The Commonwealth Bank of Australia (CBA) recognises that the workplace plays a critical role in the lives of new fathers. More men taking parental leave not only supports their wellbeing and engagement at work – it also goes a long way in improving gender equality in the workplace.

CBA recently commissioned research that showed that 90% of Australians believe men taking parental leave supports women to succeed in their careers, but 40% of men still have concerns about taking parental leave.

Commonwealth Bank’s Acting Head of Diversity and Inclusion, Ryan Burke, says more work is needed. ‘We’ve made great progress but we’re focusing on promoting a gender-neutral approach to overcome preconceptions and make parental leave accessible to all.’

To inform CBA’s parental leave strategy and approach, the company undertook a global review of parental leave policies and practices to understand current and emerging needs and best practice. Consistent with its gender-equality strategy and goals, one of the primary aims was to ensure the company’s global policies were helping parents share the caring responsibilities.

The review was comprehensive, covering both the global CBA network and the external market. Focus groups were held to better understand the experiences and needs of CBA employees.

Following the review period, and with assistance from an internal parental leave think-tank, CBA concluded that it needed to:

- Support both primary and secondary care givers as a family unit
- Take a more explicit and inclusive, gender-neutral approach to parental leave provisions
- Provide greater flexibility for CBA employees to be able to access parental leave when and as required
- Increase the ease with which CBA employees could access the support they needed to easily and successfully transition through a period of parental leave and back into the workplace
- Ensure company policy and processes were competitive in the market

Actions

To address the outcomes from the global review, CBA changed their company parental leave entitlements during the 2017 financial year to remove the distinction between fathers, mothers or other guardians, resulting in a gender-neutral approach with greater holistic support.

Supporting work / life balance

iCANflex is CBA’s group-wide approach to flexibility, which offers various flexible working options, including reduced or flexible hours, remote working, job share and career breaks. The focus is on outcomes rather than face-time and recognises flexibility is both formal and informal in nature.
A gender-neutral approach

An increase in the length of paid leave available to secondary caregivers was provided, along with greater flexibility to increase leave from secondary to primary carer status. CBA also introduced a financial bonus to assist with ongoing caring expenses in addition to paying superannuation to primary carers for up to 52 weeks.

Easy access to support

- The CBA Parents At Work program provides employees and managers with information, tools and resources to prepare for parental leave, stay in touch while on leave, return to work and manage a career as a parent
- The breadth of course topics available to employees in the CBA Parents At Work program has increased
- Communication channels were broadened to ensure the CBA Parents At Work program was reaching more employees. For example, the Parents At Work ‘Balance and Well-being’ podcast was promoted on the CBA internal well-being portal, which has nearly 32,000 unique users

Existing Parental Leave Benefits

- All employees are eligible for 12 weeks of paid leave for primary carers and four weeks of paid leave for secondary carers
- The secondary carer also has the ability to become the primary carer and receive the remaining entitlement of eight weeks of paid leave within the first 12 months of a child being born or placed with the family
- Primary carers are given a $1,500 return-to-work benefit
- Superannuation is paid to primary carers for 52 weeks to ensure that employees are not penalised in the long term

Outcomes

CBA’s recent parental leave changes have meant that more employees are accessing the support that is needed to manage both career and life. Specifically:

- More dads are taking time off to support their families following the birth of a baby or adoption. Between 2016 and 2017, there was a 22% uptick in the number of male employees taking time off to assume or share childcare responsibilities
- Between 2015 and 2017, CBA experienced a 224% increase in employees accessing its CBA Parents at Work online support resources, along with a 333% uplift in men accessing the online portal (from 3% in 2015 to 13% of overall users in 2017)

Sharing stories

- Fathers at CBA on parental leave and mothers who were promoted whilst on parental leave were profiled and their stories shared throughout the company
- Targeted events were introduced to engage parents during parental leave

Kyle Leong with his daughter Alice
Recognition

CBA’s parental leave approach is helping the company deliver on its goal to be an employer of choice.

- CBA was ranked as a top five employer in Australia in the 2017 annual LinkedIn Top Companies rankings, with LinkedIn referring to the CBA parental leave scheme as a major draw card.
- CBA has been recognised by the Australian Workplace Gender Equality Agency as Employer of Choice for Gender Equality since 2014.
- HBF Health’s Direct Advice for Dads awarded CBA as a 2018 Top 10 Best Australian Workplace for New Dads\(^1\). The leave policy for primary and secondary carers, along with the return-to-work bonus, were just some of the areas CBA was recognised for.
- In its endeavour to maintain focus on best practice in Australia and globally, from 2018 CBA will participate in the annual Bloomberg Gender Equality Index.

\(^1\) The research was commissioned by Commonwealth Bank and undertaken by independent research company, YouGov Galaxy, in April 2018 of 1,017 Australian respondents aged 18 years and older.


Experience #1

Parental leave was invaluable

Andrew Hagger, General Manager, Strategy and Operations, Business Banking at CBA, took leave after the birth of his daughter Gracie.

"Before I took leave, many people suggested that it was going to be a tougher job than my day job," Andrew states. "And it was certainly very challenging – but also very rewarding."

Andrew is one of many fathers at CBA now taking parental leave to support their families following the birth of their children.

"It ended up working well, in that my wife went back to work part-time after four months and then full-time when I took extended leave,” Andrew says. “It was just great to spend time and bond with my daughter at such a precious age. I also wanted to support [my wife] Olivia’s career."

Experience #2

An extraordinary impact on our family

Greg Sarlas, from Group Operations, was able to access the full benefit of parental leave by taking secondary carers leave when his daughter was born. This was then followed by a period of parental leave when his wife returned to work.

“When Penelope was born, I took four weeks parental leave as a secondary career to spend time with her and support my wife in those early weeks,” Greg states.

“Then, when Penelope was around nine months old, my wife returned to work and I took another eight weeks leave as primary carer.

Spending time with Penelope had an extraordinary impact on our family. It helped me appreciate what life had been like for my wife over those months one-on-one with the baby.

Having time to focus on her without any distractions brought us closer together. It’s incredible to watch your child grow, learn new things, say new words and take their first steps.”

If you would like to talk to us about how Parents At Work can support the working parents in your organisation please phone +61 2 9967 8377 or email info@parentsatwork.com.au.

You can also visit parentsandcarersatwork.com.au for more information.