

# Unions seek IVF treatment, vasectomy recovery leave

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**EXCLUSIVE**

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Workers could take paid leave for IVF treatment, vasectomy recovery, prostate or breast cancer screening, and [chronic conditions related to menstruation and menopause](#) under a new union push for 10 days reproductive and preventive health leave a year.

Unions in Queensland have held “positive” talks with the state government about applying reproductive leave across the public sector and will seek the support of the ACTU Congress in June for unions to campaign nationally to have the leave entitlements inserted into the National Employment Standards.

The “It’s For Every Body” campaign to be launched by Queensland unions on Tuesday will push for new laws providing up to an additional 10 days paid leave annually for workers to address reproductive health issues that impact on their capacity to work.

[Building on its earlier push for menstrual and menopause leave](#), the Queensland Council of Unions said the reproductive leave entitlement would include additional paid leave required for workers to take time off for IVF treatment.

It also includes a component of preventive health leave for workers dealing with vasectomies, hysterectomies, end of pregnancies and breast, cervical and prostate screening.

QCU general secretary Jacqueline King said there had been “some positive discussions” with the state government about reproductive leave and “we would be hoping to get some commitments out of them in the coming months”.

If that occurred, unions would “use that as leverage to get the ball rolling nationally”. “If we’ve got the Queensland government as the largest employer in Queensland and if they’re prepared to come out and commit to reproductive leave, I think that sends a good message to other employers and also to the commonwealth government about legislating,” she said.

Ms King said she expected the ACTU Congress in June to back a national approach. “We would like to see it as part of the National Employment Standards as well as in our state jurisdiction,” she said.

The NES provides for 10 days a year for sick and carers leave “but that doesn’t recognise the additional leave that some workers will need at various times in their work careers”.

She cited research showing more than 90 per cent of women had gone to work with debilitating period pain, one in 18 babies are now born through IVF; and prostate cancer was the most diagnosed cancer in Australia with one in seven men affected.

A Queensland government spokeswoman said on Monday that “we look forward to carefully considering these proposals and working with unions for the benefit of Queensland workers”.

She said the government was “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”.

“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,” she said.

Maurice Blackburn lawyer Jessica Heron said there was a “significant need for reproductive leave but it was not being clearly articulated because a lot of the issues that people have with their reproductive body are associated with social stigma”.

“That prevents them from speaking about it and it then prevents society at large from having a real solid understanding of just how serious some of those reproductive health issues can be,” she said.

Ms Heron said it was important to note that the entitlement would be non-cumulative.

“Let’s say it’s a male worker who’s getting a vasectomy,” she said. “He’s only going to get that one time in his life hopefully and he may not need more than three days off to recover.

“If you look at that as a pragmatic employer, is that too much of a cost when you think about the societal benefit? We would say it’s not.

“Not everybody is going to experience these things. It’s very similar in the way that we have family violence leave. That’s not put in place with the expectation that everybody at some point in their life will experience family violence.

“It’s in there because some people may, and when they do, we want to make sure that they have flexibility within their workplace to be able to maintain their employment, and have income coming in, because those two things are critical to the proper functioning of society.”

