



21 August, 2019

Australia votes 'yes' for parenting equality: Families call for removal of primary and secondary caregiver labels

New research commissioned by [ING](#) has revealed that the perception of the primary and secondary caregiver is considered outdated, as Australian families are seeking equal parental leave for both parents to ease the pressures of raising a child.

More than three quarters (76%) of Australians believe that both caregivers – no matter the family dynamic – should be permitted to equal leave after the arrival of a newborn, as a quarter of parents (27%) worry about missing out on bonding with their baby during the first few weeks and 75% of parents feel they need more than two weeks leave.

The research comes as more workplaces strive to keep up with changing attitudes, including ING, which has today become the first bank in Australia to entitle both parents to an equal 14 weeks of paid parental leave, and removed references to 'primary' and 'secondary' carers in its parental leave policy.

The new policy aims to remove the stigmas associated with parental leave, as half of men (50%) felt that as a secondary carer they would have less justification to ask for more paternity leave from their employer, while two in five (41%) felt they would be judged by work colleagues or their boss if they were to take leave.

Melanie Evans, Head of Retail Bank at ING, said: "There's no one way to define today's modern family, each with a unique structure and range of challenges. Workplaces therefore have to question their own assumptions around the caregiving roles once assigned to mums and dads. Our findings tell us they no longer apply.

"By acknowledging that no two families are the same and that all parents deserve equal entitlements and flexibility, we hope to normalise the process of taking leave, particularly for those once considered secondary carers."

The majority (91%) of those surveyed consider both parents to be equal carers in the home. Parents revealed that they would feel more comfortable taking time off work should their workplace embrace parental equality (59%).

Australians' opinions on parenting roles are changing, with 6 in 10 (62%) agreeing the role of just one – or primary – caregiver is "old-fashioned" and the majority (69%) believe that the terms 'primary caregiver' and 'secondary caregiver' promote unequal levels of caregiving work in families.

The research revealed that Australians believe equal parental leave will have a positive effect on families, including strengthening the family unit (85%), whilst parents agree it will ease the pressures of raising a child (77%) and allow both parents to bond with their child (68%).

The family dynamic has evolved over the last few decades, resulting in a diverse set of "modern families." And new policies, such as ING's, come in response to their contemporary needs, with



78% of same-sex couples agreeing that the removal of the primary and secondary carer labels is more inclusive, and half (51%) agreeing that their removal reflects modern family life.

Dr. Justin Coulson, parenting expert and father of six, also commented on the research: “The first few years in a newborn’s life are paramount for both parents when forming a close attachment with their child. It’s the time when we see them grow, recognise their unique quirks and ultimately develop an everlasting connection.

“As a working father, I understand the conflict between career and parenting commitments, particularly when there are financial pressures involved. So I’m thrilled that employers, like ING, are changing with the times and doing more to help accommodate the needs of new parents and ease the burdens they can encounter.”

Ms Evans added, “At ING, we’re moving on from the idea of a family consisting of a ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ carer by offering 14 weeks of paid parental leave to all parents, with the option to take the leave in one go or at a time that’s convenient for them, within two years. It’s an important step in equality for all family units, and we hope it will help remove unfair stigmas that we might face during one of the most important moments in our lives – raising our children.”

ING research also revealed:

- **Top worries for parents:** financial strain (49%), fatigue (42%) and balancing work with caregiving (33%)
- **Reasons for parents choosing to take leave at separate times:** to increase time spent with children (53%), to save money on childcare costs (53%), to maximise household income (49%)
- **Career set-backs:** 58% of mums agree that having a baby would impact their career, while this is only true for 1 in 3 dads (34%)
- **Workplace inequality:** 39% of secondary caregivers stated that they would not feel completely comfortable asking for paid parental leave.

-ENDS-

Notes to editors

This survey was commissioned by ING and conducted by GALKAL in August 2019. The sample comprises 1,028 Australians aged 18-75+ years distributed throughout Australia.

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About ING

ING changed the way Australians bank 20 years ago by launching the country’s first high interest, fee free online savings account. Since then, we’ve brought continued value to customers with home loans, transactional banking, superannuation, credit cards, personal lending and insurance.

ING manages \$42 billion in savings and \$45 billion in mortgages and is Australia’s most recommended bank with the highest Net Promoter Score of any Australian bank. Source: Nielsen Consumer & Media View Dec’18-May ‘19 (n=11465) when compared by customers of 18 other banks operating in Australia.

About ING’s paid parental policy:

All ING employees who have been employed for 12 months or longer will now be eligible for 14 weeks paid parental leave upon the birth or adoption of their child. This leave may be taken in one block or flexibly in blocks of two weeks up to 24 months of birth.