



## Parental Leave increase welcome

MERAS welcomed the \$40 a week increase in Paid Parental leave entitlements from 1 July as we know how new parents are struggling to meet rising costs.

From 1 July, the maximum weekly rate of paid parental leave (PPL) increased to \$661.12 per week, a 6.3% increase. Those who are self-employed also saw an increase in their minimum payment to \$212 per week.

MERAS has been calling for an increase in the cap of PPL payments since the 2020 Election. Our reps at the CTU Women's Conference two years ago put forward a remit to review PPL, including increasing the cap.

However, with average weekly earnings in New Zealand now \$1404.15, employees whose weekly pay is above the new cap will experience a loss of income while on parental leave and may be forced to return to work to pay the mortgage and other fixed expenses when their babies are less than six months old.

Some employers top up parental leave payments but not always for the full period. Midwives employed by Te Whatu Ora Health NZ get a top-up to their usual pay while they are on paid parental leave, but this is only for 14 of the 26 weeks paid leave, something MERAS has tried in vain to change in MECA negotiations.

MERAS supports the Government's commitment to helping working families who have new-borns and young children. However, we are calling for partners to have some entitlement to PPL at the same time as the birth mother to strengthen the family unit.

"Currently if partners want to take parental leave, mothers have to transfer some of their leave as it is only for the primary caregiver. But after the birth, it would be great for the babies' mothers to have their partners there to look after both them and any other children in the family. This is especially important when some mothers are being sent home from hospitals within 24 hours of the birth.

It is also important for partners to bond with their new-born babies and share in the experience of welcoming a new member to their family.

There are some employment issues with the Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act that still need to be addressed. These include entitlement to the full 52 weeks parental leave for those who have changed their employer, the way annual leave is paid out after return from parental leave, and the rights of surrogates to paid leave to recover after the birth.



**WINTER BLUES:** *Middlemore birthing suite midwives keep smiling as they cope with an earlier than predicted surge in Winter illnesses affecting staff and birthing women.*

## Importance of Trendcare highlighted

The media recently highlighted the current midwifery staffing crisis with data collated through CCDM showing one in four unfilled midwifery roles across the country.

It is important that the work you are doing is reflected in your Trendcare data. Actualising all care provided each shift and ensuring the allocate staff screen reflects the hours you spend checking equipment, going to theatre, doing escorts, making beds, and dealing with phone calls, all adds up to present a realistic picture.

Data from both these screens contributes significantly to the annual FTE calculations for your unit and determines your staffing budgets. It's especially important to do this on busy shifts and currently these are the very shifts where data is often missing.

When you use VIS/VRM, take care that you do not normalise midwifery shortages. If your ward or unit has fewer midwives on a shift than your budgeted staffing then it is unlikely that you will be in 'green'. Consider 'staff mix' and 'delayed care'. 'Deemed professionally unsafe' should be used when there is only one midwife rostered on duty and there should be more than this. Predicting and using VIS/VRM correctly might mean that your ward is in orange or red each day, but that is reflecting your reality.

MERAS advocated through the Midwifery Accord for more New Zealand midwifery students to be trained, for greater financial support while they are training, and for Midwifery Clinical Coaches. The positive impact of these initiatives is starting to be seen.

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