

ABA continues to drive impact and empower breastfeeding support at the 2023 World Breastfeeding Week

This year, World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) focuses on enabling breastfeeding and making a difference for working parents. The theme will showcase the impact of workplace support and emerging parenting norms on breastfeeding through the lens of parents themselves. Governments, policymakers, workplaces, communities and parents all play a critical role in empowering and sustaining breastfeeding-friendly environments.

To coincide with this year's WBW, the Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) is launching a new Breastfeeding Friendly ECEC Service recognition program. This initiative has been designed to provide ECEC services with materials and further develop the skills and knowledge to support breastfeeding mothers of infants and young children in care.

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services are essential in supporting mothers to continue breastfeeding when returning to work. An increasing number of women are returning to work within the first year of their babies' lives and this may coincide with starting childcare for the first time.

- 74% of mothers returned to work after spending at least 4 months at home with their infant or young child.¹
- 44% of woman returning to work rely on formal types of daycare. This number has increased from 33% in previous years.¹

Mothers may believe that transitioning feeding responsibilities to ECEC educators means they may not be able to continue breastfeeding as they start to spend longer periods of time away from their infant or young child. While research indicates that a high number of ECEC providers are unaware of it, Australian law protects the rights of breastfeeding women, including in an ECEC setting.²

There is an association between mothers returning to work and cessation of breastfeeding. Workplace settings remain a common reason for women to stop breastfeeding earlier than recommended.

Breastfeeding rates are lower in employed women, particularly women who take shorter maternity leave. Women who return to work within 3 months of giving birth are less likely to be breastfeeding at 6 months compared to those who had not returned to work.

A workplace needs adequate breastfeeding facilities to support mothers returning to work. Only 42 countries mandate workplace breastfeeding facilities. The Australian Fair Work Ombudsman states 'a best practice employer can support employees who are breastfeeding by making sure they have suitable facilities available'. However, the financing and frequency of lactation breaks is not supported by Australian legislation.

For ABA, World Breastfeeding Week 2023 is also a valuable opportunity to showcase the Association's Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace accreditation program, an initiative committed to supporting organisations to provide breastfeeding mothers with a safe and confident transition back to work.

The program works with organisations to facilitate their breastfeeding employees' return to work and aims to remove the workplace as a barrier to breastfeeding by creating work environments with the space, time and supportive culture necessary to support breastfeeding employees.

'Origin is proud to have held the ABA's Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace (BFW) accreditation for many years now,' says Sharon Jones, Head of Diversity and Inclusion at Origin Energy, an organisation which has been accredited since 2011 and held ABA's Best Practice standards for 4 years.

'Ensuring that we provide a safe, comfortable and supportive workplace for our breastfeeding parents is important to our inclusive culture at Origin. The accreditation is a clear indicator that Origin provides support for parents returning to the workplace, which is important in retaining and attracting talent.'

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References

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2017, November). *Pregnancy and Employment Transitions, Australia, Nov 2017* (No.4913.0).
2. Smith, J.P., Javanparast, S., Mcintyre, E.L., Craig, L., Mortensen, K., & Koh, C. (2013). Discrimination against breastfeeding mothers in childcare. *Australian Journal of Labour Economics*, 16(1):65-90.