



Building Better Workplaces

A Toolkit for Retaining Women Through Pregnancy, Parental Leave, and Return to Work in the NSW Construction Industry



Toolkit Introduction

Improving employees' experience of pregnancy, parental leave and return to work is about more than leave policies. It requires strategic commitment and manager education, across the continuum of stages – before and during an employee's pregnancy, preparing for parental leave, during periods of leave, and returning to work after leave – and across a wide range of issues such as such as discrimination, health and safety, career support and working conditions.

This table outlines key actions construction organisations can take to improve employees' experience of pregnancy, parental leave and return to work across the parental leave continuum. Each action area is included in this toolkit.

About the Toolkit

This toolkit is a resource for the NSW construction sector to support women through the stages of pregnancy, parental leave and return to work.

Building Better Workplaces is underpinned by research into leading practice in parental leave in the construction and cognate industries.

There are four main transition points into and out of parental leave in the NSW construction industry:

1. Before and during pregnancy



2. Preparing to go on parental leave



3. During parental and other leave



4. Returning from leave



What's in the toolkit

The pages that follow provide tools and strategies for construction industry employers to support women workers across all stages of the pregnancy and parental leave journey. Each section provides leading practice, tools, tips, checklists, case studies, and links to further resources.

The Project

This toolkit is part of a project funded by the NSW Government Women in Construction Industry Innovation Program (IIP) and undertaken on behalf of the National Association of Women in Construction (NSW). The project aims to help women remain in frontline construction roles in NSW during pregnancy, parental leave, and after returning from leave. The toolkit is a companion to the report *Motherhood, Stigma and Survival – Women's Lived Experiences of Pregnancy and Parental Leave in the NSW Construction Sector* and provides tools to support its implementation.

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Suggested citation

Hamilton, Myra., Galea, Natalie., Williams, Alison, and Hanna-Osborne, Sally (2025) "Building Better Workplaces: A Toolkit for Retaining Women Through Pregnancy, Leave and Return to Work in the NSW Construction Industry", University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia.

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Acknowledgements

This research was funded by the NSW Government Women in Construction Industry Innovation Program (IIP) and undertaken on behalf of the National Association of Women in Construction (NSW). We extend our sincere thanks to the women and industry stakeholders who generously shared their time, experiences, and insights. Your contributions enriched this research and helped shape a deeper understanding of the issues.



Transition Roadmap

For women in construction, negative experiences of pregnancy and parental leave are common and have become a major barrier to retention of women in the sector. These experiences extend well beyond poor access to paid parental leave. Rather, they include a range of challenges to their health, wellbeing, careers, economic security and work/life balance across the parental leave continuum, through pregnancy, parental leave, and transitions back to work. Key considerations for employers are set out below:



Toolkit Overview

Improving employees' experience of pregnancy, parental leave and return to work is about more than leave policies. It requires strategic commitment and manager education, across the continuum of stages – before and during an employee's pregnancy, preparing for parental leave, during periods of leave, and returning to work after leave – and across a wide range of issues such as such as discrimination, health and safety, career support and working conditions.

This table outlines key actions construction businesses can take to improve employees' experience of pregnancy, parental leave and return to work across the parental leave continuum. Each action area is included in this toolkit.

Action	Impact	Page
Developing a parental leave strategy	A strategy ensures a holistic approach to supporting the parental leave continuum that aligns with core business and is backed up by measurable targets that are owned by all.	5
Ensuring legislative compliance	Understanding and monitoring compliance with important legislation covering the parental leave journey ensures employees have appropriate access to basic entitlements that are enshrined in law.	6
Protecting health and safety	Proactively managing specific risks and hazards creates a safe, supportive work environment for women during conception, pregnancy, parental leave and returning to the workplace after leave.	7-8
Designing parental leave	Designing and implementing a paid parental leave scheme (that works for your sized company) provides longer periods of paid leave that improve women's health and economic security. It also improves retention and work engagement among employees.	9-10
Resourcing parental leave	Early, detailed resource planning for the period an employee is on parental leave, making arrangements for funding, backfilling and handover processes prevents undue stress and uncertainty for the woman and team members and ensures successful completion of projects.	11
Supporting career retention and progression	To retain talent and support long-term career development, employers should stay in contact during leave, offer clear pathways back to meaningful work, support access to training, and invest in women's career progression and pay during and after parental leave.	12-13
Improving working hours and flexibility	Addressing the long hours work culture and providing access to flexible and part time work, provide more equitable access to opportunities for career progression and leadership and improve productivity and wellbeing of staff more broadly.	14-17
Educating leaders and building workforce capacity	Leaders drive policy and practice, and model and champion behaviours required for sustained cultural change. Ensuring effective practices through targeted training and manager KPIs underpins the effective functioning of a parental leave strategy.	18-19
Sector collaboration	Sector collaboration enables knowledge exchange, leverages collective power and resources, and drives for public policy change.	20

Developing a Parental Leave Strategy

1

Define the vision

- ✓ Is there support for women's reproductive health needs including fertility treatment, prenatal care and illness?
- ✓ Are women disclosing pregnancy protected from stigma, discrimination and adverse action such as job loss, demotion, or exclusion from opportunities?
- ✓ Do pregnant women working in physically demanding roles, such as tradeswomen, have access to appropriate risk assessments, PPE, and toilets?

2

Establish current practice

- ✓ Collect and analyse data to assess your organisation's current position, i.e. proportion of women, proportion of parents, rates of retention or turnover after parental leave etc.
- ✓ Estimate take up rates of different types of policies and practices across different groups.
- ✓ Map organisational roles and assess the impact of policies and practices on operations.

3

Set goals

- ✓ Set goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound, and which have clear budget and resource allocation.

4

Design the elements

- ✓ Assess your legal obligations.
- ✓ Identify supports across the parental leave continuum (i.e. pregnancy, parental leave, return to work).
- ✓ Identify focus areas (i.e. health and safety, career investment etc).
- ✓ Embed accountability structures throughout the organisation (i.e. manager KPIs, training etc).

5

Communicate

- ✓ Provide clear, accessible information to all employees.
- ✓ Challenge beliefs and narratives framing parental leave as a reward or privilege, and re-frame it as a right for all employees which benefits the company.
- ✓ Communicate through leader modelling.
- ✓ Engage with employees and stakeholders such as contractors early and often.
- ✓ Communicate progress against the strategy – lessons learnt, and opportunities for staff to challenge, comment or get involved.

6

Review and improve

- ✓ Regularly review strategy and actions, identify successes and gaps, and continuously improve. Consider:
 - Reviewing progress annually.
 - Seeking feedback from employees who take parental leave.
 - Making annual updates to the strategy as required.
 - Linking reviews to annual planning processes, connecting long-term vision to short-term action.
 - Revisiting the strategy when legislation changes.

Ensuring Legislative Compliance

Legislation protects women from discrimination and unsafe working conditions, provides leave for pregnancy, infant care and care for older children, and supports flexible working arrangements during pregnancy, parental leave, and upon returning to work. Understanding and monitoring compliance with important legislation covering the parental leave journey ensures employees have appropriate access to basic entitlements that are enshrined in law.



Give your policies and practices a tune-up

- ✓ **Review** your policies and practices on anti-discrimination, health and safety, parental leave, flexible work and family care to ensure they are aligned with legislative requirements.
- ✓ **Monitor** and regularly evaluate policy and legislative compliance across all business areas and take prompt action for non-compliance.
- ✓ **Ensure** you have a clear policy and procedure for reporting and complaints.



Legislative support during parental leave

- ✓ 12 months of unpaid, job-protected parental leave after the birth or adoption of a child, for employees, including casuals, after 12-months' service. Up to 110 days can be taken flexibly rather than in one block. Entitlement remains in the case of a stillbirth.
- ✓ Employees can extend unpaid parental leave for up to another 12 months; an employer's refusal must be based on reasonable business grounds.
- ✓ 24 weeks of government parental leave pay (with 12% super) at the national minimum wage rate for parents who meet the work, income and residency tests. Can be taken flexibly.



Legislative support for pregnant employees

- ✓ **Anti-discrimination:** Employers must not discriminate against or treat an employee less favourably on the basis of their pregnancy.
- ✓ **Special unpaid parental leave:** Eligible pregnant employees who are unfit for work (i.e. due to pregnancy related illness) can commence their unpaid parental leave early.
- ✓ **'No safe job' leave:** Pregnant employees can request a transfer to a suitable safe job. If no such job exists, employees entitled to the statutory parental leave can take paid 'no safe job' leave until their leave commences. Employees not entitled to parental leave (i.e. casuals with < 12 months' service) can take unpaid 'no safe job' leave.
- ✓ **Flexible work due to pregnancy:** Pregnant employees can ask their employer for flexible working arrangements.



Legislative support for return to work

- ✓ Employers must not discriminate against an employee or treat them less favourably on the basis of breastfeeding or care responsibilities.
- ✓ Employees can request flexible working arrangements based on their childcare responsibilities.
- ✓ Employees are entitled to 10 days per year (pro rata) of paid personal/carers leave for sickness, or when a child (or other close family member) is sick or injured or affected by an emergency.
- ✓ 2 days of unpaid carers leave each time that an employee's close family or household member is sick, injured or there is an emergency. Casual employees are entitled to unpaid carers leave only, not paid carers leave.

Need more guidance?

Visit [Fair Work Ombudsman](#)



Need more guidance on your obligations for supporting employees to access the government Parental Leave Pay?

Visit [Services Australia](#)
[Paid Parental Leave Employer Toolkit](#)



Protecting Health and Safety

Construction employers, including small businesses and sole traders, have a legal duty to take all reasonable steps to ensure the health and safety of workers and others on worksites. This includes recognising and addressing risks and hazards faced by women who are pregnant or returning to work after childbirth. Employers must take proactive steps to manage these risks and create a safe, supportive work environment.

Pregnant Workers Health and Safety Assessment Checklist

Risk /Hazard	Yes / No		Remedial Action
Pre-pregnancy			
Does the work environment pose reproductive health risks (e.g. chemicals, biological agents)?	Yes	No	
Are clean, private, lockable women's toilets with sanitary bins and free sanitary products provided?	Yes	No	
Are showers/change rooms available and accessible?	Yes	No	
Can workers attend reproductive health/fertility-related appointments without penalty or income loss?	Yes	No	
Are flexible arrangements or modified duties offered for fertility treatment?	Yes	No	
Are there supports in place following miscarriage (e.g. leave, adjusted duties)?	Yes	No	
Pregnancy			
Is the worker's current role safe (e.g. no exposure to physical or environmental hazards)?	Yes	No	
Are workers protected from lifting, slips/falls, fatigue, shift work, chemicals, prolonged standing?	Yes	No	
Are steps taken to minimise stress and provide mental health support?	Yes	No	
Access to hydration: do pregnant workers have easy and regular access to drinking water throughout the workday?	Yes	No	
Are clean, private, lockable women's toilets with sanitary bins and free sanitary products available?	Yes	No	
Are showers/change rooms available and accessible?	Yes	No	
Are appropriate rest breaks and protections from long shifts in place?	Yes	No	
Is comfortable, safe PPE that accommodates pregnancy provided?	Yes	No	
Can workers attend pregnancy-related appointments/manage illness without penalty or income loss?	Yes	No	
Post-pregnancy / Post-birth			
Are adjustments available to prolonged standing, lifting, climbing (e.g. modified duties, gradual return) to support recovery from caesarean or birth-related injuries?	Yes	No	
Are private, hygienic, and accessible spaces provided for breastfeeding or expressing milk, with flexible work breaks?	Yes	No	
Are workloads and schedules adjusted to support caregiving and wellbeing?	Yes	No	
Are toilets, showers & change rooms clean, private, & suitable for postnatal needs?	Yes	No	
Is return-to-work planning clear and consultative (e.g. duties, hours, accommodations)?	Yes	No	
Are flexible hours and rest breaks provided to manage fatigue and recovery?	Yes	No	
Workplace culture: Is there a respectful and inclusive culture that supports new parents and prevents discrimination or stigma?	Yes	No	
Has dedicated parking been allocated and ergonomic modifications made if needed?	Yes	No	
Are the workers safety and compliance requirements up to date?	Yes	No	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> White card still valid? Site induction required? 	Yes	No	


Protecting Health and Safety

Checklist: Breastfeeding Room Requirements


Breastfeeding rooms should be safe, functional, and respectful of the needs of parents. While these rooms can be shared spaces if necessary, they must be purpose-designed and **not simply a repurposed closet or unsuitable area**. The following features are recommended:

- ✓ Lockable door for privacy
- ✓ Opaque or frosted windows (no clear glass)
- ✓ Comfortable seating (e.g. armchair)
- ✓ Sink with running water
- ✓ Microwave for sterilising equipment or warming milk
- ✓ Fridge for safe milk storage
- ✓ Power outlets for breast pumps
- ✓ Quiet location away from high-traffic or noisy areas
- ✓ Access to a nearby or integrated bathroom
- ✓ Clean, well-ventilated, and temperature-controlled
- ✓ Optional: TV or radio

Need more guidance?

Visit  [SafeWork NSW](#) that provide detailed guidance on workplace safety for pregnant workers, including risk assessments, safe job options, and legal protections. Visit their [Pregnancy and Work Safety](#) page to learn more.



Visit  [Fair Work Ombudsman](#) that offers clear information on your rights to a safe job during pregnancy, including entitlements like safe job transfers and leave options. Explore their [Entitlements While Pregnant](#) page for more details.



Case Study

Dedicated Breastfeeding Spaces

The following are two examples of companies providing breastfeeding spaces and facilities on major construction sites.

- **CPB Contractors (NSW and ACT)** have implemented a Project Start-Up Checklist to ensure facilities are available for breastfeeding mothers on-site. The 'Parent rooms' are fitted with a small refrigerator, air-conditioning, an armchair, privacy screens and a side table. Parent rooms have been established at all current projects and are in use by women returning to site.
- **Health Infrastructure NSW and Roberts Co** provided a breastfeeding room at its Concord Hospital Redevelopment Project site. A site shed in a quiet area of the construction site was converted into a private space for breastfeeding and expressing. It had a lockable door and was equipped with comfortable armchair, sink, microwave, fridge, TV and adjoining bathroom.

Visit  [Culture Standard for the Construction Industry](#) who provide further implementation guidance including checklists for site establishment.



Case Study

Role Redesign For Pregnancy Safety

A tier 1 construction company redesigned the role of a pregnant frontline construction worker to reduce hazards for the worker and her unborn baby and enable her to continue working safely until full-term. To do this, the company took the following steps:

- **Early and pro-active action.** When the pregnancy was first disclosed, HR scheduled a meeting with the worker, her frontline managers, and a WHS adviser to discuss her needs and concerns and develop a process for pro-actively managing risks and hazards as the pregnancy progressed.
- **Expert advice.** The company drew on the advice and expertise of the pregnant worker's doctor and company health and safety adviser to identify hazards at various stages of the pregnancy and redesign work accordingly.
- **Flexible modifications.** Role and task adjustments included transferring the worker to gate and spoil management work which could be performed sitting and standing, and later in the pregnancy, to office-based work.
- **Shared responsibility and consistent communication.** Responsibility for monitoring and managing the worker's safety was shared between line managers, HR, WHS advisers and the employee. Regular meetings ensured all relevant staff were up-to-date on evolving risks and requirements, and enabled solutions to be developed collaboratively.

Designing a Parental Leave Scheme

Leading organisations provide strong paid parental leave schemes to assist staff to improve health and achieve career continuity. These schemes can improve retention and work engagement outcomes.

Steps to a leading practice paid parental leave scheme

✓ *Tick the steps as you progress*

Begin with your core-level scheme

Ensure policies are inclusive of same-sex partnerships, single and co-parenting arrangements, and different pathways to parenthood i.e. fostering, adoption, surrogacy

Remove gender and primary/secondary carer distinctions so the leave can be used by mothers and fathers

Allow for flexibility in how and when parental leave is taken, for example continuously or in blocks, part-time or full-time, and over a period longer than 12 months.

Limit qualifying periods for paid parental leave (ideally to zero)

Consider providing access to long-term casuals

Pay superannuation on parental leave payments

Extend duration of paid parental leave towards 26 weeks

Parental leave for apprentices

- Pregnant apprentices are entitled to 12 months unpaid parental leave, like any other employee.
- As employees, apprentices are also entitled to paid parental leave under their EBA or employer policy.
- Apprentices can suspend their apprenticeship and their TAFE studies during their leave. A suspension form must be submitted to Training Services.
- How the apprentice returns to work and recommences their apprenticeship will depend on the sector in which they are employed (for example, electrical apprentices have stringent licensing conditions and must meet these in a timely way), the amount of their apprenticeship that they have completed and the length of the leave.

Talk to [Training Services](#) on **13 28 11** for help and more information.



Tip

Set up a 'keeping in touch' plan before an employee goes on leave that sets out how often they would like to be contacted and what matters they would like to be contacted about including any training or career opportunities.



Case Study

Apprenticeship

A large employer in the energy sector set up a personalised program for their pregnant apprentice covering possible lighter duties at different stages of her pregnancy, staying connected to her apprenticeship, options for and advice on the implications of suspending her apprenticeship, and returning to work.



Spotlight

Parental Leave Offer

Lendlease offers 26 weeks of leave for all employees, regardless of gender, pays full salary and superannuation, and provides flexibility over 24 months for taking leave after birth, adoption, surrogacy, or stillbirth.

Parental Leave Innovations in Small and Medium Enterprises

Many small and medium businesses (SMEs) report that a leading practice parental leave scheme is out of their reach. However, many SMEs are innovating to provide a parental leave offering that gives them a competitive advantage.

Small business parental leave innovations

- ✓ Combining shorter paid parental leave periods with other flexible leave measures, such as '5 days' pay for 4 days' work' or shorter working hours across five days.
- ✓ Employer-funded top-ups to the government's Paid Parental Leave to top up to full salary for up to 22 weeks.
- ✓ Superannuation on unpaid parental leave.
- ✓ Flexible parental leave banks, allowing parents to draw leave over several years.
- ✓ Targeted financial bonuses for returning parents.
- ✓ Additional paid leave or recognition days around milestones such as the child's first birthday or other key moments.
- ✓ Extra leave or support days for medical appointments or pregnancy-related fatigue.

? Did you know?

About 1 in 6 construction companies with 100 staff or more provide a parental leave 'top up', topping up the government scheme to full wages.



Case Study

A parental leave package at icubed consulting

SME engineering company icubed consulting have implemented the *For Them and You* initiative, an innovative package of measures to support employees across the parental leave continuum.

Offering

- **Reproductive leave:** Additional days of leave to attend medical appointments for fertility and pregnancy care, available also to men supporting partners at these appointments.
- **Parental leave:** 14 weeks of PPL for primary carers, which combines 9 weeks of leave after the birth of the child and 6 months of return-to-work leave (see below). Primary care leave can be accessed by men or women and taken up to 18 months after birth of child. Secondary carers receive one week of PPL. Superannuation is paid at the employee's full rate for 12 months (e.g. to cover a further period of unpaid leave).
- **Return to work leave:** For 6 months, primary carers are paid for 5 days work but work for 4 days per week. The one day of leave can be spread over several days throughout the week. Secondary carers can access the same benefit for 8 weeks.

Benefits

- Spreading the PPL offering over a longer duration means that employees still benefit from paid parental leave and reduced hours on returning to work, whilst reducing the upfront outlay for the business.
- The PPL scheme boosts the retention of women after childbirth and facilitates greater balance between work and care for employees.

Resourcing Parental Leave

Early and detailed resource planning for the period an employee is on parental leave, making arrangements for funding, backfilling and formal handover processes prevents undue stress and uncertainty for the woman and team members and ensures projects are completed successfully.

Resource planning guide

Clients: Engage early with contractors to set realistic project timelines and workloads. Ensure contractor tenders and schedules account for:

- ✓ Parental leave absences and temporary absences
- ✓ Reasonable workloads
- ✓ Flexible work arrangements (e.g. part-time roles)

Contractors: Integrate parental leave into tender resource planning.

- ✓ Plan early with clients for leave coverage and flexible roles
- ✓ Include budget allowances for additional staff during leave
- ✓ Schedule handovers and backfilling in advance
- ✓ Maintain contact with employees on leave, based on their preferences
- ✓ Review roles for flexibility and identify cross-skilling opportunities

Site and Project Managers: Ensure workforce planning supports parental leave and return-to-work needs.

- ✓ Plan for leaves of absence and flexible work arrangements
- ✓ Support adjusted working hours for employees returning from leave
- ✓ Monitor team capacity and ensure adequate coverage
- ✓ Hold early conversations with staff before and after leave
- ✓ Plan coverage and minimise disruption
- ✓ Model flexible work to build team support



Tip

Review and restructure

Review and restructure on-site human resourcing, and shift the way projects are resourced, planned and scheduled, to incorporate flexibility, especially for site-based roles

Plan for Substitutability

To make flexible work successful on-site, ensure there's always enough team coverage. Create resourcing plans that allow others to step in when someone is on leave or working flexibly. This helps maintain smooth operations and supports flexibility on the frontline.

How to Cost for Parental Leave

Employers can plan for parental leave in the same way as other staffing provisions. Here's how to do it:

- 1. Estimate uptake:** Use historical data or workforce demographics to estimate the likely number of employees who will take parental leave each year.
- 2. Calculate the cost of leave:** Estimate the average cost of paid parental leave per employee, based on their salary or wage. Include related on-costs (e.g. superannuation, payroll tax).
- 3. Apply a recovery rate:** To recover this cost, calculate a loading (for example, 0.5% to 1%) to apply to total staff costs. This amount is then factored into the overall staff rate.
- 4. Include in tenders:** Once incorporated into staff rates, the cost of parental leave becomes part of your tender pricing and is therefore recoverable from the client.
- 5. Plan for coverage:** Where possible, allow for a provisional sum in tenders to cover the cost of temporary staff replacing those on parental leave. This helps ensure roles are properly backfilled, reducing the risk of work overload and burnout among existing team members. Avoid relying solely on redistributing responsibilities across the current team.

Need more guidance?

Visit [Champions of Change Architecture offers a parental leave return on investment calculator.](#)



Supporting Career Retention and Progression

Women's careers in construction often lose momentum during and after parental leave, leading to stalled progression, deskilling, or leaving the sector altogether. To retain talent and support long-term career development, employers should: stay in regular contact, offer clear pathways back to meaningful work, support access to training and development, and provide flexible work options. These steps help keep skilled women in the workforce and strengthen the future of the industry.

Off 'site', not out of mind: Career support during parental leave

- ✓ Notify employees on parental leave of workplace changes which will affect their job and/or employment conditions, including redundancies, structural changes, and changes to the location and working hours. Where possible, consult with the employee on ways to minimise the impact of the changes on their employment and career.
- ✓ Allow interested employees to participate in professional development and training while they are on parental leave.
- ✓ Provide flexibility in promotion cycles and performance reviews to ensure that employees on parental leave do not miss out on progression, pay reviews or bonuses.

Invest in women returning from parental leave

Consider offering:

- ✓ A return-to-work bonus
- ✓ Career coaching
- ✓ Sponsorship: Pairing women with a senior manager prior to their parental leave
- ✓ Skills refreshes (e.g. expired tickets) or/and access to training
- ✓ Access to parents' or women's networks inside or outside the organisation and paid time to participate



Case Study

Supported return-to-work programs in engineering

Two Australian engineering firms have implemented leading practice return-to-work programs to support employees transitioning back to work after career breaks and improve women's retention in the industry.

AECOM in North Queensland has implemented a suite of initiatives, including:

- Career Reload, a returner program to support engineers transitioning back into the workforce in a supported environment.
- Partnering with Engineers Australia to host an EngConnect event to connect and support engineers who are on parental leave, working part-time or on sabbatical.

WSP introduced a 'Return to Work' program for anyone who has had a break from work or the industry for longer than one year. It runs during the first six months of the worker's return to work and involves:

- A focused training and mentoring program to upskill their technical and industry standard competencies while introducing them to changes in workplace practices
- Flexible working hours and working from home options.

Sources: Australian Government (2022) Career Revive case study – AECOM, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations; Engineers Australia (2021) Re-engineering the return to work, News release 26 July 2021.



Tip

NAWIC suggests these ways to support a woman's return to work after a construction career break

Review and restructure on-site human resourcing, and shift the way projects are resourced, planned and scheduled, to incorporate flexibility, especially for site-based roles.

Reboarding: Providing education on any changes and shifts in the industry, such as in construction practices, new legislation, or emerging technologies, to provide the employee with the tools and information to safely and successfully return to their position.

Mentorship: Pairing the returning team member with a seasoned colleague who can offer guidance on navigating new systems or techniques, answer questions and provide feedback, and help the individual regain confidence and re-engage with their colleagues.

Supporting Career Retention and Progression

Use this Return-to-Work Plan to actively support a smooth and safe transition for employees returning from parental leave. It should be read alongside the Health and Safety Checklist to ensure a comprehensive approach. The plan helps you assess and respond to key needs ensuring employees feel valued, supported, and ready to contribute.

Pre-return Planning

✓ *Tick the steps as you progress*

- Return-to-work conversation between manager/supervisor and employee held
- Preferred return date discussed
- Type of work discussed (on-site, office-based, home-based, hybrid)
- Proposed work schedule (full-time, part-time, hybrid, phased return, job share)
- Career progression goals discussed
- Return-to-work development plan created

Communication and Support

✓ *Tick the steps as you progress*

- Supervisor check-in frequency:
- Weekly Fortnightly Monthly
 - Return-to-work champion or mentor assigned
 - Union representative advised
 - EAP or wellbeing support offered
 - Career check-in scheduled at 3–6 months post-return
 - Connected with peer support or leadership return network

Role and Responsibilities

✓ *Tick the steps as you progress*

- Job changes during leave identified
- Training needs listed
- Skills update or re-onboarding required
- Job reviewed for flexibility
- Project reforecasting discussed with clients/contractors
- Key return projects/tasks identified
- Inclusion in progression-aligned projects

Career and Remuneration Review

✓ *Tick the steps as you progress*

- Employee included in upcoming pay review cycle
- Performance appraisal scheduled post-return
- Eligibility for bonus considered
- Career progression opportunities discussed and identified
- Role aligned with career progression goals
- Access to mentoring, sponsorship or leadership pathways

Other Supports

✓ *Tick the steps as you progress*

- Return incentives considered (e.g. bonus, 5 days pay for 4 days' work)
- Access to professional development funds
- Subsidised childcare considered

Need more support?

Specialist providers can help you support employees returning from parental leave. From policy advice to coaching and flexible work planning, expert support makes it easier to retain talent and keep careers on track.



Visit [Parents At Work](#)



Visit [Circle In](#)

Improving Working Hours and Flexibility

Flexible, employee-focused work arrangements are vital to retaining women returning from parental leave and supporting their progression into senior roles. Long and inflexible hours are a key barrier to return, wellbeing, and long-term retention. Flexibility also makes it easier for men to take on caring responsibilities. A culture that supports flexibility leads to stronger teams, better productivity, and a more sustainable workforce.

Understanding flex: what it is and how it works

Flexible work arrangements make construction sites more inclusive (and safer)—especially for pregnant workers, parents, and employees with changing life needs. Flexibility is possible even in frontline roles.

- ✓ There are three key types of flexibility, which can each be adapted to suit on-site, office, or blended roles:
- ✓ **Time** – adjusting work hours or shift patterns
- ✓ **Place** – offering different work locations or remote options where feasible
- ✓ **Process** – rethinking how tasks are done to allow more autonomy or adaptability

Approaches

Implementation Tips

Flexibility in time

Reduced work hours	Offer fractional appointments or job share arrangements.
Part-time	Provide contracts with fewer than 35 hours per week.
Adjusted work hours	Allow varied start and finish times to suit individual needs.
Compressed hours	Enable full-time hours to be worked over fewer days (e.g. 4- and 5- day week).
Staggered hours or split shifts	Allow work in blocks separated by extended breaks.
Time in lieu	Allow extra hours worked to be reclaimed as time off.
Purchase leave	Offer additional leave days in exchange for reduced pay.
Tailored use of leave	Support flexible use of annual leave to meet life demands.
Unpaid leave	Provide options for unpaid leave with a planned return date.

Flexibility in location

Working from home	Allow informal or formal remote work arrangements.
Hybrid	Enable a mix of on-site (office/site) and remote work hours.
Scheduled locations	Coordinate on-site days across teams or departments.

Flexibility in process

Job share	<p>Split full-time roles between two or more employees using:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twin model: shared responsibilities • Islands model: divided responsibilities • Hybrid model: a mix of shared and divided tasks
Shift-swapping	Allow workers to trade shifts with each other.
Bid rostering	Let team members bid for preferred shifts or work lines.
Flexible rostering	Build rosters that consider employee shift and day-off requests.

i Source

Adapted from [Champions of Change Coalition \(2022\) Shifting expectations: Flexibility for frontline, shift and site-based roles](#)



Improving Working Hours and Flexibility

Embedding flex in workplace cultures

Building a flex ready organisation

Supporting women returning from parental leave takes more than policy, it requires action across leadership, planning, and culture. Here are key practices to help embed flexibility on the frontline and strengthen career retention.

Build Skills

- Train managers and supervisors to put flexible work into practice on-site.
- Leverage in-house champions who can model and support flexible work approaches.

Strengthen Accountability

- Address long hours and presenteeism as both are barriers to sustainable return.
- Respect weekends and fatigue days to support wellbeing.
- Make flexibility part of your company's formal values and action plans.

Lead with Intention

- Managers should visibly support and use flexible work arrangements.
- Give managers the autonomy to manage teams flexibly.
- Ask managers what support they need to make flexibility work.

Commit to Implementation

- Take a whole of organisation approach. Flexibility should apply to everyone.
- Move from enabling flex (policy) to implementing it (practice).
- Use pilot programs to test new approaches and build confidence.
- Track progress and adjust as needed.

Be Transparent

- Communicate clearly and consistently about available flex options and expectations.
- Plan for Sustainability.
- Workforce planning must ensure enough team coverage, so flexibility is viable.
- Audit your tech and systems to streamline processes and create more time.

Having supportive flexibility conversations

Flexibility conversations help managers support women navigating pregnancy and parental leave. They're a practical way to plan fair, sustainable work arrangements that balance operational needs with caregiving responsibilities.

1. Work Preferences and Needs

- What kind of flexibility is being sought? (e.g. start/finish times, part-time, remote work, job share)
- Are there any care responsibilities or personal needs to consider?
- What's worked well (or not) in the past?

2. Operational Requirements

- What are the role's core requirements (on-site presence, availability, deadlines)?
- What tasks must be done in-person vs. flexibly?
- What are the team or project constraints?

3. Schedule and Structure

- Preferred days, hours, or shifts.
- How will communication and handovers work?
- Is a trial period or review point helpful?

4. Tools and Support

- What tools, technology or access are needed to make it work?
- Does the worker need support (e.g. EAP, mentoring, manager training)?

5. Performance and Fairness

- How will success be measured (outputs, outcomes)?
- How can this arrangement ensure fairness across the team?
- Are there risks of overwork or underutilisation?

6. Next Steps

- What's the agreed arrangement?
- When will it be reviewed or adjusted?
- How will it be communicated to others?



Tip Consider trialling flexible formats for pre-start meetings

For example, offering multiple session times (e.g. 8am and 2pm) or using video messages. This can help include all workers, especially those with care responsibilities and can operate as a signal that flexibility is embedded into everyday practice.

Improving Working Hours and Flexibility

What does a successful job share look like in construction?

Job share arrangements are being trialed on sites in frontline roles (e.g. project manager, engineers, tradespeople)

Ingredients for a successful job share:

- ✓ Clear communication protocols and shared digital tools such as logbooks.
- ✓ Defined responsibilities and overlap time for weekly planning handovers to ensure seamless communication and continuity
- ✓ Supportive and well-trained leadership that valued flexibility and inclusion.
- ✓ Consistent rostering systems to manage overlap and handovers.
- ✓ Well managed tool and equipment access
- ✓ Senior leader support to legitimise job share roles
- ✓ Clear communication rules between job share partners
- ✓ Shared goals and aligned KPIs for accountability
- ✓ Regular review points to check what's working
- ✓ Fair task allocation to support career development

Case Study

Job-sharing for 24/7 operations

Australian energy company Viva Energy incorporated more flexibility into its 24/7 refinery operations by redesigning operator roles as job-shares.

Steps taken:

- Extensive consultation with the union to create a new part-time shift in the Enterprise Agreement, as well as approval from the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission to advertise for women only.
- Recruitment campaign was overhauled including re-focused competency criteria, removal of gender bias in advertising material and highlighting parental leave and other benefits.
- Tailored training, induction, and shift patterns for the new part-time operator model, along with reviewing and adapting PPE for women.

Success indicators:

Over 4 years, women's share of operator roles increased from 9% to 23% and their overall representation in the refinery increased from 16% to 24%.

Source: Adapted from *Champions of Change Coalition* (2022) [Shifting expectations: Flexibility for frontline, shift and site-based roles](#)



Case Study

Building Job share into Enterprise Agreements

The Keolis Downer Hunter Bus [Engineering and Maintenance Enterprise Agreement 2023](#) (CEPU and AMWU) allows parents to return from parental leave into a job share arrangement.



The SK Family Trust (The Trustee For) T/AS SK Building Construction Pty Ltd and the CFMEU (Victorian [Construction and General Division](#)) [Subcontractors Caulking & Sealing Enterprise Agreement 2024 - 2027](#) provides job sharing examples including working hours and pro-rata entitlements (see Appendix O).



Improving Working Hours and Flexibility

What are other enablers of flexibility?

Cap Long Hours to Retain Women

- ✓ The culture of long work hours affects everyone, but it disproportionately pushes women out of the sector and limits men's ability to be active carers.
- ✓ Aligning work hours with care responsibilities is essential to building a healthier, more inclusive, and sustainable construction workforce.
- ✓ Set clear work-hour limits aligned with the [National Employment Standards](#) (maximum 38 hours per week). Adopt cultural change tools like the [Culture Standard for the Construction Industry](#) to promote five-day work weeks, normalise sustainable work hours, and reduce stigma around working flexibly.

Supporting employees to access childcare also helps them with work/family balance

You could:

- ✓ Support employees to find childcare facilities near the site.
- ✓ Make a financial contribution towards childcare costs.
- ✓ Set up childcare centres or school holiday care on bigger worksites or at head office.

What are other enablers of flexibility?

Draw on resources

For a comprehensive approach to enhancing flexibility in construction workplaces, explore the following resources for practical guidance and real-world examples:

➤ [Culture in Construction: Time for Life - Implementation Guide and Toolkit](#)



➤ [Flex from the Start: Case Study on flexible work in frontline construction roles](#)



➤ [Flex from the Start: Literature Review on flexible work in frontline construction roles](#)



➤ [Project 5: A weekend for every worker](#)



➤ [Shifting expectations: Flexibility for frontline, shift and site-based roles](#)



➤ [Improving flexible working in construction: a ten-point action plan](#)



These materials offer valuable insights and strategies to help you implement and improve flexible working practices within your organisation.



Case Study

Take a whole of organisation approach to flex

To build a safer, more inclusive construction sector, John Holland trialled flexible work initiatives on three major projects through the Flex from the Start pilot. Supported by training and team-led design, workers tested a range of flex options, including a nine-day fortnight, five-day compressed week, early finish rosters, dual pre-start meetings, and individual flex plans.

The interventions were tailored to meet the realities of construction work, where rigid schedules, long hours, and on-site demands typically limit flexibility.

Teams that succeeded had three things in common: visible leadership, strong resource planning, and a shared commitment to make flex work for everyone. Training was key to challenging assumptions and encouraging creative, site-specific solutions. Clear communication also helped normalise participation and build team-wide support.

Some challenges remain, particularly around long-standing work patterns and the pressures of project delivery. But the pilot shows that with leadership, planning, and cultural change, flexible work on the frontline is not only possible, it can bring lasting benefits for workers and teams.

This initiative was funded by the NSW Government's Women in Construction Industry Innovation Program. Adapted from Flex from the Start: Case Study on flexible work in frontline construction roles.



Educating Leaders and Building Workforce Capacity

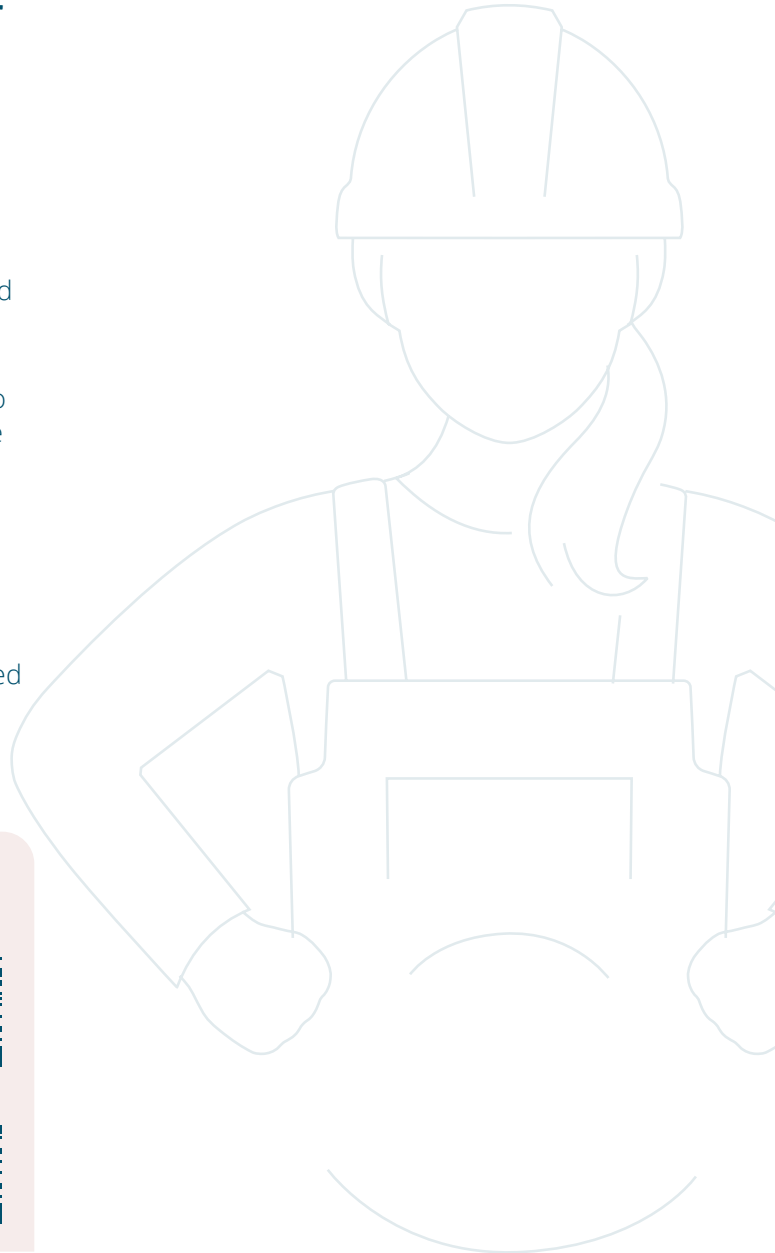
Leadership is a critical driver of change to improve the experiences of women transitioning in and out of parental leave and support their retention in construction careers. Leaders and managers can drive the implementation of policy and practice, and model, influence and champion behaviours required for sustained cultural change.

Provide targeted education and training for managers on:

- ✓ Responsibilities under legislation, including to prevent discrimination on basis of gender, pregnancy or parenthood.
- ✓ Appropriate job redesign practices during pregnancy.
- ✓ Effectively managing return to work transitions and flexible workplace arrangements.
- ✓ Appropriate conversations about pregnancy disclosure, parental leave transitions and return to work planning. See the Conversation Guide on the next page.

Ensure effective practices by embedding parental leave goals into manager KPIs:

- ✓ Operations/project managers' job descriptions include parental leave-related targets and expected behaviours.
- ✓ Leaders' KPIs include retention of pregnant employees and take up of flexibility.



i Need more guidance?

Free training is available

◀ [Fair Work Ombudsman Diversity and discrimination online course](#)



◀ [Fair Work Ombudsman Workplace flexibility online course](#)



Tip

Do you have adequate accountability structures in your workplace for effective parental leave policies?

- ✓ Establish a dedicated position in the business, with sufficient resourcing and seniority responsible for the management of women's health and safety in pregnancy and parental leave transitions.
- ✓ Nominate a staff member to be responsible for communicating significant workplace changes to the employee while they are on leave.
- ✓ Establish lines of accountability for managing employees on parental leave and transitioning back into the workplace.
- ✓ Nominate a 'return to work champion', for example a line or operations manager, who provides support and advocates for the woman transitioning out of parental leave.

Educating Leaders and Building Workforce Capacity

Responding to pregnancy disclosures – A guide for managers

Initial response

- ✓ Offer congratulations and acknowledge the significance of the milestone.
- ✓ Ask the employee how they are feeling and listen to their concerns.
- ✓ Avoid making assumptions about the employee's capabilities, needs and expectations for pregnancy and returning to work.
- ✓ Set up an initial planning meeting with the employee and other relevant staff members (e.g. HR, health and safety representatives, and for small businesses, the owner).

Preparing for the planning meeting

- ✓ Learn about your responsibilities under relevant legislation and organisational policies, and the entitlements and obligations of pregnant employees.
- ✓ Consult health and safety authorities and practitioners on managing specific risks in the pregnant employee's workplace.
- ✓ Obtain copies of any policies, guides or toolkits for your reference and to provide to the employee.

At the planning meeting

- ✓ Discuss work duties and any potential challenges and health and safety risks or concerns. Plan for adjustments to the employee's role, duties and work environment and any changes to working hours and location, to reduce risk and promote the health and safety of the employee and unborn child.
- ✓ Outline paid and unpaid parental leave and other entitlements and where the employee can go for more information. Provide copies of relevant policies.
- ✓ Ask the employee about their expectations around departure and return dates and flexible work, acknowledging that this may not be known for some time. Provide information about the employee's duties to provide notice.
- ✓ Schedule further meetings to discuss handover and transition planning, options for keeping in touch, training and professional and career development opportunities while on leave, and any changes to the employee's needs and expectations.

Adapted from Australian Human Rights Commission (2015) Supporting Working Parents: A Toolkit for Employers, An Australian Government Initiative.

Case Study

“You can't be what you can't see”: The importance of leadership at Pernod Ricard Australia

Spirits and champagne company Pernod Ricard's 'Better Balance' diversity and inclusion strategy was launched in 2017.

Core features of the strategy include:

- a comprehensive parental leave checklist to help managers tailor the parental leave experience to each individual, and
- how-to guides to support managers overseeing the return-to-work process.

The strategy has the backing from the executive team and management across the business which supports the development of policies and their subsequent adoption throughout the business.

'Growing Diverse Teams' is one of Pernod Ricard's global leadership competencies, embedded throughout the organisation and included in all employee annual performance and development reviews.

Adapted from National Association of Women in Operations' (2020) case study: Re-writing the rules on parental leave: Pernod Ricard.



Sector Collaboration

Barriers to retention of women who are pregnant or transitioning in and out of parental leave exist across all construction organisations. Improvements can be made by sector collaboration, which enables knowledge exchange, leverages collective power and resources, and drives for public policy change.

Sectoral Targets

Start collaborative discussions, set national standards and leading indicators of gender equity, such as:

- ✓ Sectoral targets for women's retention in frontline roles in the sector.
- ✓ Enhance the Culture Standard with a focus on parental leave and pregnancy.

Bargaining

Enterprise Bargaining Agreements (EBAs) in the sector are currently lacking focus on pregnancy and parental leave. EBAs should prioritise consideration of work hours, flexibility and support for pregnant workers and parental leave.

Exchanging Knowledge

Share knowledge about practices across the sector and explore opportunities for leaders to collaborate in the development of leading gender inclusive practices.

Procurement

Major Government-funders to proactively plan projects with reasonable completion timelines and workload expectations. Ensure project tenders, work plans, schedules and forecasting account for reasonable workloads, parental leave absences and part-time work and meet the Culture Standard for the Construction Industry.

Collective Advocacy

Engage in strategic advocacy on issues shaping women's retention, i.e.:

- ✓ Enhancing state and federal employment and health and safety regulations to ensure stronger requirements for breastfeeding facilities and women's amenities on construction sites, making it necessary for these to be included in project budgets.
- ✓ Making childcare more available for people doing shift work.

Case Study

Advocating for a parental leave levy

Consider a levy similar to the existing NSW Government's Long Service Leave Levy for the construction industry but tailored to address the unique needs of supporting women's parental and reproductive health.

What is the long service levy (LSL)? The LSL is a mandatory fee paid to the government to establish a portable long service benefit for eligible workers in the NSW construction industry.

Who pays the LSL? The levy is paid by the builder or construction company, the client commissioning the work, or where applicable, the contractor working on behalf of the government.

How much is it? The current rate is 0.25% of the value of the building and construction works, payable on projects with a value of \$250,000 or more (including GST).

Who manages it? The funds collected are administered by the Long Service Corporation, which disburses payments as long service benefits to eligible workers.

The sector could collectively examine establishing a sector-specific levy designed to fund pregnancy and parental leave initiatives in SMEs. This targeted levy would be collected like the LSL, creating a dedicated fund to support women's reproductive health and parental leave, thereby fostering a more inclusive and equitable work environment across the sector.



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