



# A Call for Change to the Australian Government Parental Leave Pay Scheme

Additional paid parental leave for families with babies born requiring specialised medical care.

*'Better, healthier outcomes for premature and sick newborns and their families'*





miracle babies  
FOUNDATION



# What these families *Need*

“Parental Leave is needed to help families care for the infant, the [WHO] guidelines state government and regulatory policies should ensure families receive sufficient financial and workplace support”

World Health Organisation

A premature or sick baby can spend months in specialised hospital units to survive.

Our current PPL legislation does not allow for this critical care period and many families exhaust their entire paid leave entitlement before baby even gets discharged from hospital.

These vulnerable families, already at an increased risk of mental illness and with babies potentially facing developmental challenges, need this critical care period in hospital to be matched with additional paid parental leave to keep these babies together with their parents for longer.

This would provide all families with the same paid parental leave entitlements to bond and have a better chance for parenting success.

83%

*of families  
experience  
financial strain  
above normal*

95%

*of mothers  
couldn't work  
while their babies  
were in the NICU  
or SCN*

2.5x

*more likely to suffer  
postnatal depression  
as a parent of an  
extreme preterm  
baby*

*“We need to better support these vulnerable families, to give them equal paid leave entitlements. Having a baby in critical care for weeks or months should not be classified as parental leave, but more of an extended special leave for the baby's time in hospital” - Kylie Pussell, CEO and CoFounder*

# A simple but urgent request:

Parents with babies who receive specialised medical care for **more than 2 weeks** should receive this time in **additional paid parental leave**, allowing the standard 18 weeks of paid leave available on baby's discharge.

## Above the financial strain, parents of preterm or sick infants have other implications



### Increased risk of Mental Health problems

"My husband had to return to work 2 weeks after Judah was born, at 27 weeks gestation. He also had to care for our two older sons whilst I drove to the Royal Women's Hospital in Randwick from Wollongong every single day. Having to return to work was devastating for my husband. Travel and accommodation every day was also a huge impact on our financial situation. Both of these factors would have been better handled with more leave. Kangaroo care is life saving for both the baby and parents [significant health benefits] and is crucial to reduce depression and improve bonding. Without additional leave the impacts are devastating. Extreme prem babies like ours are in hospital for 3-4 months and then require high needs care for months when home." Rebecca Muser, Miracle Mum



## Entire families may be separated, and parents are separated from their babies, experiencing significant stress

"My husband and I had 24 week premature twins weighing 644g and 696g. Our little boy passed on day 2 from extreme prematurity, our little girl went on to fight for 120 days in the NICU. After week 3 in the NICU my husband had no choice but to go back to work, we live in regional NSW and our closest NICU was in Melbourne about 3.5 hours away. When you have a premature/sick baby the mortgage and bills don't stop not to mention one parent having to relocate to be closer to the NICU. My husband had to leave me and my preemie daughter to stay home and work all while going through so much trauma and grief. Our family was separated for nearly 4 months seeing each other only on weekends. We truly believe NICU parents need more help financially so families can be together through these tough times. I know it would have meant the world to us to have a bit more financial support whilst we were living our worst nightmare."

Tori Sutherland, Miracle Mum

# Implementing this change will SAVE the Government

Up to **1 in 2** parents who have had a baby in NICU will suffer from mental illness\*. 48,000 parents each year.

Investing in additional paid parental leave for NICU parents, preventing the onset in mental illness, would save the Australian Government  
**\$54 Million**  
in Mental Health Funding..

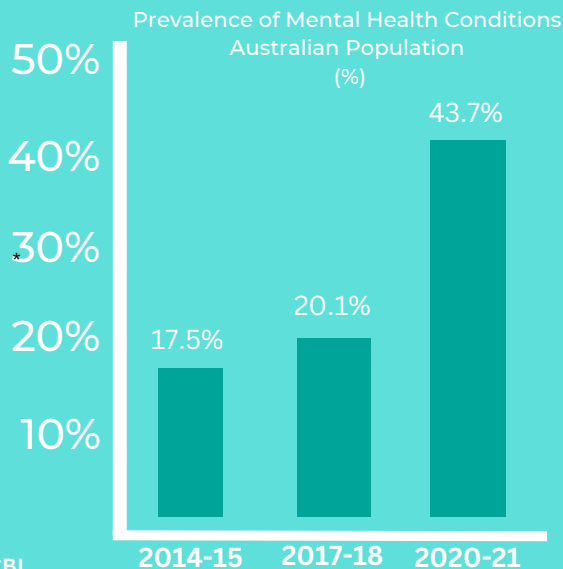
This saving is based on 72,000 people (2 parents and 1 child per family for those who will be impacted) benefiting from access to additional support

\*The Government spends \$759 per person on Mental Health Support including National and State Based Services, Medicare-subsidised services and prescriptions.

This does not include additional expenditure for associated support such as housing, workforce participation programs, income support and more.  
And this will only continue to rise with mental illness increasing.

In 2020-21,  
**more than 2 in 5**

Australians (16-85) had experienced a mental health condition in their lifetime, a huge 43.7% compared to 17.5% in 2014-15.\*\*



\*[Parental mental health screening in the NICU](#), NCBI

\*\*Expenditure - Mental health - AIHW

\*\*\*Mental health, 2017-18 financial year | Australian Bureau of Statistics ([abs.gov.au](#))

National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing, 2020-21 | Australian Bureau of Statistics ([abs.gov.au](#))

# Investment on Additional Paid Parental Leave = Positive Net Outcome

31,510 babies will spend 2+ weeks in hospital. A budget prepared by the *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health* estimates the below, with the assumption that 50% of mothers and 30% of fathers/partners will uptake additional leave.

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| Additional leave for primary carers will cost = \$28M | Cost of investment =<br>[ Total = \$36 million ] | Additional leave for fathers/partners = \$8M |
|---|--|--|

However with a saving of \$54 Million on Mental Health Support, this would mean a

**\$18 Million positive net impact**  
**to the Government Budget**

In support of this important change include organisations such as:



**BabyLove®**



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**MELBOURNE**



**COPE**  
Centre of Perinatal Excellence





# THE IMPACT OF CURRENT PAID PARENTAL LEAVE ON FAMILIES OF PRETERM AND SICK BABIES



Having a baby born prematurely or unwell is a stressful and challenging time for families. Babies can be in hospital for many weeks and months, and parents can struggle emotionally and financially which can further impact child development.

## A NATIONWIDE CHANGE TO THE AUSTRALIAN PAID PARENTAL LEAVE ACT FOR PARENTS OF SICK OR PREMATURE BABIES IS URGENTLY NEEDED\*

\*We recommend one week of extra Parental Leave Pay for primary caregivers for every week a baby is in hospital beyond two weeks, with a maximum of 14 weeks extra pay. For fathers and partners we recommend an additional two weeks of extra Dad and Partner Pay.

In an Australian survey of 231 parents and their experiences of having a baby admitted to hospital for prolonged periods:

➔ 93% of parents were female

➔ Most were primary caregivers

➔ 57% had to stop work early due to pregnancy related illness

➔ Most parents worked full time in the year before their baby's birth



## 94% OF PARENTS HAD A BABY BORN PREMATURELY

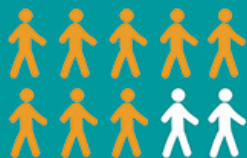


➔ 66% of babies stayed in hospital for 1-4 months

➔ 34% were readmitted to hospital across their first year of life

➔ 45% of parents couldn't use childcare across the first year due to their child's health issues

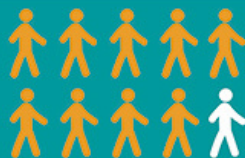


**ANXIETY & DEPRESSION****8 out of 10**

Report moderate, severe or extreme levels of anxiety or depression during their baby's hospital stay

**FINANCIAL IMPACT****3 out of 4**

Report a moderate to very large financial impact due to their baby's extended hospital stay

**HEALTHCARE COSTS****9 out of 10**

Report costs associated with direct medical care in their child's first year of life as having a moderate-very large financial impact

**ANXIETY & DEPRESSION**

67% of parents continued to report this high level of anxiety or depression across their child's first year of life

**FINANCIAL IMPACT**

Whilst their baby was in hospital, costs associated with travel, food, income loss, and parent healthcare had a moderate-very large financial impact for parents

**OVER THE FIRST YEAR**

Costs associated with travel, income loss and parent healthcare continued to have a moderate-very large financial impact

**81%**

Travel

**75%**

Food

**64%**

Income loss

**30%**

Parent healthcare  
\*e.g. psychology

**65%**

Travel

**57%**

Income loss

**33%**

Parent healthcare  
\*e.g. psychology





## Join others in support of our message...



**Miracle Babies do a remarkable job and I fully support their campaign which will provide considerable support to families who have premature or sick infants**

*Dr Mike Freeland, MP*



**Every day in my role as consultant RN in the Neonatal Intensive and Special Care unit I see parents that are impacted financially and professionally by the sudden, unexpected preterm birth of their baby. Both mothers and fathers juggle meeting the comfort and safety parenting needs of their preterm hospitalised infant, and the financial pressure that requires them to continue to work during this very stressful, demanding time**

*Megan Batter, Neonatal Nurse*



**"It's essential that we support families to be with their babies during this critical period of development. We need to value the important role families have in their baby's development. Financially supporting parents to be with their baby during hospitalisation is an investment in the future of our nation."**



*Professor Alicia Spittle | Associate Dean Research  
Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences*

*NHMRC Career Development Fellow/ Dame Kate Campbell  
Fellow*

*Department of Physiotherapy, Faculty of Medicine Dentistry  
and Health Sciences*

My daughter was born at 31 weeks due to unexpected pre eclampsia/ HELLP syndrome. I had to start my Maternity leave straight away and my partner took no leave from his two jobs. We were in hospital for 5 weeks and the following weeks spent on maternity leave were stressful because of complications which meant the remaining weeks were not an enjoyable bonding experience. More paid leave would have made a big difference to our family.

-Melissa, Miracle Mum

By the time we were able to take our beautiful boy home, I had exhausted the majority of my paid parental leave. The thought of returning to work after just a matter of weeks with him at home was distressing and we made the decision that I would stay at home while my husband went back to work. This was an incredibly stressful time for our family only exacerbated by the fact that we were trying to get by on a single income. The current scheme left me feeling incredibly isolated and stressed.

-Rosie, Miracle Mum

Our first baby was born at 26 weeks and spent 115 days in NICU. My husband did the 30-40 minute drive to drop me off at the hospital every day, then go to work, then come back and spend some time with our baby before we would drive home again- this really affected his mental health during an already stressful time. Had there been longer paid parental leave, he would not have had to make the choice to take the mere 2 week PPL for only 2 weeks out of the 17 weeks our daughter was in hospital for, or take the 2 weeks once she came home- neither of which was anywhere near enough

-Rosanna, Miracle Mum

