

# Creating a more inclusive paid parental leave scheme for the NSW public sector

A PSC review of parental leave arrangements in the public sector laid the groundwork for an enhanced paid parental leave scheme, introduced on 1 July 2021. The scheme is now gender neutral and provides up to 14 weeks of leave entitlement to parents when they take primary responsibility for the care of their child.

The PSC review aimed to understand the level of support in the sector for all parents to share caring arrangements and promote women's workforce participation. The review was prompted by the Male Champions of Change listen and learn forums held in 2020. Senior leaders in the NSW Government participated in these forums all across NSW Government clusters, which were designed to raise awareness about issues that affect gender equality. Through the forums, participants learned about the importance of parental leave for both female and male employees.

The PSC review compared NSW public sector arrangements with best practice in other government jurisdictions, the private sector and internationally. It found that NSW entitlements were far behind best practice, and did not provide fathers, same-sex parents, adoptive parents and other caregivers equal opportunity to share caregiving.



It recommended establishing a sector-wide working group to develop a best-practice parental leave model, with representatives present from each cluster and key stakeholders, such as whole-of-government data and human resources information services providers. The NSW Government Chief People Officers Group endorsed this approach in October 2020. At the same time, NSW Treasury undertook preliminary calculations to determine what a new scheme could potentially cost and what the broader economic outcome would be of better supporting women's workforce participation. As a result, then Treasurer, the Honourable Dominic Perrottet, announced funding for the new paid parental leave policy in the State Budget delivered on 16 November 2020.

In response, the PSC chaired a paid parental leave scheme working group focused on designing a gender-neutral parental leave scheme that would align with the budget announcement and consider the practical aspects of implementing the scheme.

Establishing the cross-government working group was key to the speed of change. Input from sector-wide data collectors, industrial relations specialists and human resources service providers enabled the working group to think about implementation needs from the start.

Pairing a budget measure with a cross-government working group endorsed by the Chief People Officers Group gave change at the agency level the best possible chance. The working group collaborated with NSW Treasury to provide estimates of the costs of the new scheme. It also simultaneously worked on the scheme's finer design principles and implementation needs. This collaboration with Treasury meant the working group knew its proposals would be feasible within the framework of the budget announcement.

The working group collaborated with the Department of Premier and Cabinet's Public Sector Employee Relations team to prepare a determination that would apply to the entire NSW Public Service. It also coordinated with all the Secretaries' offices to coordinate the passing of their own determinations to cover the rest of the government sector. A Premier's memorandum was also drafted to extend the provisions to the remainder of the public sector.

The paid parental leave scheme work shows that a cross-government working group, paired with strong political commitment, is a model for driving change on sector-wide employment initiatives. These initiatives are sometimes challenging to implement in a diverse sector with different needs, but they can be done through collaboration.

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