**Supporting Working Parents: Pregnancy and Return to Work National Review**

Submissions from women and men who have experienced discrimination at work while pregnant, or while on or on return to work after taking parental leave

**Submission Number 309**

**Part C Submission Response**

One of the key challenges in returning to work following maternity leave is that of breastfeeding. I have outlined below the supporting evidence and benefits and included some comments regarding positive measures that can be implemented to support women returning to work.

Benefits of breastfeeding and recommendations/ prevalence

The benefits of breastfeeding for both mothers and infants are well documented. The World Health Organization recommends exclusive breastfeeding for babies to 6 months of age. However, although initiation rates for breastfeeding in Australia are high (96%), by six months only 15% of infants are exclusively breastfed. A woman’s return to work has repeatedly been found to be a major contributor to the premature cessation of breastfeeding. Workplace policies and practices to promote, support, encourage and assist the continuation and duration of breastfeeding are therefore important.

Benefits of facilitating lactation breaks: to the employer and employee

There is significant evidence that the benefits of providing a working environment conducive to breastfeeding outweigh the costs. If breastfeeding is supported in the workplace women are more likely to return to work and return earlier which contributes to women maintaining their job skills as well as reducing staff turnover. Women are also more likely to have reduced frequency and length of work absenteeism due to fewer and less severe baby-related illnesses. Additionally, women are more likely to have higher morale and improved levels of concentration resulting in increased productivity. Accommodating lactating mothers also contributes towards the development of a positive corporate image.

Breastfeeding Policy

In 2006, NSW Health released a mandatory policy directive to increase the promotion, protection and support of breastfeeding within the NSW Health system. I am employed by one of the few Local Health Districts in NSW that have developed and endorsed a local breastfeeding and employment policy in line with this directive. The local policies support breastfeeding employees through:

- The provision of paid lactation breaks of up to one hour per day (for full time employees, pro rata for part time employees)

- Provision of facilities for lactation breaks

- Clarifying managerial and employee roles and responsibilities to facilitate lactation breaks

- Outlining that antidiscrimination laws exist to protect breastfeeding employees.

As evidenced by the information presented in this submission, women need support in the workplace if they are to successfully combine breastfeeding and work. Organisations need to create a workplace culture that supports and promotes breastfeeding, and institute policies that allow flexible hours, lactation breaks and appropriate facilities to breastfeed and store breast milk. In my experience there have been some successes in these areas, which have been strongly supported by the adoption of our local breastfeeding and employment policy.

Outcomes from the National Review

1. Recommendation that employers develop and implement policies to support breastfeeding that include

- The provision of paid lactation breaks of up to one hour per day (for full time employees, pro rata for part time employees)

- Provision of facilities for lactation breaks

- Clarifying managerial and employee roles and responsibilities to facilitate lactation breaks

- Outlining that antidiscrimination laws exist to protect breastfeeding employees.