



**WORK AND FAMILY BALANCE ACTION AGENDA
REPORT CARD**

APRIL 2005

INTRODUCTION

The Victorian Government's *Action Agenda for Work and Family Balance* was released in November 2003 in response to growing recognition that Victorians are seeking better work and family balance.

Changing family structures, increasing numbers of women wanting to pursue a career and falling fertility rates on the one hand, and the growing need to maximise workforce participation on the other, make work and family balance a priority.

Failure to recognise and act on the connection between a productive and satisfied workforce and buoyant economy, and the well being of families and communities will lead to high social and economic costs being borne by the Victorian community.

In response the *Action Agenda for Work and Family Balance* outlines activity in four areas:

1. Leading the way in work and family balance.
2. Supporting industry to adopt practices that enhance work and family balance.
3. Working in partnership with the community.
4. Demonstrating work and family balance in Victorian public employment.

The benefits that will flow from a better work and family balance include:

- stronger family relationships and personal well being;
- less pressure and stress-related illness;
- increased productivity and economic growth;
- participation of a wider pool of skilled labour in the workforce, particularly women and older Victorians;
- improved retention of skilled and high performing employees and reduced staff turnover;
- realising the full potential of the workforce, new technologies and innovative work practices; and,
- more cohesive and caring communities which support families.

This Report Card summarises the actions the Victorian Government took in the first year of the Action Agenda to help Victorians achieve a better balance between work and family life.

BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY IS ONE OF THE BIGGEST ISSUES FACING VICTORIANS

Nearly half of working Victorians are responsible for caring for a family member. A growing number of workers, especially women, face the pressure of striking this balance each day.

The Victorian Government is acting on a number of fronts to help families care for children and other family members, while continuing to participate in the workforce.

Not only is work and family balance a major part of our effort to build cohesive and inclusive communities, it is also central to meeting the challenges of demographic and social change.

The *Action Agenda for Work and Family Balance* released in November 2003 outlined a range of practical ways Government is helping Victorians achieve a better balanced and higher quality of life.

Since then the Government has worked with community, unions and industry to develop and put in place policies that give Victorian women and men choices that fit their work and family lives.

Creating communities and workplaces that place a high value on balancing work and family will be increasingly important to Victoria's future prosperity.

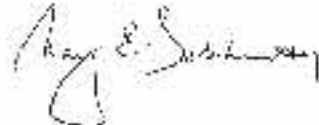
As we face up to the challenges of an ageing workforce and population decline, encouraging and supporting people to enter and remain in the workforce will be critical.

This report card is a snapshot of the Government's work in the past year to help all Victorians achieve a better balance between work and family life.

Steve Bracks
Premier of Victoria



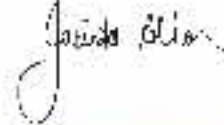
Mary Delahunty
Minister for Women's Affairs



Rob Hulls
Minister for Industrial Relations



Jacinta Allan
Minister for Employment



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ACTION AGENDA 1: LEADING THE WAY IN WORK AND FAMILY BALANCE



The Government is showing leadership on work and family balance by leading the debate, raising public awareness and promoting the economic and social benefits of better work and family balance to industry and the wider community.

ACHIEVEMENTS

FAMILY PROVISIONS TEST CASE

The Victorian Government played a major role in preparing the States and Territories' position in the Industrial Relations Commission's Family Provisions Test Case. The Government advocated for better recognition of work and family balance in industrial awards.

PROPOSED LONG SERVICE LEAVE REFORM

The Victorian Government has proposed reforms to Victoria's long service leave entitlements acknowledging that long service leave can assist workers meeting family commitments. The reforms will provide better opportunities for workers to take long service leave and spend time with their families. They will also ensure that any form of parental leave does not break service for the purpose of long service leave and that paid parental leave counts towards accruing long service leave.

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ACTION AGENDA 2: SUPPORTING INDUSTRY TO ADOPT PRACTICES THAT ENHANCE WORK AND FAMILY BALANCE

The Government is helping business recognise that work and family balance for employees translates into a healthier business performance.

ACHIEVEMENTS

BETTER WORK AND FAMILY BALANCE GRANTS PROGRAM

In its first year of operation the *Better Work and Family Balance Grants Program*, run by Industrial Relations Victoria provided funding for six projects – five in small businesses and one in a regional council.

The projects have seen organisations adopt flexible working arrangements such as employee choice rostering, 9-day fortnights and home-based work. Early evaluation is showing increased productivity, reduced absenteeism and improved employee morale as a result of the changes.

QUALITY PART-TIME WORK RESEARCH

In recognising the need for the part-time work to be a viable alternative to full-time employment, the Government is undertaking research on quality part-time work. Outcomes from this Industrial Relations Victoria project will be guidelines and case studies for business on how to achieve quality part-time work. The project is progressing in collaboration with industry groups and unions and will continue throughout 2005.

RAISING AWARENESS IN INDUSTRY

A series of forums to raise the awareness of the benefits of work and family balance within specific industry sectors is putting the issue on the agenda of Victorian businesses. In November 2004 Industrial Relations Victoria co-sponsored the Building Commission's forum for the construction and building industry.



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ACTION AGENDA 3: WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE COMMUNITY

The Government is working with communities across Victoria to develop practical ways to help women and families overcome the pressures of balancing work, family and community responsibilities.

ACHIEVEMENTS

PARENTS RETURNING TO WORK PROGRAM

The Parents Returning to Work Program provides grants to help parents gain or update their skills after being out of the workforce caring for children for more than two years. The \$1000 grants for education and training provide support for women and men who want to go back to work. In 2003/4, 4,017 parents took advantage of the grants.

THE CHILDREN'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE

In 2003 the Premier's Children's Advisory Committee convened to advise on how well services for children were meeting the needs of families, including the need to balance work and child rearing. The Committee looked across child care, maternal health and parenting services.

Adopting the Committee's recommendations, the Premier appointed a new Minister for Children, the Hon Sherryl Garbutt MP, to oversee a new Office for Children within the Department of Human Services. The Victorian Children's Council, and a new Child Safety Commissioner were also appointed. These changes will help families get better access to support and learning programs, more conveniently located services, and more involvement in local planning.

SUPPORTING OUTSIDE SCHOOL HOURS CARE

The Government is providing stronger support for services that care for children before and after school so that parents can use the services with more confidence. The Quality in Early Years Service initiative included training grants for staff and resources such as the Shared Visions for Outside School Hours Care Kit and a Food Safety Kit. 2005 will see staff do injury prevention training and work will continue on developing regulations for the sector.

'ONE STOP SHOP' CHILDREN'S CENTRES

The Government is putting \$8 million over three years into establishing children's centres. The children's centres will be a 'one stop shop' for early childhood services, and priority is being given to communities experiencing disadvantage. This funding is over and above \$8 million funding for new kindergartens in multi-use facilities. To date \$4.7 million has been allocated for the establishment of 19 children's centres, 11 of which are located in rural areas.

INCREASED RESPITE SUPPORT

The Government is spending \$8.27 million over four years to expand respite support for families of people with a disability. This includes a focus on individual respite plans to suit the needs of all family members, and partnerships with organisations such as local governments, Neighbourhood Houses, Family Day Care, schools, sport and recreation clubs and TAFEs to develop a range of respite choices.

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ACTION AGENDA 4: DEMONSTRATING WORK AND FAMILY BALANCE IN VICTORIAN PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT

As a major employer the Government is taking the lead by strengthening its work and family balance policies and culture, and by demonstrating the benefits that flow from adopting family-friendly work practices.

ACHIEVEMENTS

VICTORIAN PUBLIC SERVICE EXTENSION OF PAID MATERNITY LEAVE

Work and family balance issues were front of mind when paid maternity leave for public service employees was increased from 12 weeks to 14 weeks and paid adoption leave from six weeks to 14 weeks.

FLEXIBLE WORK POLICY

The Department of Education and Training has introduced a Flexible Work Policy to help change workplace culture and promote flexible working arrangements within schools as well as other parts of the department.

Amongst many projects, a Flexible Work Options Kit was developed for staff and two Flexible Work Working Parties (school and non-school sectors) were established. In 2005 the Department will focus on promoting the Flexible Work Options Kit to staff.



CASE STUDIES AND NEW DIRECTIONS

St Amand's Children's Centre provides kindergarten programs, long day care, family day care coordination, a Maternal and Child Health Service, counselling, specialist services and out of school hours care. Having all the services in one place supports families better manage their work and family commitments.

Media Equation is a growing small business, which identified the need to formalise flexible working arrangements with staff and encourage business practices that support work and family balance. The Managing Director consulted staff and is delighted that "without exception these discussions came up with ideas to make things better for the employee and the business."

Mansfield Shire Council 180km north east of Melbourne identifies itself as a 'lifestyle municipality', which is keen to attract and retain staff. Their Work Supporting Lifestyle Employment Model project is helping the council to support more flexible work practices, which is leading to reduced sick leave and higher staff morale.

Altona Green Primary School in a growing residential area 20km west of Melbourne developed a Balancing Work, Life and Family Policy for all staff at the school. An evaluation of the policy in action showed that it was significantly contributing to staff health and wellbeing, high morale and enthusiasm for professional development.

NEW DIRECTIONS

Workforce Participation – Ensuring all Victorians including workers with family responsibilities can participate fully in the workforce is a key priority for Victoria. The Government has convened a high-level Taskforce comprising representatives from the business, trade union, education, academic and community sectors to analyse current workforce participation as well as future trends. This information will underpin strategies to ensure optimum participation, taking account of work life balance issues and business and industry requirements.