

# Carer's Leave: Greater Equity For All

Discussion Paper

2023



The Champions of Change Architecture Group acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the many Countries on which we live and work and recognise their continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We recognise that these lands were never ceded. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures and to Elders past and present.

We gladly accept the invitation extended in the Uluru Statement from the Heart to walk together in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.

# We recognise women in all their diversity

We recognise that efforts to advance gender equality have not lifted all women equally. By highlighting the specific demographics of people who experience exclusion, we increase the issue's visibility and boost understanding of how exclusion is experienced within organisations and in society more generally.

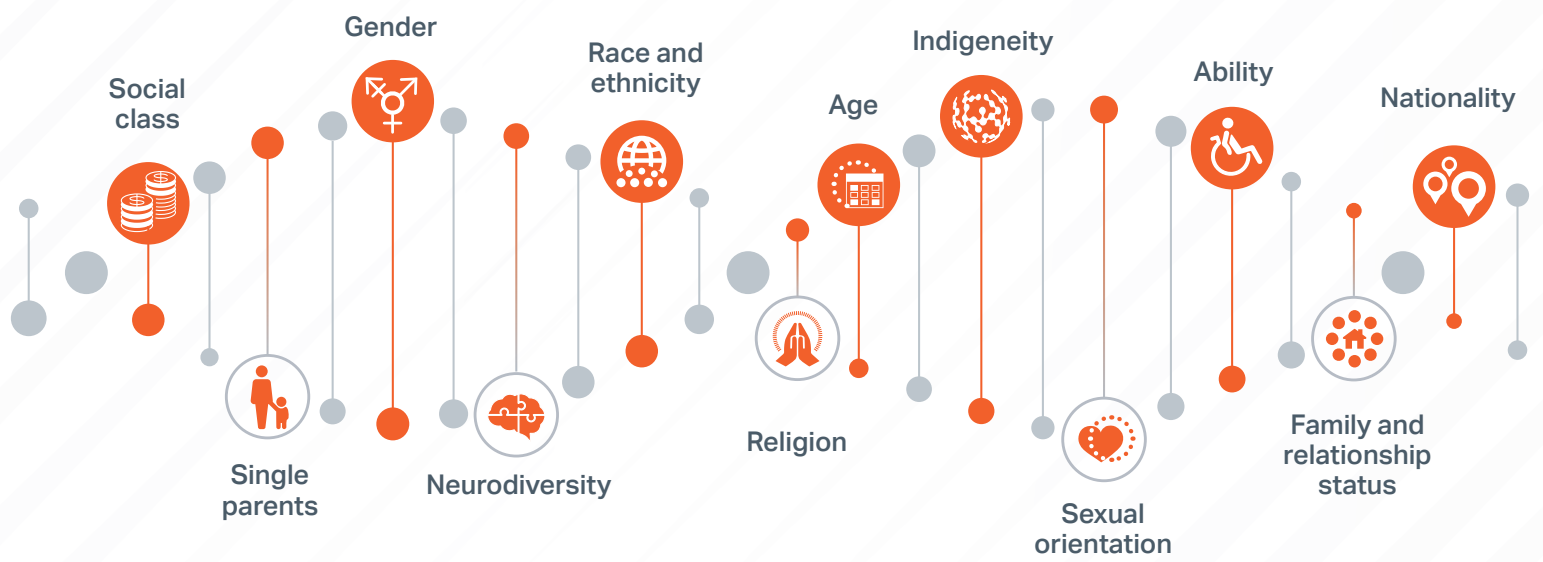
Throughout this document, the terms **women, women in all their diversity, women experiencing intersecting inequalities and diverse people** are used to improve readability. Women includes both cis and trans women.

When referring to **women experiencing intersecting inequalities**, means the structural inequalities and multiple, intersecting and compounding barriers to inclusion and progression faced by:

- **women from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds**
- **single parents**
- **First Nations women**
- **women with disability**
- **ethnically and/or racially marginalised women**
- **neurodivergent women**
- **LGBTIQ+ women.**

When referring to **diverse people**, this means the wealth and variety of people who broadly reflect the diversity of our population.

**Inclusive gender equality** recognises that diversity, equity and inclusion strategies must consider and engage all genders in global efforts to achieve gender equality, with a particular focus on elevating and advancing currently under-represented and marginalised groups. At its core, the intent is to create respectful, safe and inclusive cultures of belonging for all.



# PREFACE

ALEX SMALL (AS) is an architect and director in COX's Sydney Studio. ZOE KING (ZK) is an interior designer and director in COX's Adelaide Studio.

**AS** As a mother of two adult daughters, I look back on my experience juggling work and parenting from 20 years ago and reflect on how things have changed, and what is yet to improve.

I had my first child at an established UK company that had no parenting policy. I was around the third mother to have a child at the time. Whilst parental leave funding was quite advanced, with the British Government paying a certain amount and offering legal protection for maternity leave, there was no written company policies around parental leave, flexible work, or hybrid working.

With so few previous parents to model off, I considered my leave request in line with my workload and what I assumed would be considered acceptable by the company. This was a new experience for me, and one I was ill prepared for. I requested a 6-month leave period, and also managed to negotiate a 4-day week. It was my first unwitting foray into my ongoing involvement in flexible working arrangements and the alignment of work practices to suit parents.

The company I worked for at the time was quite inexperienced in these matters, and frankly hadn't been exemplary in the treatment of previous mothers. For me, I was lucky in that they topped up the minimum government pay and allowed the experiment of a 'package architect', working a 4-day week. I suppose they deemed an architect with 7 years' experience was worth holding on to!

**ZK** Everyone's journey to parenthood is not linear, and I know this first-hand. I knew from an early age that I was unable to carry my own child due to an underlying health issue. However, that didn't stop me from pursuing a family of my own.

With the support of my specialist, we started IVF. Throughout this journey, I shared my story with those close to me. And incredibly, my cousin offered to be our surrogate.

IVF is not a straightforward process, nor is surrogacy. This process was a rollercoaster, and at times, was truly devastating. However, in 2018 we struck gold with our last viable embryo. Later that year, our Judd was born.

At the time, COX was in the process of establishing a parental leave policy that was completed a short time after Judd was born. I was the first director to benefit from this entitlement, and while my time on leave was magic, it became apparent to me that I needed to return to work earlier than I had originally planned.

Learning to juggle this new role, with the career I'd worked so hard to achieve, was quite overwhelming. My husband Mike and I were both working part-time, and somewhat parenting part-time, and probably weren't doing either particularly well. And one day, he came to me with a plan. Mike wanted to be a full-time stay at home dad and encouraged me to go back and work flexibly. This worked beautifully, and still does.

I am so proud of him, he is shaking up the status quo. He is actively involved in the care of our child, something that is great for his mental health, our family wellbeing, and the emotional and intellectual development of Judd. His support meant my career never stagnated, allowing me to grow and develop as a designer, director, and mother.

**AS** Much like Zoe's situation, I had a somewhat 'unconventional' work/family dynamic for the time. The co-sharing of responsibilities started on my return to work, where my husband requested a 4-day working week. He was as competent at the practicalities as me (better at the park adventures but less keen on being the sole male in the mothers' groups!), where he also shared the mental load of parenting young children.

After our second daughter turned 1, we moved to Australia where my working arrangements changed. I went back to a 5-day working week where the pressures of long day care, shorter preschool hours, and long school holidays became greater. The primary school years were the hardest. I can say we only got through by working as a family team, with both parents now working full time with no familial support. I would pack lunches and do drop-off, where my husband did pick-up and evening meals, splitting sick days between us.

But with that simple statement it belies the reality of how the split might affect a career. My husband, at the beginning, had a role that didn't require longer hours and mine did. But as time went on, the opportunities for my husband may well have been impaired by him rarely being able to say he could work back late or attend a later afternoon meeting. Who knows what this meant to his career trajectory whilst my ability to be 'agile', in days before working from home, to stay back late to complete some work for a submission, to revise or re-work a design, meant I could increase my experience and advance my career. 'Presenteeism' for us was not equitable at all.

His role did morph once our daughters attended high school, with less need to pick up and drop off, but that is a long 8 years of 2 children at primary school.

So, looking at the options that are afforded by a good parental leave policy, backed up with a flexible working policy, I can see how much it supports both the parents and the organisation. The frameworks these provide allow for open and honest conversations to be had, with the premise of mutual obligation and support. It follows that with both of these policies in place, the opportunities for parents to co-share parenting more equitably is much more likely and can allow for both male and female engagement in the parenting roles to be accepted, with the impact on careers mitigated by the common understanding that the company has much more to gain by supporting parents by holding on to their experienced staff, and allowing them to parent with less feelings of guilt.

**ZK** Alex is exactly right, and I want to elaborate on why a good parental leave policy is so integral. To put it simply, our people are our number one asset, without them, we don't have a business. So, to keep them, it's simply good business to support them as they embark on and through parenthood. Throughout an employee's career, they will go through many stages in their lives, and they need to know they are valued through each one.

These policies encourage inclusivity and diversity, with an understanding that this balance ensures the best design outcomes and more interesting and authentic studio environments.

My son has taught me more about being a 'good-human' and what it truly takes to navigate life more than any traditional teachings ever could. The two elements bring out the best in me, with my son making me the best Director I can be, and my work making me the best mother I can be.

**AS** And it's not even just about parents.

**ZK** Of course. It's not just about parents needing these flexibilities, a caring policy will eventually be broadened to capture all carers. For instance, elderly or relatives who may have a disability, to support ad-hoc days for sickness or specialist appointments. This is the bigger picture.

**AS / ZK**

We are very proud of the work that Action Group 1A have produced using the detailed analysis by way of real-life interviews, to consider where parental leave policies are working well and where there may be the need to amend and update to support the employees (and their organisations) through this very life changing phase of life. Also we became much more aware of the need to develop policies for carers of the elderly or people other than a baby/child, which we discovered through the interviews was very much an 'invisible' caring role' and this area of caring needs further research to provide the right 'language' and approach in carers' leave policies so that it can be managed with discretion and sensitivity as this caring can mean the emotional burden of caring for someone through ill health.



ZOE KING



ALEX SMALL

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# OVERVIEW

This document identifies tangible, simple strategies illustrated through personal experience to assist women overcoming career stagnation post parenthood and men overcoming the stigma of taking on caring responsibilities, with the aim of achieving greater equity for all. It also begins to address the experiences of people caring for other relatives.

Parenting is an ongoing commitment that does not stop six months after returning from parental leave. Similarly, caring for relatives can be a major, gradually increasing responsibility. A supportive work environment can help parents and carers to balance ongoing and changing caring responsibilities throughout their careers, which in turn helps them to succeed and contribute more effectively to the practice and industry.

This document is intended to encourage process and framework improvements within organisations, as well as providing practical tips and options for individuals to consider, noting that every practice and person are different. The learnings are extracted from real-life personal experiences of people in the architecture industry across Australia who have taken parental or carer's leave.

A brief background of the topic and overview of the research process set the scene for five key discussion topics that provide detailed insights and recommendations. These include:

- Stagnation and progression
- Men's experience
- Practice culture, policy and behaviour
- Communication
- Carer's experience

# 1. BACKGROUND

## 1.1 Context

A Parental Leave Toolkit was produced in 2020 by the Champions of Change Architecture Group, which provided a policy and process framework for practices to adapt or modify to accommodate their practice model and workplace culture and even use for board approval.

Over the last few years since the release of the toolkit, many practices have updated their parental leave policies, which in turn has created a positive cultural shift and improvements in the experience of parental leave and returning to work. However, concerns, challenges and stigmatisation are still very prevalent for those that have caring responsibilities.

The research conducted found that participating practices have differing policies and approaches to parental leave and ongoing support of working parents varies substantially within the industry. Carers of aging parents or relatives with disabilities are less represented within policies and their needs are less visible generally. Across all demographic groups the consistent finding was that individual needs and circumstances vary and policies and workplaces need to be flexible to support them.

## 1.2 Objectives

The objective of this work was to create a meaningful resource to support employees' opportunities before, during, and after parental/carers leave, that builds on, but does not replicate the Parental Leave Toolkit 2020.

The focus was on obtaining qualitative data of individuals' experiences to review and analyse the successes and shortcomings of parental leave and carer policies within practices to identify key insights and recommendations to support change.

The document aims to:

- Encourage discussion and awareness within practices to help promote cultural and formal policy change
- Provide practical recommendations to help parents and carers to progress their careers
- Identify ways to improve the uptake of flexible work and caring responsibilities by men to allow for opportunity of equal parental responsibility and career growth
- Identify experiences unique to carers of elderly parents or relatives with disabilities to better understand their needs.
- Illustrate concepts with direct quotes about personal experiences to highlight different approaches that may work for different practices and individuals

# 2. RESEARCH / DATA COLLECTION

## 2.1 Methodology / Process

An in-depth interview process was undertaken to understand the experience and impacts of new and previous policies. Interviewees were identified with the help of HR/office managers, based on their experiences with parental/ carer's leave.

A detailed questionnaire was used to establish a framework for discussion with parents and carers about their experiences before, during and after taking parental or carer's leave. It was circulated to interviewees prior to an in-person discussion to help guide the conversation, with the hope that a conversational approach would provide richer and more nuanced responses than a written survey alone. Most interviews took around 45 minutes to complete.

The sessions were recorded in video or in text as a Microsoft Teams transcript with the participant's permission to be able to listen back to them when collating this document. Participants were ensured that privacy and anonymity would be maintained by the team of interviewers. The aim was to hear from a variety of voices across multiple practices to gather and collate perspectives and feedback across different demographic groups.

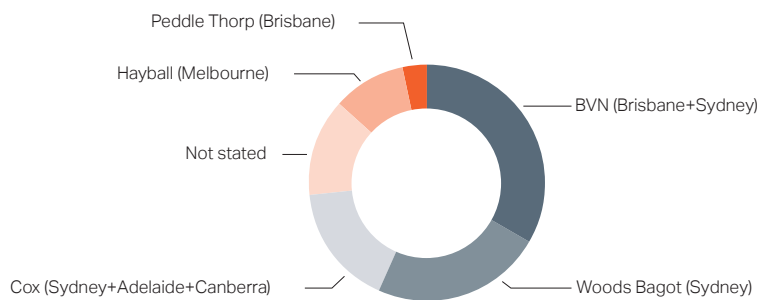
Data from each interview was collated in a shared spreadsheet, including demographics, key themes and direct quotes for experiences before, during and after leave. This was then reviewed by a researcher to identify key trends and focus areas.

Throughout this process it was clear that people were keen to have an avenue to talk about their experiences and be heard. The interviewees were honest, candid and vulnerable with a genuine hope that sharing their experiences could shape future change for others.

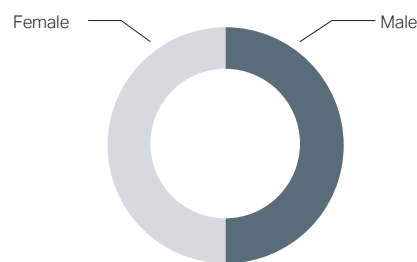
If your practice would like to complete a similar process please refer to the interview document in [APPENDIX A](#) as a guide.

\* The study included 34 interview participants. A total of 30 responses were analysed with 4 removed due to incomplete data.

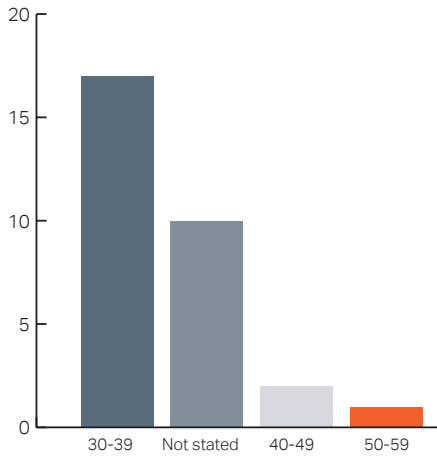
### PARTICIPANT BREAKDOWN



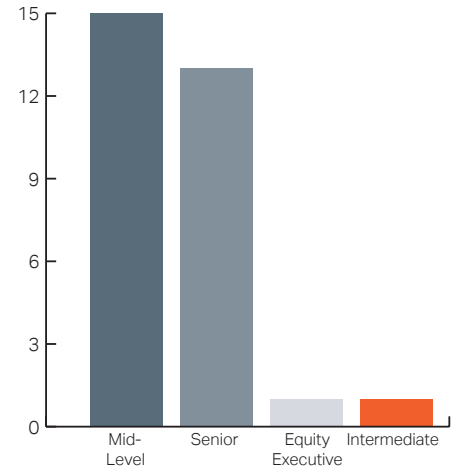
### ORGANISATION



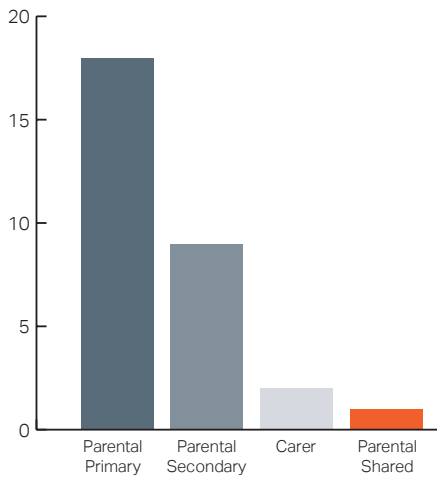
### GENDER



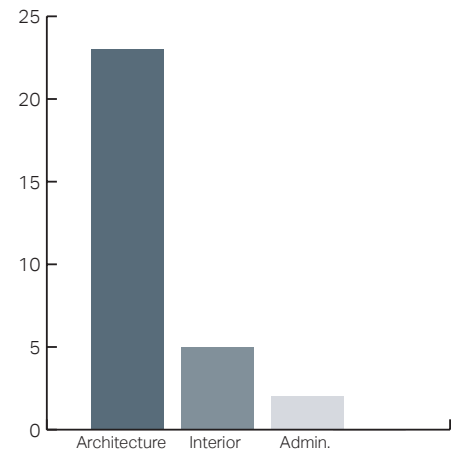
**AGE**



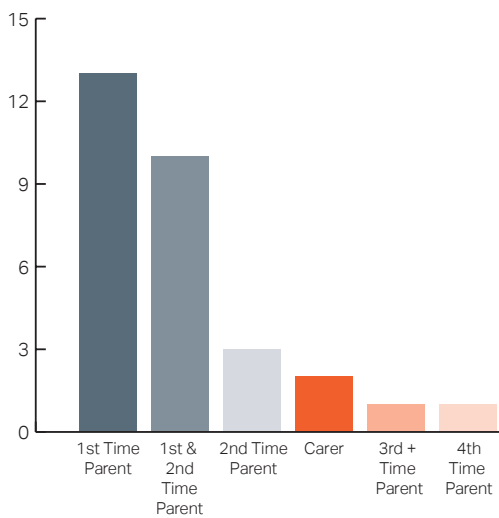
**LEVEL OF SENIORITY**



**TYPE OF LEAVE**



**DISCIPLINE**



**FAMILY DEMOGRAPHIC**

# 3. DISCUSSION TOPICS

## 3.1 Stagnation & Progression



Discussions about career stagnation and concerns about progression after starting a family featured heavily in the interviews that were conducted with female primary carers.

The majority of the women interviewed were associates and above and all who provided their ages were in their 30s and above. This suggests that within this sample size women are having children later in life and may be in more senior positions by the time they start a family.

The interview feedback suggested that setting up for continuing career progression after starting a family begins long before going on parental leave, with many women citing concerns about stagnation and a focus on planning considerations from an early stage in their careers. The insights and recommendations in this discussion topic have therefore been broken into three time periods; before, during and after parental leave.

### BEFORE BECOMING A PARENT

#### INSIGHTS

**Fear of career stagnation:** The interviews identified that many women had feelings of fear and anxiety about the impact on their careers before going on parental leave, including:

- A perception that it's not okay to talk about planning to have children, even after having them
- Missing project developments, continuity of experience, progression opportunities and falling behind others
- Worrying about disappearing or not being visible
- Uncertainty surrounding job security due to length of time in company i.e. less than 12 months
- Concerns about managing workload and stress

**Lack of support from leadership:** This was identified as a key barrier to career progression and appears to be a contributing factor to fear of career stagnation. Interviewees discussed:

- Pushback and concerns raised by project leaders and senior leadership about the amount of time taken on parental leave
- Resistance from leaders to allow working from home (pre COVID) to accommodate pregnancy health needs, resulting in earlier commencement of parental leave than wanted/planned
- Not feeling comfortable to raise concerns with leadership

**Optimism and security:** A smaller number of women were optimistic about taking time off and discussed:

- Seeing time off from work as a chance to reset
- A sense of career security due to the hard work already done
- Reflecting on their experience with their first child and prioritising leave more the second time around

## //

Before you have kids you're in a race against time to get as far as possible. You don't want to talk about planning for children in case you miss out on an opportunity. It is only once you have kids that you feel free to talk about it.

People still ask you when you are having more. When do you get to a point when you're free of that? In your mid 40s?

**Senior Associate | Parent of Two | Female (30-39)**



I planned my leave with the Directorate so if there were bigger projects leading up to my due date, another leader was across the project. This worked out really well as my waters broke 5 weeks early.

**Director/Equity Executive | 1st Time Parent | Female**



The company supports parental leave, but how you take it is negotiated with the project leader and they seemed concerned about the amount of time. There was pressure to try and finish everything.

**Associate | Three Children | Male (40-49)**



If you were able to align yourself with an advocate early on before you have kids, then I think it would be a much easier journey. Because there's always someone then who knows where you've been, where you're going, what your goals are.

**Senior Associate | Parent of Two | Female (30-39)**

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Support from senior leadership:** It was acknowledged that it would be helpful for senior leaders to:

- Ensure project leaders are aware of parent leave policies and are led by senior management to support employees in the lead up to taking parental leave
- Address any fear of letting the company down

**Establishment of position and visibility:** The interview responses reinforced the value of achieving key milestones (such as registration) prior to going on parental leave. Recommendations include:

- Undertake a performance review (separate to personal or pragmatic discussions) prior to starting parental leave to record and solidify position, achievements and career expectations
- Build an established position and strong social network within the practice. These were seen to mitigate against the lack of formal process prior to starting a family

**Transition planning:** The importance of early planning to the company, clients, project teams and parent/carer was strongly emphasised in interviews. Recommendations include:

- Manage client and team expectations with more effective and timely communication
- Consider reframing the role of project architect to co-leadership or project teams
- Manage the transition and ramp down period with project commitments and ensure that sufficient time is allowed for handover

**Focus on wellbeing:**

- Consider avoiding high stress projects/competitions in the lead up to leave as this can negatively impact mental health, wellbeing and preparedness. This should be an open discussion between the practice and individual to avoid making assumptions or restricting opportunities
- Plan for the unexpected. Be flexible around health needs and appointments and allow for the ability to work from home if required, for example due to bed rest or early arrival of a baby

## DURING PARENTAL LEAVE

### INSIGHTS

**Feeling of isolation:** Many people who were interviewed experienced feelings of isolation while on parental leave, resulting from:

- Feeling like a single parent with limited support from a partner (due to partner's employer's parental leave policy)
- Feeling that their job is sacrificial to their partners
- A perception that the office is not child friendly
- Having to initiate contact themselves with no formal keeping in touch days

## //

It would have been nice to have more contact with the office, but it wasn't really at the forefront of my mind. I wasn't invited to any events or 'keeping in touch' days. Perhaps this was more difficult due to COVID.

A few chats with HR in the lead up to returning, however I needed to initiate this. I would have liked HR to make the first move.

**Graduate Architect | Primary Carer | Female**

## //

I think the amount that [Studio Director] reached out to me was enough... You're already trying to navigate being a parent then trying to pencil in time to catch up with your boss or your employer can be stressful.

**Practice Director | Primary Carer | Male**

## //

Having a team of managers or directors that are aligned in their values and ethos, their care for their staff - for people to have families and be able to juggle and balance work and be happy in their personal and work life is so important.

**Director/Equity Executive | 1st Time Parent | Female**

**Sense of not having enough time:** some women expressed regret for not taking a longer period of leave and noted that the leave seemed to pass very quickly. Reasons for reduced leave duration include:

- Pressure to return to work due to concerns about who will run projects etc. in absence
- Having to return to work due to financial pressures

**Lack of boundaries while on leave:**

- High volume of contact from colleagues regarding project status in lead up to return to work, which caused increased anxiety about return
- Frequent contact from their company, builders and clients that needed to be "fended off"
- No-one allocated to take over work while on leave
- Pressure from finance/accounts team to update timesheets while on leave
- Wish to maintain design input

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Staying connected and visible:** The importance of staying connected was a strong theme in the interviews and helped to mitigate feelings of isolation or being forgotten. Recommendations include:

- Senior leadership to initiate contact
- Stay connected via teams/slack/email
- Maintain social network through existing strong connections
- Come in to office for social events, awards nights, CPD, mentoring etc.
- Ask questions at practice wide events and online to stay visible
- Provide flexible working options, including:
  - Flexibility to spread leave over time
  - Flexibility to work from home or hospital around health needs
  - Working 1 day per week to maintain contact and problem solve on key projects
  - Ability to work on small projects during leave period

**Respecting boundaries:** Staying connected needs to be done in a controlled way.

- Senior leadership to reinforce respect for boundaries internally and to clients, contractors etc.
- Avoid any pressure to return quickly
- Encourage the mindset that there will be many projects in a career
- Encourage a transition period back to work focussed on looking after yourself instead of jumping straight back in
- Ensure that administration such as time sheets is resolved prior to leave starting so that carer/parent does not need to be contacted during leave

## //

And you know, you feel guilty to be honest, about sending your child to childcare five days a week and you don't see them.

**Practice Director | Primary & Secondary Carer | Male**

## //

The first thing (a principal) said to me was like, 'Oh hi, you're a mum of two now.' I'm like, yes, I'm a mum of two, but I'm also many other things... I'm very conscious if I'm with people who don't have kids or who I know are not interested in kids, I won't talk about them. ...I don't want to be pigeonholed as the mum.

**Senior Associate | Parent of Two | Female (30-39)**

## //

When you're a single income family you have to work hard; when you're a double income family you have a choice.

**Associate | Secondary Carer of Two Children | Male (40-49)**

## //

Childcare fees are ridiculous. We pay more in childcare than we pay in rent.

**Specialist Lead | Primary Carer of Two Children | Female (30-39)**

**Return planning:** The interviews conveyed that effective return planning allowed for more successful re-integration to work with less anxiety.

- Company to initiate return planning to ensure the employee feels supported and not forgotten
- Company to consider employee's partner and situation as a family instead of individual
- Conversation with leadership about project resourcing prior to return. Interviewees expressed preference for continuity/familiarity
- Informal support from employer to help prepare for return
- Buddy system or informal support can be helpful

### AFTER BECOMING A PARENT

#### INSIGHTS

**Physical and emotional energy of caring responsibilities:** The interviews conveyed a substantial physical and emotional transition process upon returning to work.

- Engagement in extracurricular activities suffered
  - Tension between participating in social + industry activities, vs completing project work in limited working hours
  - Attending office events leads to overtime to compensate
- Guilt
  - Worrying about impact on bond and connection with children
  - Worrying about career and managing work commitments
- Loss of identity
  - Not wanting to be treated like a new person upon return
  - Coming to terms with change in priorities
  - Not wanting to be pigeonholed as "the mum"
  - Postnatal depression and feeling of disappearing

**Financial impact:** Many interviewees noted that decisions about their career were directly impacted by their financial and family situation.

- Career is defaulted to primary earner, which is often the male parent, older, and in a more senior position in this sample size
- Pay differentials at the time of child-birth can mean women's careers are often devalued, minimised and in some cases ended based on current/point-in-time rather than future earning potential
- First few years is really hard while paying for childcare fees (school aged children were generally considered easier) and this was a driver to work more hours
- Parental leave payment not provided by some companies





I'm leaving my children with somebody else. I earned almost next to nothing because I'm paying 2 lots of daycare to come in here and I'm doing something that I'm not particularly enjoying and I sort of start to question why am I doing this, so I think I have this spiral every time I work on health projects.

**Practice Director | Primary Carer of Two Children | Female (30-39)**



I came back to work earlier than planned because I missed the structure, stimulation and social interaction and needed a break from being at home with the baby (while struggling with post natal depression)... I didn't want a buddy because I didn't want to be treated as a new person. I got support from my team instead.

**Administration | Primary Carer & 1st Time Parent | Female (30-39)**



I would not recommend going from being a full time mum to working full time. I would recommend taking some time off for yourself without the baby.

**Specialist Lead | Two Children | Female (30-39)**

**Pressure to maintain work ethic:** Some interviewees describe the experience of watching peers of the same level be promoted while on leave and difficulty obtaining the same recognition upon return due to their part time role. They discussed the barriers below:

- Worry about performance
  - Not wanting to let down company
  - Maintaining pre-parenting standards and identity of being a hard worker
- Return to extreme workload
  - Immediate return to high pressure and long hours with no transition or welcome back
  - No strategy in place for days off if child is sick
  - Worry that long hours increases risk of post-natal depression
- Perceived career downgrade
  - Part time work was a barrier to progression
  - Sense of career having suffered due to priority shift
  - Only being resourced temporarily or to small jobs
  - Buddy system can make people feel like a new employee

**Excitement and relief to return:** Some people expressed their optimism about returning for reasons including:

- Needing a break from being home with baby
- Structure, stimulation and social support
- A sense of adrenaline and being a role model
- Surprise that absence was not as impactful as anticipated before leave

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Care and support on return:** Interviews indicated that ongoing care and support are critical for a successful transition back to work. This is recommended for the first six months as a minimum as the new parent gets used to balancing caring and work responsibilities. Suggestions include:

- Return to work care package and welcome catch up
- Encouraging self-care and allowing time for gradual transition
- Career coaching or liaison role for preparing returning parents
- Buddy system with experienced parent mentor to provide advice, with consideration of existing friendships in office
- HR/Management check-ins with a focus on wellbeing rather than performance

**Financial support:** options to consider include:

- Cab charges available to support short notice pickups of young children from day care during work day
- Employer preferred childcare centres with subsidies
- Employer provided childcare subsidy for training or professional development days



I actually discovered upon my return that no one actually knew what level I was or how much experience I had, so I had to reiterate everything all over again... They said 'Well, it's difficult to run projects on three days a week.'

To get a title/promotion you need to be running projects; to run a project you need to work four days a week. I very much had to put it out there and fight for it to happen.

**Senior Associate | Parent of Two Children | Female (30-39)**



In the teams I've been more recently working with, probably also because they've been more female dominated, there's a high degree of diversity and who's working when. You don't feel like you're the odd one out because it's always someone's non-working day, so there's a lot less judgement of people.

Everybody's got some sort of special arrangement... Whether you're in the studio, or you're working from home, or you're not working that day but you're just dialling in for the meeting - it adds to that diversity. It sort of dissolves any stigma.

**Architect | Primary Carer of Two Children | Female**

**Strong support from leadership:** Advocacy from the top down was acknowledged as a critical factor for creating a culture that supports working parents and carers. Recommendations include:

- Clear communication between leaders and staff and transparency of expectations
- Offer the flexibility to work from home or work flexible hours
- Promote support of flexible working arrangements and alternative team structures to clients and consultants e.g. acknowledging flexible or part-time team members in bids or updating email signatures to include "My company supports flexible work. My work days are ..."
- Lead by example and being vocal about working flexibly and caring responsibilities

**Appropriate workload:** Interviewees conveyed the importance of mutually negotiating an appropriate workload to suit each parent/carer's individual circumstances.

- Discuss the level of responsibility and workload with individuals before assigning the work and check in regularly to monitor suitability over time
- Be realistic about what can be achieved when returning to work and acknowledge that there will be a transition period (avoid immediate high-pressure workload)
- Set and respect boundaries around work times and communication outside of work hours

**Continuity of role and responsibilities:** Many interviewees acknowledged a desire to return to their previous role, level of responsibility or project where applicable. The recommendations below were identified to support ongoing leadership opportunities.

- Consider team size and structure
- Large teams offer:
  - Visibility and support from other team members
  - The ability to share responsibilities and flexibly manage workload
  - More diversity in working arrangements to minimise stigma of working part time
  - A sense of familiarity if returning to the same large project team
- Small teams can:
  - Offer more autonomy, flexibility and the ability for self-paced work
  - Allow for continuity of leadership role and responsibility
  - Be isolating and stressful if no support is available
- Re-think possibilities for part time leadership:
  - Leading less projects at the same time
  - Co-leading or job sharing with another project leader
  - Leading with a 2IC to reduce workload and provide the opportunity to mentor and upskill another person

## 3.2 Male Experience



Everyone is different, so everyone will have different core values. For myself personally, family plays a major part of that...you just have to value family time.

It's not just like celebrating the birthdays or doing those special days, or taking the kids out somewhere nice or whatever. For me, family time involves all of the little jobs, like giving the kids a bath going through all their homework, having some fun.

**Mid-Level Associate | 2nd Time Parent | Male (40-49)**



My career has suffered from not being there... The perfect employee is a young man with no family... When work isn't the main priority, they lose prestige in the office.

**Mid-Level Associate | 3rd Time Parent | Male (40-49)**

The interview process confirmed that there is still a large divide in how men and women experience parenting and caring responsibilities and the impact that this has on their careers. In the interviews conducted, the male partner's career was often considered the primary income while female primary carers' careers become sacrificial. There is a family predicament with the aspirations of both partners being able to maintain a successful and fulfilling career versus the practicality of income and expenses.

The gender pay gap at the time of parenting influences decisions. Career and financial status comparison within couples drives decision making about who will be the primary carer.

There is the self-fulfilling prophecy that women will be the primary carer by default if they are paid less and/or in a more junior position due to expectation that they will at some point take primary carers leave (also affected by age differences within couples). Women's careers are therefore often devalued, minimised and in some cases ended based on current/point-in-time rather than future earning potential.

There were gaps in the data collected i.e. lack of men taking primary carer's leave as the majority interviewed took secondary carer's leave, suggesting that there is still an imbalance in sharing of caring responsibilities.

### INSIGHTS

The overall theme in interviews was that many fathers wished to take a more active role in parenting, which is expressed through:

- Regret for not taking additional leave (by some)
- Reassess the short-term financial sacrifice of taking extended leave as a long-term investment in two careers and overall family health and well-being. The partner's career was able to advance in tandem thus easing the pressure of one dominant earner in the family – thinking as a team rather than individuals. Careers are longer term trajectories
- Regret for not saying no to opportunities (e.g. competition, concept stage design) in lead up to leave
- Take additional leave for birth of second child after feeling there was not enough time with first
- The benefits of equal shared caring responsibilities between both parents
- Men needing to overcome the stigma of taking career breaks to be carers
- Perceived need to incentivise men as primary caregivers, not just as a support to primary caregiving partner but to have enough time to be truly responsible for children

Identified barriers and perceived obstacles to reducing stigma of parental leave for men from interviews:

- Low expectations of possibilities for part time roles by senior leadership
- Low policy preparedness for equal or alternating primary carer responsibilities between partners
- Stigma of being the first man in the company to take primary carers leave which could be perceived poorly by company in comparison to the alternative primary and secondary caring responsibilities between partners
- Low awareness of precedent / role model for taking primary carers leave as a father



There is no stigma to being a father. Stigma is more related to work ethic. There is a need for balance between a family-oriented parent and presenteeism.

Options could include looking at a suitable alternative role in the project if part time work is to be pursued for the individual returning to the workforce.

**Senior Executive | 2nd Time Parent | Male (30-39)**



So I think my recommendation to myself is that I should have said there are going to be a million projects until the end of my career and have had someone else appointed to be design lead. Being greedy ultimately impacted the time I had with my daughter.

**Senior Associate | 1st Time Parent | Male**



It was emphasised repeatedly that secondary carer's leave could be spread out to help the transition of when your partner goes back to work. Because my wife is a stay at home mum I felt less entitled to take the leave.

**Associate | 3rd Time Parent | Male (40-49)**

- Gender pay gap within couples at time of parenting
- Culture of overtime
- Sense that there isn't stigma associated with being a father ("family man" identity viewed positively by peers and leadership), but there is stigma associated with work ethic
- Fear of missing out on opportunities in own career
- Fear of part time hours impacting career progression
- Stigma of taking more than 2 weeks of parental leave or reducing work hours permanently
- Fear of letting the company down
- Strong work ethic perceived to be synonymous with long hours and presenteeism, stigma of leaving on time/early, perception of need to make up hours in own time if attending non-project company events
- Career and financial status comparison within couples drives decision making for who will be the primary carer. However, type of work/ industry was also a factor e.g. a doctor/nurse/dentist may earn more, but transactional/appointment based work is easier to do part time than project work as an architect
- Being firm about making sure that time away from work had to be respected so that the time away was solely for parenting duties

## EXPERIENCES OF MEN TAKING PARENTAL LEAVE FROM CONDUCTED INTERVIEWS

### BEFORE BECOMING A PARENT

- In the lead up to leave flexible work options were needed to allow for attending appointments
- Taking time to be prepared to be a parent

### DURING PARENTAL LEAVE

- Regret expressed for not sticking to own "rules" of reduced work contact
- Regret for not setting firmer boundaries while on leave
- Need the time off to mentally process the big change in life of having a new child

### AFTER BECOMING A PARENT

- Sense of not having taken enough time off
- Some thinking of short-term financial sacrifice of taking extended leave as a long-term investment in two careers and overall family health and well-being
- After leave, sense that despite pushback and worry, leave taken was not detrimental to team or project and could have taken longer. On the other hand, there was a perception by some that parental leave for fathers is a holiday
- Changes after becoming a parent include prioritizing personal time management to ensure there is family time at home. Engagement in extra-curricular activities suffered
- Less travel for work or perhaps family comes along for the longer work trips



Co-leadership - think about it as project team instead of project architect. Plan early and get clients on board. Introduce co-leader or new leader to clients early in a transition period.

Share responsibilities to manage project demands. Talk regularly about how to manage time. Sharing project leader role makes it not a burden for one person all the time.

**Mid-Level Associate | 2nd Time Parent | Male (40-49)**



The people who found the idea of a man taking leave as being difficult or unhelpful were the older men who had not taken leave when they had their children.

Younger staff members were much more receptive to the idea and understood that it was generally a good change to the status quo of caring responsibilities.

**Senior Associate | 1st Time Parent | Male**

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO REDUCING STIGMA OF PARENTAL LEAVE FOR MEN FROM CONDUCTED INTERVIEWS

### BEFORE BECOMING A PARENT

- Create policy preparedness for equal or alternating primary carer responsibilities between partners i.e. parental policy to benefit both parents. Parental policy could be improved if both parents were able to take the primary carer's leave
- Address workaholic personalities and workplace cultures that over-emphasise presenteeism (explicitly or implicitly)
- Re-train client expectations of architect's availability with unrealistic expectations on project delivery
- Flexible work arrangements are important to enable the parent to attend doctors appointments, or even working 9-day fortnight in one cited example in order to schedule appointments on the day off
- Perceived need to incentivise men as primary caregivers
- More diversity of arrangements within team to "dissolve" stigma
- Consider co-leadership - establishing a project team instead of the sole project architect. Introduce a co-leader to the client early in a transition period. Project responsibilities are shared to manage demands. Ongoing communication with your co-leader assists in time management and lessens the project burden on the one person. It further lessens the mental load

### DURING PARENTAL LEAVE

- Promote awareness of precedent / role model for taking primary carer's leave as a father, not just as a support to primary caregiving partner but ensure there is enough time to be truly responsible for children
- Acknowledge importance of parental leave for adjustment period to becoming a parent and establishing new routine

### PROGRESSING CAREER AFTER BECOMING A PARENT

- Need to change the culture of overtime i.e. strong work ethic is perceived to be synonymous with long hours, the stigma of leaving on time/early, perception of need to make up hours in own time if attending non-project company events
- Return to work care is important and beneficial to carer's health and wellness

## 3.3 Practice Culture, Policy & Behaviour



I don't get a lunch break. I'm on from the moment I get there. My days are chaotic.

**Practice Director | Primary Carer | Male**



The option for both of us to have the same length of time with our son has made the bond an equal one and the parental sharing equal too.

**Associate | Primary Carer | Male**



If women take maternity leave it can irritate people, but I took 2.5 months off and I was considered a hero.

**Associate | Primary Carer | Male**

The interview process highlighted that becoming a parent is a major life event and that this pivot to a new life stage taught carers how to best prioritise their time. This suggests that parents work very efficiently, which should be acknowledged and celebrated.

From the sample pool interviewed, it was evident that if directors, senior management and senior team members set an example with regards to cultural aspects of parental leave and flexible working arrangements, this would have a positive influence on the remainder of the workforce and culture more broadly.

Interviewees generally felt that the transition before, during and after taking parental leave was much smoother if there was a written and transparent policy in place.

Many participants commented on the culture of practising architecture; long hours, tight deadlines and working with other industries (construction or developers for example) who in some cases prioritise caring responsibilities even less, particularly for males.

### INSIGHTS

- Limitations of the data pool: Practices that don't already offer equal parental leave to both primary and secondary carers don't have a lot of data for the male experience of taking parental leave beyond two weeks
- The idea that parenting is an exercise in time management with no down time. Time is valuable because there is less of it. Parents get in, get out and get the job done
- The idea of senior team members 'leaving loudly' to reduce the stigma of presenteeism
- Societal norms are changing, and more men are willing to take extended leave. However, there is a perceived unfair stigma of a senior female vs a senior male taking extended parental leave
- Some interviewees held the perception that the culture of practising architecture is positively geared towards young males
- Some interviewees had to negotiate their parental leave entitlements, rather than having a written policy in place effective to all employees. Conversely, there was a sense that written parental leave policies are a one-size-fits-all approach
- Some employees do not feel supported by their managers in pushing back on unrealistic deadlines or felt there was limited respect for their days off. Senior team members feel the pressure to work minimum four to five days per week so that projects can be run effectively and then feel guilty about not being able to care for their child
- Other industries being disrespectful towards flexible work arrangements or being on parental leave



I don't have to feel guilty about having to leave early. Be really open about juggling and the flexibility. I am setting an example.

**Director | Primary Carer | Female**



When a manager leaves loudly, it sets the tone for those less senior, creating a healthy work/life balance culture in the office.

**Cayla Dengate |  
Sydney Morning Herald, 2023**



...research shows that managers with care-giving responsibilities are rated by their staff as better managers and have more satisfied staff than managers with no responsibilities.

**Diversity Council Australia |  
Inclusion@Work Index, 2021**



I've found since the policy has been put in place, reassurance around arrangements has made planning to grow a family easier.

**Associate | Primary Carer**

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Encourage senior team members to 'leave loudly'
- Transparency and communication about current life stage – don't pretend to be available at a full-time capacity if only working part-time. List working days or flexible hours in email signature
- Celebrate and acknowledge parents going and returning from parental leave to wider studio
- Managers to acknowledge and celebrate the time management and productiveness of parents
- Develop written parental leave policies and review/update them regularly to enable men and women to share the care
- Parental leave policies to be written, easy to access and digest. A clear line of communication between the employee and the most appropriate person that they can discuss the policy with – HR manager, office manager, director, associate etc. The ability to tailor the parental leave policy to the individual, within reason
- Job-sharing for employees working part-time so that clients and consultants are serviced five days per week
- Directors and managers to be vocal and transparent with clients and consultants regarding meeting days/times, working overtime capabilities
- Directors and managers to negotiate appropriate timeframes for deadlines to mitigate potential overtime hours

## 3.4 Communication



It comes down to individual roles and personalities. We need to talk about it more. Juggling of work commitments and role as a project leader is sometimes hard to take time off. [The] 2IC role is therefore very important to share knowledge and responsibilities.

**Senior Project Leader |  
Secondary Carer | Male**



I opted to spread out my paid parental leave over a number of weeks working part time. This was made easier due to working from home arrangements as it allowed a whole lot more flexibility.

However, while working part time, resourcing commitments were an issue or not being communicated to all. I constantly needed to remind others of part time arrangements and capacity

**Senior Associate | Secondary  
Carer | Male**

One of the key themes that emerged from the detailed interview process was that regardless of the individual and their personal circumstances, clear and effective communication is essential to the effectiveness of any practice when it comes to policies and processes for carer's leave. The majority of those interviewed believed that even with parental leave policies in place, there is still room for improvement. A 'one size fits all' approach is inherently flawed when it comes to parental and caring responsibilities.

- Clear and transparent communication prior to and during leave, along with returning to work was incredibly important to most parents and carers
- Companies with parental leave policies in place allow employees to clearly understand the process, expectations and entitlements, although this can always be developed and improved
- Communication methods can either be formal and driven by policy or informal and instigated by various members of staff
- Those who identified unclear communication often felt disconnected and unsure of company's expectations and processes
- Formal modes of communication outlined in parental leave policies vary widely between companies

### INSIGHTS

- Carers interviewed all had their own opinions on 'communication', which is a broad term. This also changed as individuals moved through various phases of their leave and on returning to work
- Expectations around frequency and form of communication varied, both from the parental / carer and company
- Common to most carers was the want for clear communication prior and post leave period. This provided reassurance and clarity over roles, expectations, working arrangements and financial management
- Anxiety felt by those planning their leave mostly stemmed from confusion or lack of clarity. Namely, confusion regarding expectations, financial uncertainty and concerns with a lack of plan in place – everything happening at the last minute
- Low understanding of administrative requirements by HR contributed to the organisation of impending leave complicated
- During leave, some carers were happy to be 'left alone' while others wished to continue to feel part of the office
- Formal 'keeping in touch days' or more general contact from the office during leave seemed to differ. Not all companies have parental leave policies, and of those that do - not all include a framework around communication or "keeping in touch" during the leave period
- Having the option of keeping in touch days were largely valued by individuals, even if not used. Many described not having this option communicated to them, or needing to initiative themselves
- Clear, concise and regular forms of communication benefit both the employee and employer – always good to be on the same page
- Individuals had various opinions on its success and failures based on own personal circumstances and expectations
- Typically, primary carers who took longer leave periods found the transition back to work more difficult than secondary carers. Clear communication and agreed expectations made this transition easier





Communication to the studio about my return was not great. People were confused about whether to go to me or to the person who had filled my role while I was away.

**Administration | Primary Carer | Female**



Men should be made aware that they can take carer's leave if their partner has post natal depression. We should be checking if a secondary carer's partner is doing OK and if they need more supported time off.

**Administration | Primary Carer | Female**



I felt that continuous contact with my company was important throughout for my own personal growth and mental wellbeing.

**Senior Associate | Secondary Carer | Male**



Clear communication needs to happen about what people will be working on instead of them randomly getting emails about it before even being told that they are working on it.

**Senior Associate | Primary Carer | Female**

- Many parents / carers returning from leave felt their transition back could have been better handled, particularly in regards to communication with the broader office and project team. Interviews highlight the value of a return-to-work plan, but there is a need for better implementation. Many individuals felt that they have to advocate for themselves and start discussions. Concerns included not enough discussion about options, limited support from HR, a sense of pressure to increase days but was not explicitly communicated, role clarity upon return not established and most importantly, some individuals did not feel that could ask for more transparency
- Many parental leave policies do not extend to beyond the leave period. What check-ins are in place for parents who have recently returned to work? How are they managing the transition? Are expectations around the role, project assignment and tasks reasonable? Are there signs of stress, struggling to manage or post-natal depression?

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### BEFORE BECOMING A PARENT

- Accept that a 'one size fits all' approach doesn't work in this instance. Be prepared to adapt to the needs of the individual. These needs can also change throughout the leave period and upon returning to work
- Given the personal nature of each individual circumstance, expectations around levels of communication to be better set-out prior to leave. Establish a mutual understanding on how, when and who. HR or senior management may not always be the best person to be communicating with an individual on parental / carer's leave
- Prior to commencement of leave, establish who is the best person within the organisation to continue the communication and how often this may take place
- Increase transparency in communication about leave details such as payment amounts, frequency, accruing annual leave, superannuation and each individuals access to various entitlements. Discuss and offer flexible payment options prior to leave commencing

### DURING PARENTAL LEAVE

- If 'keeping in touch days' are part of the company policy, ensure they are enacted. Professional development sessions or social functions held out of hours may not be accessible to some carers. Invitations need to be appropriate for the individual's circumstances and interests to establish an inclusive environment. This could be an opportunity to participate in work events, business development sessions, drawing reviews, design workshops, mentoring or professional development forums
- Prior to returning to work, HR or senior management to meet with carer to set out clear expectations. This may involve negotiating part time, flexible hours and project commitments



Since the parental leave policy has been in place, reassurance around arrangements made planning to grow a family easier rather than leave and seek work elsewhere.

**Associate | Primary Carer | Female**



It would have been helpful to have both the company's parental leave policy and government policy easily accessible and explained. This would help with planning and how to go about the application.

**Senior Project Leader | Secondary Carer | Male**



Directors and HR have a really good understanding of what it's like and the challenges [returning from parental leave and working part time], yet they don't have time to do the regular check-ins.

This would be good if it came from a senior architect, there HR and director philosophies need to be communicated to mid-level management who are directly impacting staff.

**Architect | Primary Carer | Female**

#### FOLLOWING LEAVE

- Provide carers with a platform for communicating their needs and aspirations. Make sure they feel they are heard and valued
- Check in regularly upon return. Depending on the individual, this could be formal or informal
- Following COVID, architectural practices have embraced differing forms of communication, including the use of technology and virtual tools. These should be exploited to allow for more inclusive events, forums and meetings. Having practice wide sessions available on Teams, or in hybrid format, allows people who are on leave, non-working days, working remotely decide if they attend in person or online. Sessions can be recorded to for catch-up at a later, more appropriate time

## 3.3 Carer's Experience



Whilst I'm physically maybe not doing that much work for my mum and dad, it is a lot of emotional energy. I will see them on a Sunday and I am just so exhausted after spending the day with them because it's just quite draining.

**Senior Associate | Carer | Female**



My recommendation would be if somebody loses somebody from their immediate family that they may not have to go back into their previous role. From day one give a bit of time and space to try to balance it better.

**Senior Associate | Carer | Female**

The interview process highlighted that very few participants interviewed were carers of elderly parents and loved ones with a disability. We predict that this is not a true representation of the number of colleagues who do in fact have caring responsibilities beyond that of young children.

As people are having children later in life, the likelihood of an overlap in caring for children and aging parents also continues to increase.

Parental leave policies typically do not extend beyond an individual's return to work following the initial leave period and flexible work policies do not specifically cover those with ongoing caring responsibilities.

### INSIGHTS

- Ongoing caring responsibilities are rarely spoken about, particularly when they involve elderly parents or loved ones with a disability. This may be due to the very private and personal nature of the matter, with individuals reluctant to share too much with their employer
- Unlike the immediate and visible commencement of parenthood that comes with the birth of a baby, caring responsibilities can start gradually and progressively increase over time
- Given the lack of awareness, appropriate policies are relatively unknown or not even present. Informal carers may not be aware of suitable arrangements available for their situation
- Carer's leave was taken in conjunction with a regular flexible work arrangement in one instance to allow for home supervision for the parent facing terminal illness
- Negotiations for employees seeking carer's leave may be on a case-by-case basis
- There is a need to design the carer's leave to avoid potential negative effects including the recruitment and career progression of carers
- As much notice as possible allows for better support and flexibility

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Carer's leave to be well defined in company policies and outlined separately to parental leave. Some people aren't aware of what it can be used for
- Flexible work arrangements combined with carer's leave allows for continuous project involvement
- Carer's leave promotes a family friendly office culture and does not stigmatise. It promotes equity, flexibility in workplace, inclusion of workers with varied family circumstances without penalty or hampering career progression. It recognises diversity in the workplace family situations especially with an ageing population
- Encouragement for workplace relations to be resolved through negotiations and open conversations with flexible work provisions will cater for a fair and balanced working arrangement to suit both parties
- Undertake more research into the ongoing roles of carers
- Openness and strong social connection can help support carers e.g. communicate to project leaders what is going on in your life so that they can help support you

# 4. SUMMARY

## 4.1 Summary & Recommendations



It inevitably turns into a male/female issue when you have primary and secondary and for me that is in direct conflict with everything Champions of Change is trying to do...

Is a detriment to me having a bond with my children but also a detriment to my partner being able to return to work.... I understand why they put it in place and why they made it explicit, but it does have unfair repercussions...

**Practice Director | Primary & Secondary Carer | Male**

With the key focus of Greater Equity for All, we sought to better understand the qualitative outcomes and personal experiences following the implementation by many participating practices of the 2020 Parental Leave Toolkit. Are the current parental leave policies working or not working, what could be improved and how does the role of carers beyond those of new parents fit (or don't fit) within these policies?

On the whole, those interviewed expressed a positive shift in their parental leave experiences where a parental leave policy is in place, which can be attributed to the work undertaken by the 2020 Champions of Change Architecture Group and companies embracing the toolkit.

Despite the above noted success, continual review of parental leave policies should occur to ensure the needs of employees are being supported and an inclusive company culture is being fostered. The interviews conducted highlighted that stigmatisation is still very prevalent for those with caring responsibilities, who are overwhelming women. Further work needs to be done to remove the perceived negativity around males taking carer's leave to allow for opportunity of equal parenting responsibilities and career growth.

Limited information was collected from individuals who have caring responsibilities beyond those of a young child – for example elderly parents, older children, people with disabilities or mental health concerns.

### FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Companies without a parental leave policy in place should seek to implement one
- HR and/or senior management should check in with employees regularly to better understand the success of parental leave policies. There is no point having a policy in place if it's not working. A copy of survey questions asked for this body of work is available for reference
- Continually update any parental leave policy as required and ensure it is flexible enough to accommodate the various needs of individuals
- Undertake further research on those with caring responsibilities beyond those of a young child. Parental leave policies typically don't extend beyond the return of a new parent to work, nor is it specifically covered by flexible work policies
- Junior staff members typically follow the lead of senior management. Clearly communicate to senior management expectations and entitlements around the parental leave policy, particularly on returning to work, to allow them to better support and advocate for team members
- Gendered stereotypes need to be abolished to promote equal caring responsibilities and career growth

# APPENDIX

## Interview Facilitator Guide

### PROCESS

The intent of this questionnaire is to establish a framework for discussion with parents and carers about their experiences before, during and after taking parental or carer's leave.

The questionnaire can be circulated to interviewees prior to an in-person discussion to help guide the conversation, with the hope that a conversational approach will provide richer and more nuanced responses than a written survey alone. It would be beneficial to record the sessions with the participant's permission to be able to listen back to them when collating a series of case studies.

Our aim is to hear from a variety of voices across multiple studios to gather and collate perspectives and feedback from all of the groups below.

- HR or office managers to establish and understand the studio's approach to carer's leave and to help direct you to people who may be most suitable to participate in discussions
- 1st time parents
- 2nd time parents
- 3rd + time parents
- Secondary carers and fathers who have taken a block of leave immediately after the arrival of a child
- Secondary carers and fathers who have taken leave later in the child's life or spread it over an extended period
- Carers of elderly relatives or people with disabilities
- People will be anonymous unless they agree to be identified

### QUESTIONNAIRE

**INTRODUCTORY DETAILS (For Champions of Change Coalition Architecture Group group to establish context and assist with case studies):**

- What is your current position at work?
- What type of leave did you take? (i.e. primary/secondary parental leave, carer's leave)
- What was the duration of your leave and how long ago did you take it?
- Do you currently have a flexible working arrangement? If so, please describe it
- If you have children, how many do you have and what are their approximate ages?
- If you are a carer of a relative please describe your responsibilities/situation

### BEFORE LEAVE

- Please describe your experience leading up to your leave? Was there a process that was followed at work? Were you informed of options available to you and offered any support?
- Did you have concerns or reservations about the potential impact of taking time off work?
- What worked well for you?
- Was there anything that didn't work well and do you have any suggestions or recommendations for what could be improved?
- What was your partner's role through this time?

### DURING LEAVE

- What level of engagement did you have with your studio while you were on leave?
- Did you participate in "keeping in touch days"? If so, what did this look like for you (e.g. what kind of activities did you do? How often did you come in? Was it beneficial?)
- Was there anything that didn't work well and do you have any suggestions or recommendations for what could be improved?
- What was your partner's role through this time?

### AFTER LEAVE/RETURN TO WORK

- What was your initial return to work like? I.E. were you on a large or small team? Did you come back in the same role? Did you alter your working hours?
- Did you feel listened to/heard?
- What worked well or was helpful for you when you returned?
- Was there anything that didn't work well and do you have any suggestions or recommendations for what could be improved or how you could be better supported to progress and thrive in your career?
- What impact has being a carer or parent had on your career?
- What was your partner's role through this time?

### OTHER COMMENTS

- What do you think could be done to improve the uptake of leave and sharing of ongoing caring responsibilities by men and secondary carers?
- Do you perceive any stigmas or barriers (e.g. presenteeism) around being a carer or parent in the workforce? If so, what do you think can be done to overcome them?
- Are there one or two changes that you believe would make the most difference in improving opportunities for parents or carers and helping them progress and thrive?
- Do you have any other comments or feedback?
- Are you aware of any aspects of your leave processes being supported by the Champions of Change Architecture Group toolkits/advice?

## Additional Reading

- Diversity Council Australia, *Inclusion@Work Index: Mapping the State of Flex in the Australian Workforce*, Sydney, Diversity Council Australia, 2021
- Sydney Morning Herald, *Loud leaving has replaced quiet quitting, and it's making a splash*, Cayla Dengate, March 30 2023  
<https://www.smh.com.au/business/workplace/loud-leaving-has-replaced-quiet-quitting-and-it-s-making-a-splash-20230327-p5cvnb.html>
- The Australian HR Institute, *How can employers better support working parents?*, Natalie Ried March 23, 2023  
[https://www.hrmonline.com.au/diversity-and-inclusion/how-can-employers-support-working-parents/#msdyntrid=fenKjgdvk\\_vp31Ys3gk3\\_wlv60A9xOg4nqt17lj2Po](https://www.hrmonline.com.au/diversity-and-inclusion/how-can-employers-support-working-parents/#msdyntrid=fenKjgdvk_vp31Ys3gk3_wlv60A9xOg4nqt17lj2Po)

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