. This simply means a private, comfortable room with a lockable door, comfortable chair, hand washing facilities, power points (for those using electric pumps) and a small fridge for storing milk.
- Accommodating additional ‘lactation’ breaks in the work day so that mothers can maintain an adequate milk supply – and her own physical comfort. Ideally there should be two lactation breaks over an eight-hour period, in addition to usual meal and rest breaks.
- Ensuring information is available about extending breastfeeding, including information about expressing and storing breast milk.

The *Australian Breastfeeding Association* (formerly the *Nursing Mothers’ Association*) offers a consultancy service to employers – and also accreditation which can be used in recruitment activities.



Initiatives other organisations have successfully implemented

- The *Nurses/Midwives (SA Public Sector) Enterprise Agreement 2007*: Clause 23.1 states ‘Where possible, breastfeeding facilities will be made available for employees’. Most large public hospitals are therefore likely to have such facilities available.
- The family-friendly practices at *Red Cliffs and Community Aged Care Services Inc* were acknowledged with a High Commendation in the *2007 Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry/Business Council of Australia National Work and Family Awards*. Initiatives which the residential facility offered its workforce of 80 included eight weeks paid maternity leave, lactation breaks and breastfeeding rooms.
- The *City of Unley* provides one weeks paid paternity leave and 12 weeks paid maternity leave for staff after 24 months continuous service.
- *Anglicare Western Region*, with just 17 staff in Toowoomba and Roma (Queensland) has some exceptional parent-friendly initiatives – including allowing children to come to the workplace and new mothers to bring their baby into work for up to 19 hours a week!

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Health and Wellbeing Programs

Why would you want to do it?

The general health of the Australian workforce is poor

There is an increasing body of research finding the general health of the Australian workforce is not what it should be. For example, a study commissioned by Medibank Private (*The Health of Australia's Workforce*, November 2005) found:

- Australian employees don't exercise enough and have poor dietary habits, leading to almost two-thirds (62%) being overweight
- More than half the Australian workforce is 'stressed' (53%); not getting enough sleep (56%); or participating in risk behaviours (56%) (which include smoking, drinking above recommended alcohol limits or using sun block irregularly)
- Almost one-third (29%) of the workforce suffers back and neck pain
- One in five employees suffers hay fever (22%) or has heart disease (21%).

Poor workforce health impacts on industry

The Medibank Private study concluded that:

- Healthy employees are almost three times more productive than those with poor health (based on 'presenteeism' which considers the extent to which employees are productive and engaged in their work)
- Employees with poor health take up to nine times more sick leave than healthy colleagues
- Poor employee health and absenteeism costs Australian business \$7 billion every year!

Workforce Health and Wellbeing programs are a good investment!

Introducing a Health and Wellbeing program in the workplace is therefore about much more than any perceived 'social responsibility' – it's about:

- **Gaining economic benefits** by reducing absenteeism and enhancing productivity and efficiency (and perhaps reducing Workers Compensation costs)
- **Managing risk factors** in the workplace by improving anxiety, stress, psychological well-being and focus of staff
- **Becoming an employer of choice** by demonstrating you value your staff. Research has shown that even employees who don't participate in workplace health and wellbeing programs are still more likely to be loyal and satisfied with the organisation for being offered the program in the first place!

How would you go about it?

Developing and implementing a Workplace Health and Wellbeing Program goes beyond the traditional focus of Occupational Health and Safety. It's about offering information and support to create a more positive state of physical, mental and social fitness – so that you have a more productive, engaged and resilient workforce.

Successful corporate health programs therefore focus on three key areas:

- Identifying and managing current illness
- Reducing the risk of future ill health
- Maximising and protecting current good health.

Initiatives you could consider

To be successful, an Employee Health and Wellbeing Program should engage individuals to take part voluntarily. Employees are responsible for their own health – it's about prompting them to action and supporting their activities. The key to success is variety – and activities spread across the three main areas:

To identify and manage current illness

- Coordinate an in-house Health Risk Assessment which includes personal sessions with a qualified and experienced health consultant who can tailor advice and motivate employees to take specific actions.

Initiatives you could consider *continued*

- Take a 'specific-issue' approach where everyone has their blood pressure measured, eye-sight tested, cholesterol or blood sugar level checked.
- Coordinate/subsidise a Multiple Blood Analysis for all employees (with results sent to their GP of choice).
- Coordinate in-house training programs for issues such as stress management, time management or conflict management. The key to stress-reduction programs is not to call them that – many people refuse to admit they are stressed, but will willingly participate in a 'holistic health workshop'.
- Provide rehabilitation support for non-work related injuries (e.g. from sport participation).

To reduce the risk of future ill health

- Coordinate an on-site flu vaccination program or subsidise employees to make their own arrangements.
- Provide relevant health information sheets and subscribe to relevant health newsletters.
- Organise an annual 'health fair', inviting representatives from relevant health organisations to participate.
- Coordinate group activities to take place during lunch periods or before/after shifts – such as group walks, Pilates or Yoga sessions to encourage physical flexibility.
- Provide assistance for people seeking to quit smoking – consider subsidising 'patches' or other support recommended by their GP.

To maximise and protect current good health

- Arrange and/or subsidise monthly massage therapy on-site.
- Arrange corporate membership for private health insurance and negotiate lower premiums for staff.
- Arrange corporate membership for gyms and fitness centres and negotiate lower membership for staff.
- Encourage participation in fun runs by sponsoring corporate teams.
- Organise a group to participate in a 'Boot Camp' – perhaps subsidising costs.
- Investigate potential for some in-house gym equipment – either purchased or hired. Research into this option should include a risk assessment about specific equipment and investigation of Workers' Compensation ramifications. Basic equipment – such as walking machines and exercise bikes – may only require that staff are appropriately trained in their use, while weights or more complicated exercise machinery may require supervision. Any equipment for use on site should have an appropriate 'Safe Work Plan'.



Initiatives other organisations have successfully implemented

- *Aboriginal Home Care* has a 'Wellbeing Program' which runs a range of activities over two hours once a month. Staff are paid for the time and decide as a team what activities to include. Examples include massage therapy, craft sessions, luncheons, a visit to the Botanic Gardens and even a group shopping excursion!
- The *City of Unley* provides a comprehensive *Healthy Lifestyle Program* which includes health assessments; blood glucose, cholesterol and blood pressure checks; aerobic fitness and backcare; Body Mass Index advice; vision assessments; Cardiac Risk Score; stress management profiles and counselling; skin cancer screening; free Flu and Hepatitis B immunisations; and a 12 week 'Bodytrim' (shape or weight loss) program.
- The *Royal District Nursing Service of SA Inc (RDNS)* has negotiated corporate rates for its staff and their families with two Health Insurance providers and regularly enters teams in activities and Fun Runs.
- *Eldercare* offers on-site massage programs; staff-run weight loss programs; annual flu vaccinations and support for staff to stop smoking by paying for nicotine patches for the first six weeks. Eldercare has also negotiated with a Health Insurance provider to remove the 'excess' for staff admitted to hospital – and bonuses (paid depending on the number of staff who join) are redirected back into staff health programs.
- The *ACH Group* recently introduced an '*Active Ageing Program*' which included a series of seminars on lifestyle, exercise and nutrition over two separate twelve-week periods. Although the initial program targeted staff older than 50, it proved so popular the seminar series will be extended to a broader age range for future programs.
- The *ACH Group* also has an '*Early Intervention Program*' which provides early physiotherapy intervention of up to four visits for any staff who experience muscular discomfort as a consequence of activity at work – or at home. The initiative has proven very popular with team members – and has encouraged them to identify potential injuries and take preventative action early.

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