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Study to weigh costs, benefits of paid reproductive health leave

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As unions ramp up their campaign for paid reproductive leave, the HSU, the Queensland Council of Unions and Aware Super are commissioning university research to examine the costs and benefits of the entitlement ahead of a resolution to be considered by the ACTU's triennial Congress this afternoon.

Kate Marshall, the HSU's assistant national secretary and assistant state secretary of the Victoria No. 3 branch (trading as HACSU), alongside Queensland Unions general secretary Jacqueline King and Aware Super's Melissa Bodycoat, will tell the Congress that they have asked the Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre at Curtin University to undertake the project, and intend to use the results to inform their advocacy.

The proposed research will:

- **Review** existing reproductive health and wellbeing policies and leave entitlements that employers offer in Australia;
- **Estimate** the prevalence of reproductive health conditions among workers and the number of workers likely to use it; and
- **Assess** the economic and social costs and benefits of the proposed entitlements, including for employers, and the cost of not having such an entitlement

The ACTU previously commissioned the BCEC to undertake an independent economic analysis of the costs to employers of providing paid family and domestic violence leave to workers, which formed part of its submission to the FWC review into the proposal, which concluded with the FWC's 2022 provisional decision to introduce 10 days paid FDV leave as an award entitlement (see [Related Article](#)).

The BCEC researchers also gave evidence to the FWC review, and later to the Senate Employment and Education Legislation Committee [inquiry](#) into the bill that the Labor Government introduced in 2022 to provide the paid entitlement as part of the NES (see [Related Article](#)).

The university's reproductive leave research will model a variety of leave configurations and their potential effects, including on the use of other forms of leave, productivity, and employee attraction, retention and turnover.

From its preliminary analysis of Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia survey data from 2019, the BCEC found that female employees who experience difficulties in having children take 1.3 more days of paid annual leave than workers who don't face difficulties, and 1.1 more sick days, with comparative patterns for men.

The research project also aims to survey employers and workers to ascertain their attitudes towards reproductive leave.

The QCU has been leading the push for paid reproductive health leave, and committed to taking its claim to ACTU Congress in Adelaide this week, with backing from the AWU, FSU, HSU and RTBU, and on Monday, ACTU president Michele O'Neil signalled her support for the campaign (see [Related Articles here](#) and [here](#)).

Some 28 resolutions will be before Congress in Adelaide this afternoon, including an [IR resolution](#), which contains a commitment to advocate for expanding the NES to include an entitlement for 10 days paid reproductive leave, to improve women's workforce participation, career progression and the gender pay gap.

The resolution canvasses a broad range of other topics, including job security, bargaining, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers and fair rules for industrial action.

Reproductive leave key to increasing women's super balances: HSU

In its April [submission](#) to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee [inquiry](#) into the issues related to menopause and perimenopause, the HSU said that addressing reproductive health barriers is the key to gender equity at work and in superannuation accounts, and it recommended introducing 12 days paid reproductive health leave along with menopause information tools for employers.

"Women are often forced to utilise paid and unpaid personal leave because of reproductive health issues," the HSU said.

"Access to paid reproductive health leave for all employees experiencing reproductive health issues increases workforce participation, reduces the gender pay gap, and reduces the superannuation gender pay gap at retirement."

When the HSU began advocating for paid reproductive health leave in 2021, it recommended five days, but it has since received advice from women's health professionals and Sydney University academics, and it is now recommending a minimum of 12 days to better align with a woman's regular cycle.

Its submission backed 12 days paid leave for managing symptoms, and attending and recovering from appointments, along with access to flexible work arrangements and reasonable adjustments for those experiencing reproductive health issues.

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