



Submission for Inquiry into the Operation and adequacy of the NES

I would like to make this submission in reference to the role of the NES in promoting the object of the Fair Work Act. Specifically, subsection a). This is also informed by my difference in experience as a woman. I believe that for these laws to be fair to all working Australians, to promote job security, gender equality, productivity and economic growth, that carer's leave and personal leave should be separate entitlements.

The current arrangement that pools carer's leave and personal leave together disadvantages those who have caring duties in addition to their workforce participation, which are disproportionately women. There is a further effect on workplaces and the economy, when carer's either have to take unpaid leave to meet caring responsibilities, or attempt to work whilst sick and further spread illness.

I am a working solo mother and with the current cost of living crisis, I cannot afford to take unpaid leave. I had to start a new role when returning to work after my second child and did not have a bank of personal leave saved. This meant that every time I was sick I was forced to choose between working whilst sick or take leave knowing that I would not have enough when my children were sick and I wouldn't have the option not to work. It caused a huge amount of stress in an already stressful time and has flow on impacts to workplaces when people are pressured to work whilst sick as it allows viruses to spread, lengthens the recovery time, and reduces productivity.

Examples of effective Carer's Leave

In **Japan**, an aging population forced them to review how they treat carers. There have always been barriers to meaningful work to primary carers of young children (primarily women) however as Japan's talent pool shrank with the demographic shift this was further compounded by the loss of employees to multi-generational caring duties. Professor Yoko Niimi of Doshisha University found that the ability to take leave for caregiving reduced the likelihood of the caregiver leaving the workforce by 7.6%. Japan now allows 93 days of leave for caregiving.

In **Sweden**, carer's leave for children has been law since 1974 and allows either parent to access 120 days of leave for each child under 12 at 80% of their pay (capped). This can also be delegated to another family member, such as a grandparent – which is particularly helpful in this current climate. With retirement age further away, even the grandparents who would like to be hands on and supportive are not in a position to offer much help to working families when a child is sick as they are still working themselves. Sweden's is also government subsidised, which eases the burden on businesses and allows self-employed people access.

In **Norway**, each parent gets 10 days per year of carer's leave that doesn't affect their personal leave. 15 days when caring for more than 2 children. 20 days for single parents. 20 days each per parent for a child with a chronic or long-term illness or disability. The first 10 days of each of these is funded by the employer, the remainder by their government care allowance. Allocating the 10 days each in this way supports the dual earner/dual carer model, which we don't see supported in Australia.

All of the above mentioned countries have thriving economies, data from the [International Labour Organisation](#) places Norway and Sweden several percentage points higher than Australia in terms of workforce participation, they also perform better with regard to their gender pay gaps, which both sit above the OECD average, while Australia in 2023 was still behind the OECD average. Japan has separate cultural challenges in addressing its gender pay gap, however it is worth noting the significant increase in female workforce participation since reforming their care support, now bringing it up to par with Australian female workforce participation.

We cannot claim to be promoting gender equality when we continue to disadvantage caregivers, who are predominately women.

Thank you for your consideration.