

## Queensland leads push for paid reproductive health leave

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Queensland's Miles Government says it will carefully consider a QCU push for 10 days paid reproductive health leave, including for IVF, painful periods, vasectomies and cancer screenings, while ACTU Congress will debate backing it as a national policy.

The It's For Every Body campaign, launched today by the QCU, calls for new laws providing up to 10 days paid leave a year (non-cumulative) for workers to address reproductive health issues affecting their capacity to work.

It says the reproductive health reasons would include conditions or illnesses related to pregnancy, fertility, endometriosis, menopause, dysmenorrhea and "any other experience of pain or discomfort relating to menstruation".

The preventative reproductive healthcare measures would meanwhile encompass monitoring for prostate issues, cervical or breast screening, and surgery or other treatment relating to reproductive organs, like vasectomies and hysterectomies.

Accessible on a pro rata basis and able to be taken as a block, in multiple or single days, the QCU says it should be paid at an employee's base rate and "commensurate with existing arrangements for paid carer's sick leave and compassionate leave".

### An IR, OHS and community-wide issue: King

According to QCU general secretary Jacqueline King, the leave would provide "support and flexibility for workers when their reproductive health negatively affects them and their capacity for work", while recognising the need for preventative health care.

"Reproductive leave is an industrial matter, a work health and safety matter, and a community wide issue," she says.

The QCU says research data reveals "the widespread impact of reproductive health issues on the community", with more than 90% of women having "gone to work with debilitating period pain" and 77% of that group saying it affected their ability to work.

It adds that "one in six Australian families experience fertility issues, and one in 18 babies in Australia is now born through IVF", while prostate cancer is "the most diagnosed cancer in Australia with one in seven men affected".

As well as highlighting stories from workers affected by their reproductive health, the QCU says unions will "talk with employers, undertake community actions, and lobby government on incorporating these changes in workplace laws".

### Queensland Government "always looking" at extra support

A spokesperson for the Miles Queensland Government says it is "look[ing] forward to carefully considering these proposals and working with unions for the benefit of Queensland workers".

"The Miles Government is rightly proud of our nation leading record when it comes to workers' rights and supporting women, including being the first jurisdiction to introduce paid domestic and family violence **leave**," she said in a statement provided to *Workplace Express*.

"We are always looking at what additional support could be provided, and just this week we have launched our \$1 billion women and girls health strategy which includes publicly funded IVF, new walk-in clinics, a boost to women's mental health services, and better access to endometriosis support and services."

The government spokesperson says unions "play a key role in improving our workplaces, and we are always happy to receive proposals from Queensland unions on ways we can better support Queensland public sector workers including when it comes to **reproductive leave** entitlements".

## ACTU "debating" policy at Congress

An ACTU spokesperson told *Workplace Express* in answer to a question about any plans to lend its support and call for national legislation, that the "ACTU Congress is where policy positions are democratically discussed and positions are taken".

"We look forward to debating this policy in June," the spokesperson said.

While a spokesperson for Workplace Relations Minister Tony Burke did not respond to a question about providing **reproductive health leave** nationally, the Women's Economic Equality Taskforce recommended in its final report last October that it introduce "workplace protections for **reproductive** health, e.g., the ability to request flexible working arrangements; and implement reasonable adjustments and take new forms of **leave**" (see Related Article).

**Maurice Blackburn lawyer Jessica Heron** meanwhile says a "stigma associated with the **reproductive** body prevents workers from seeking flexibility to manage their symptoms at work".

She says **leave** designed for this purpose would be "a step towards pushing the cultural shift needed, and modernising industrial relations laws to reflect" workers' needs.

Heron told *Workplace Express* in 2022 that Maurice Blackburn was working with unions to survey members on how **reproductive** issues including conception, fertility, menstruation, menopause and peri-menopause affect them in the workplace and the changes or supports that would be beneficial (see Related Article).

## "More balanced approach needed": Ai Group

Australian Industry Group head of workplace relations policy, Brent Ferguson, says, however, that it is "important to recognise that in many instances employees are already able to access significant entitlements provided under current workplace laws to help them deal with the kinds of significant issues identified by the unions".

"It is also important to recognise that there is a myriad of very important reasons why employees seek or need to be absent from **leave** beyond those identified by the union," Ferguson told *Workplace Express*, adding that these "often include other medical reasons".

He says that while employers are "commonly willing to provide various types of flexibilities to help employees navigate these issues when they can", it would not "be reasonable to simplistically impose an additional paid **leave** obligation on all employers on top of the existing substantial safety net".

Ferguson says a "more balanced and nuanced approach is required".