Actions: Implement supportive parental leave approaches

Best practice employers have parental policies and practices that are practical, flexible and tailored to specific circumstances of the business and its employees. Parental leave policies assist employees to manage their transition out of and back to work, providing clarity around entitlements and expectations. They also help employers to ensure that valuable employees are attracted, retained and feel appreciated.

Where to find information:

- Fair Work Ombudsman: Maternity and parental leave - Fair Work Ombudsman
- Workplace Gender Equity Agency: Parental leave | WGEA
- Grattan Institute: Dad days

What immediate actions you can implement:

- Design and adopt supportive approaches for parents without compromising business needs using the Parental leave resource.
- Develop a business case for a dedicated 'Health and Wellbeing Officer' with a focus on discovering and developing talent, promoting wellbeing strategies and implementing a 'keep in touch' program for employees on extended leave.
- Audit existing policies and processes to ensure they:
    – Meet the minimum legislative requirements
    – Are accessible (employees with varied literacy and access to computers are aware of entitlements)
    – Meet the unique needs of employees
    – Include options for employees to participate in work related activities while on a period of leave
    – Are reviewed and updated for continued relevance
    – May be used to attract potential employees
- Consult with employees and managers to gather information about the experience of employees on maternity leave.
- Consider areas that may be strengthened or leveraged more widely across the business.

What longer term actions you can implement:

- Implement strategies and practices for maternity/return to work that are holistic. Consider policies including:
    – 'Topping up' an employee's pay during the period of Government funded Parental Leave Pay
    – A return-to-work bonus, payable after an employee has returned to work following parental leave
    – Arrange meetings with employees prior to their leave dates to discuss return to work expectations
    – Remaining in touch with employees while they are on paid leave
    – Incorporating innovative and flexible arrangements that assist parents before, during and after their period of leave
    – Providing training options and mentorship to support return to work

- Create job share registers to enhance flexibility upon return
- Regular audits of retention rates and frequent consultation with staff who intend to use or have recently used parental leave

- Develop a checklist for employees prior to leave period to determine:

    - Engagement preferences in the lead up to maternity leave
    - Frequency of contact during the leave period
    - Preferred point of contact (manager/HR/maternity buddy or mentor)
    - Opportunities to stay connected (including website, emails, informal meet ups or WhatsApp groups)
    - Consider establishing a group of 'maternity mentor' volunteers who can provide support, guidance and encouragement before, during and following the leave period if requested by individual.
    - Conduct regular audits of retention rates and frequent consultation with employees who intend to use or have recently used parental leave.
    - Develop hardcopy guides/toolkits/brochures for soon to be/recent parents.

Scenario:

PinnacleHPC (PHPC) has successfully implemented several new initiatives and policies to help women re-enter the workplace. As part of the Career Revive initiative, PHPC prioritised improving the experience of female staff returning to work following maternity leave.

Following consultation with female staff, PHPC:

- established a safe, private and hygienic personal room for mothers, allowing them to continue to breastfeed or express milk
- introduced leave for neo-natal appointments and
- implemented new family friendly workplace policies, including:

    - parking spots for expectant mothers within close proximity to the office
    - options for flexible work arrangements and
    - a strengthened commitment to the mental health and wellbeing of staff, which is being supported by a team of internal mental health ambassadors.