



Medibank

Case Study:

Parental Leave Policy



Increasing Men Taking Parental Leave

The Medibank success story

Medibank made history in March 2018 when they rewrote the rulebook, scrapping 'primary' and 'secondary' carer labels and adopting a fairer approach to Parental Leave.

Their new policy, called 'FamilyFlex', offered greater choice to new parents regardless of gender. It's also flexible - parents can choose to take their 14 weeks leave across two different periods within the first 24 months. Under the previous policy, the primary carer would be eligible for 14 weeks paid leave in one block, and the secondary carer could take two weeks of paid leave.

The results were immediate. Before Family Flex was introduced, only 2.5% of employees taking parental leave longer than two weeks at Medibank were male. More than a year later, this figure is now 28% and on average males are now taking eight weeks of parental leave.

"It's early days, but we've already seen the positive qualitative and quantitative results of this change," says Kylie Bishop, Medibank's Group Executive of People and Culture. "Culturally it's had a really big impact on our organisation."

"Medibank is an organisation which prides itself on flexible working for all employees, not just those with children or caring responsibilities. For our male employees, what we are seeing is that they are now more comfortable leaving the office 'loudly'. They are sharing school drop off and pick ups, or working from home if they need and they are sharing their stories with their teams and peers. Our mantra is 'you should be able to bring your whole self to work', and we're starting to see some change behaviourally in the workplace around this."

The How

How did this FamilyFlex major policy change come about?

Interestingly, the organisation was originally trying to solve a different issue – the low return-to-work figures for new parents.

"We went out and spoke to our people - about the good, the bad, what's working, what's not," says Kylie. "We spoke to people who had been on parental leave, who were about to go on parental leave, and those who hadn't but who had a view on what that might mean for them in the future."

From these employee conversations came the realisation that the current parental leave scheme and its gendered approach wasn't working for most.

"What became obvious was that the old policy hadn't moved with the times," Kylie explains. "With modern family structures and both parents often working, the traditional way of thinking about parental leave was not set up for this, plus it was really confusing and complicated."

This led to questioning why the 'primary' and 'secondary' labels were being used and whether they were necessary at all. What followed was months of engaging employees and organisation leaders, gathering data, and attempts at designing a new policy.

When presenting the case for change to Medibank executives, Kylie said it was more a 'philosophical conversation' – aligned to the company's values and purpose, focusing on the notion of removing primary and secondary carer labels, and how that would increase male participation in parental leave.

The Results

For many businesses a decision to increase parental leave for males is considered in the context of impact to the bottom line. Kylie explains that in Medibank's case, there was a solid business case for providing every parent with the same opportunity to play an active role in their child's early life.

"We look at our flexibility figures - 76% of our employees work flexibly," says Kylie. "And we know those who do are more highly engaged and therefore productive, than their counterparts. So there is absolutely a business case [for equal parental leave] - you have to think about it in the whole employee life cycle – from talent acquisition to retention."

While taking away the labels may seem simple, Medibank's decision to do so is a bold and progressive move – one which also allows couples to be at home with the child at the same time if they wish. The policy recognises that all families and new babies are different and that mothers and fathers need to be better supported to thrive at home and professionally.