

# **‘Work, Care and Family in Australia: linking new research to policy effect in Australia’**

## **Work and Family Policy Roundtable**

**21 & 22 November 2012**

**Held at the University of South Australia – Adelaide**

**Sponsored by the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia in conjunction with the Centre for Work and Life, Hawke Research Institute, University of South Australia**

**Co-Convenors: Barbara Pocock (ASSA), Elizabeth Hill, Sara Charlesworth**

### Introduction

The Academy of Social Sciences Australia (ASSA) provided funds for the workshop on ‘Work, Care and Family in Australia, linking new research to policy effect in Australia’ The workshop brought together leading Australian researchers in the field of work, care and family to review the latest international and national research evidence and to prepare a set of evidence-based benchmarks against which to evaluate Australian policy over the next five years.

### Work and Family Policy Roundtable

The Work and Family Policy Roundtable (W+FPR) is made up of 30 researchers from 18 universities and research institutions with expertise on work, care and family policy. Its goal is to propose, comment upon, collect and disseminate research to inform evidence-based public policy in Australia. The W+FPR held its first meeting in 2004 and since then has actively participated in public debate about work, care and family policy in Australia. The W+FPR also provide research-based submissions to relevant public inquiries, disseminating current research through publications for public commentary and through the media.

### Work, Care and Family Policy Background

Australia is in the midst of profound demographic and workplace change, with more women in the paid workforce, and an aging population, both of which create significant national challenges. A more feminised workforce, with higher rates of labour market participation, means more workers have caring responsibilities and face the challenge of combining them with paid work. An older population means providing more care to older citizens and changing workplace and caring arrangements to suit their needs.

Recent years have seen some important work and family policy reforms, including paid parental leave, childcare reform, and flexibility rights in National Employment Standards. However, more change is needed to ensure a good society that enables workforce participation while supporting social and family relations, where work and care can be easily combined with positive benefits for all. In the long run, productivity is dependent upon social reproduction before all else, making the successful combination of work and family an ongoing national economic, as well as a social goal.

## Work and Family Policy Roundtable Election Benchmarks

Work, care and family issues have been key areas of electoral interest over the last four national elections and in 2012, these issues are still of major importance for all Australians. The W+FPR has proposed work, care and family policy benchmarks prior to the 2007 and 2010 elections against which policies for improving paid work, care and family outcomes in Australia could be assessed. The aim of the Benchmarks is to provide a set of best practice policy principles based on research evidence about effective and equitable ways to balance work and care responsibilities in Australia. Attention is given to policy changes that increase gender and socio-economic equality based on national and international evidence and assists these goals in each policy theme to formulate the policy.

### Work, Care and Family Workshop

The ASSA funded Work and Family Policy Roundtable (W+FPR) workshop was held in Adelaide on 20 & 21<sup>st</sup> November 2012, and was coordinated through the Centre for Work+Life at the University of South Australia. There were 16 of the 30 Work and Family Policy Roundtable members in attendance which included the three co-convenors, Professor Barbara Pocock (UniSA), Associate Professor Sara Charlesworth (UniSA) and Dr Elizabeth Hill (University of Sydney).

Also in attendance at the workshop were 7 Early Career Researchers (ECRs) and PhD students from the University of South Australia, the University of New South Wales, the Australian National University and the University of Melbourne. The W+FPR also hosted Ariane Hegewisch, Study Director of the Institute for Women's Policy Research in Washington who offered an international perspective on the key policy areas discussed over the two days.

Media coverage for the two day workshop was arranged generating publicity and interest in the forthcoming 2013 Election Benchmarks see link: <http://www.unisa.edu.au/media-centre/releases/301012/>

### **Day One 21<sup>st</sup> November 2012**

The first session of the workshop was hosted at the Centre for Work + Life (Magill Campus) University of South Australia. The first session included discussion about current research in the field of work, care and family policy in Australia and included advances, limitations and methods of gathering new knowledge, particularly in the OECD. Associate Professor Lyndall Strazdins and Professor Marian Baird provided summary briefings from the inaugural international Work and Family Researchers Network in the US and emphasised the importance of the continued relationship between the W+FPR and international counterparts. Associate Professor Sara Charlesworth summarised key themes from the UK Family and Work Network (FAWN) held in September 2012 in London.

The importance of providing improved funding and access to research in the area of work, care and family policy was discussed given the changing workplace and demography of Australia. This discussion also included the need to extend current work, care and family research to take into account the growing number of migrant workers with care responsibilities, and to include workers who are victims of domestic and family violence.

Also discussed was the requirement for increasing the numbers of upcoming researchers in this field, and suggestions for the provision of funding for ECRs and PhDs to attend workshops and conferences.

At the conclusion of Day 1, a dinner was hosted by the convenors which provided a productive space to continue discussion of current research gaps and international policy trends and to introduce the PhD/ECRs to the group less formally.

## **Day Two 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2012**

The second day of the workshop was hosted at the Hawke Centre at City West Campus (University of South Australia). Day two of the workshop was focussed on the pre-determined themes related to work, care and family policy. Presentations by lead researchers were delivered based on circulated papers prior to the workshop which included current research findings and policy recommendations. Short talks were delivered by the researchers in the areas of: Childcare; Paid parental leave; Workers Managing Disability and Ill-Health; Older Workers; Carers; Working Time Regulation; Pay Equity; Tax, Welfare & Superannuation; Work, Family, Leadership and Workplace Culture. (See attached final program).

Following each session there was discussion and debate about the W+FPR policy position that would be then published in the forthcoming 2013 Election Benchmarks. PhD/ECRs were encouraged to contribute to the debate and played a pivotal role in recording key discussion points and decisions. It was determined during discussion that a number of themes could be merged, resulting in eight key policy areas being published in the Election Benchmarks 2013.

Each policy recommendation considered the founding principles of the W+FPR which asserts that people's lives involve a different mix of paid work and unpaid work as carers, and that carers need access to flexible and secure employment. W+FPR policy recommendations also considered that women perform the majority of unpaid household and caring work and secure families and productive workplaces require that women and men are equally able to manage their work and caring responsibilities.

### ASSA Workshop Outcomes

The publication of the Work, Care and Family Policy Election Benchmarks 2013 (as attached) will be released mid April 2013 and circulated to key Ministers and Shadow Ministers with responsibilities in portfolios particularly covering work, care and family responsibilities, disseminated via direct email to nominated organisations and be available for download from the W+FPR website [www.workandfamilypolicyroundtable.org](http://www.workandfamilypolicyroundtable.org). Individual members and their institutions will also have the publication available form links on their websites.

The University of South Australia and the University of Sydney will circulate a media release prior to the launch of the Election Benchmarks and W+FPR researchers in the key policy areas will become part of the national debate around work, care and family policies.