

The Win-Win imperative:
Supporting working parents in Australia

A national white paper on psychosocial safety, wellbeing, productivity and organisational performance

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TELUS Health in partnership with win win® parenting

Executive summary

Workforce–Workplace Mismatch

Approximately 40% of the Australian workforce are working parents, with nearly three-quarters (73%) of couple families having two employed parents. Despite this demographic reality, most workplace cultures, structures, and expectations remain implicitly designed around employees with few competing demands outside the office. The mismatch between workforce reality and workplace design is at the heart of the challenges facing working parents. It also has important implications for psychosocial risk and safety.

When workplace factors such as high job demands, excessive workload, limited flexibility, low job control and inadequate support interact with significant caring responsibilities, the risk of stress, burnout and psychological harm can increase. Under Australian WHS frameworks, employers are required to identify and manage psychosocial hazards. The TELUS Mental Health Index reveals the cost of this structural mismatch and why sustainable change requires organisations to redesign systems, not simply offer disconnected programs.



A mental health and productivity crisis

Findings from TELUS Mental Health Index reveals a stark and consistent gap between the mental strain experienced by working parents and non-parents, highlighting the importance of examining whether workplace conditions are increasing psychosocial risk for employees with caring responsibilities.

Burnout and mental health

37%
of working parents find it increasingly difficult to stay motivated (vs. 31% of non-parents)

54%
end their workday mentally and/or physically exhausted (vs. 41% of non-parents)

Working parents are
80%
more likely than non-parents to report feeling extremely burnt out

Nearly half
(46%)
report feeling under constant stress (vs. 37% of non-parents)

40%
of working parents report anxiety symptoms (vs. 34% of non-parents)

These findings point to elevated stress and exhaustion among working parents and reinforce the need to identify and manage workplace psychosocial hazards that may be contributing to these outcomes. These trends are reinforced by other Australian research showing high levels of psychological distress, work-family conflict, burnout and difficulty balancing work and caring responsibilities.

Productivity impact



Working parents experiencing organisational wellbeing support still lose 31 working days annually, more than double the 13 days lost by non-parents feeling the same support.



Working parents with moderate-to-high organisational trust lose 36 working days annually, rising to 49 days for those with low-to-no trust, a 13-day productivity loss that underscores trust's impact on productivity

The findings highlight an important distinction: providing wellbeing support is not the same as managing psychosocial risk. Individual support should complement organisational action on workload, flexibility, job design, leadership and other workplace factors.

Stigma: An added barrier

Compounding the mental health burden is the stigma that surrounds it.



Two in five (41%)

working parents report they would feel negatively about themselves if they had a mental health issue (vs. 35% for non-parents)



56%

would be concerned their career options would be limited if their mental health issue became known in their workplace (vs. 48% for non-parents).

Working parents face a double bind: they are simultaneously more likely to need mental health support and more likely to fear the career consequences of seeking it.

The gendered reality

Nearly half (49%) of working parents report feeling overwhelmed, compared to 31% of non-parents. This burden falls disproportionately on working mothers: 54% feel overwhelmed (vs. 43% of fathers), and they are nearly 40% more likely to identify personal demands as the primary source. Working mothers face a disproportionate caregiving burden and greater structural barriers. This disparity extends to career progression and job satisfaction.

Only **56%**

of working mothers trust their organisation to be fair and honest (vs. 63% of working fathers)

Just **50%**

of working mothers report it is easy to understand their employer's health coverage (vs. 75% of working fathers)

Working mothers are **35%**

less likely than working fathers to highly trust their organisation to provide effective wellbeing support

Only **47%**

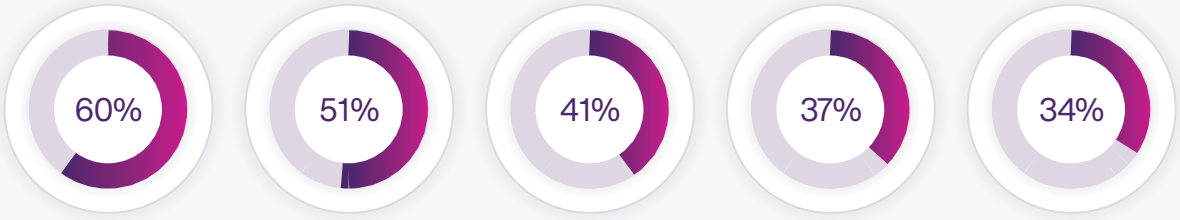
believe they could take on a leadership role without excessive stress (vs. 66% of working fathers)

These discrepancies do not reflect a lack of capability or ambition, but rather a rational response to the structural barriers and inequities working mothers systematically encounter in the workplace. They also highlight the importance of considering different levels of exposure to psychosocial risks across employee groups, rather than relying solely on workforce-wide averages.



The support gap

While 65% of working parents report their organisation's culture supports their personal wellbeing (slightly higher than non-parents at 61%), only 56% feel their workplace is genuinely family-friendly. When asked what they actually need, working parents identify:



Several of these priorities, particularly workload, flexibility and manager support, are also important considerations in psychosocial risk management. Critically, 38% of working parents, and 44% of working mothers, would prefer better wellbeing support over a 10% salary increase, signalling that this is not a fringe concern but a mainstream priority.

The role of people leaders

While the majority (71%) of working parents feel supported by their manager, 29% do not - with a persistent gender gap (73% of fathers vs. 68% of mothers). The fundamental barrier is that most managers are not equipped with the knowledge, skills, or organisational permission to support working parents effectively. Manager training programs rarely address the specific challenges of working parents. Equipping and supporting people leaders to recognise and address working parent psychosocial risks represents a significant, addressable opportunity for organisations.

A systemic framework for change

Sustainable change requires organisations to examine and redesign systems themselves. The five-step Win-Win framework for reducing psychosocial risks and creating family-friendly workplaces is:

1. **Conduct a working parent risk assessment** to identify psychosocial hazards, risk factors, support needs, and gender-specific disparities
2. **Train and resource people leaders** to recognise risks, support working parents effectively, and foster psychologically safe teams
3. **Offer tailored workplace wellbeing programs** that address the unique challenges of balancing work and family responsibilities, alongside organisational risk controls
4. **Build family-friendly workplace culture** where caregiving responsibilities are understood, respected, and supported without stigma or career disadvantage
5. **Monitor, report, and review** psychosocial risks, policies, programs, and workplace practices to ensure continuous improvement and accountability

The opportunity

Working parents represent a significant portion of Australia's workforce. They are experienced, skilled, motivated, and ambitious. Yet according to TELUS Mental Health Index data, many are losing more than a month of productive work annually due to unmet needs and inadequate support.

For organisations, supporting working parents is therefore more than a wellbeing or family-friendly initiative. It is also an opportunity to strengthen psychosocial safety, reduce organisational risk and improve productivity, retention and performance.

When working parents are supported to thrive at home, they are better able to thrive at work. Organisational action on working parent support is not merely a workplace initiative, it is part of a larger systemic shift toward recognising that employee wellbeing, family wellbeing, and organisational success are fundamentally interconnected. The question is whether organisations are ready to recognise this reality and act on it.



Full report

For further insights, evidence, references and practical recommendations, read our comprehensive full report to explore how organisations can better support working parents, strengthen psychosocial safety and create healthier, more productive and sustainable workplaces.

Employee support programs designed for working parents

The growing challenges facing working parents, including rising work-family conflict, mental load, caregiver stress, burnout risk, and increasing psychosocial demands, highlights the imperative that organisations need more than standalone policies and manager training. They need targeted, evidence-based support programs that help employees navigate the realities of balancing work and family responsibilities.

Not all working parent programs are equivalent. Organisations evaluating options should look for:

- A genuine evidence base with content grounded in child development, psychology or occupational health research, rather than general wellbeing material repackaged for parents
- Practical application, with strategies parents can use at home that week, not awareness-raising alone
- Breadth across the parenting and caring lifecycle including support that spans parental leave and return to work, the early years, primary school, adolescence, the transition to young adulthood and caring for ageing parents, recognising that employees may have caring responsibilities across multiple ages and stages of life.
- Coverage of the issues parents actually face, including neurodiversity, screen time and gaming, bullying, anxiety and family conflict
- Peer connection opportunities for working parents to connect with and learn from others facing similar challenges, helping reduce the sense of isolation that the data shows is widespread.
- Sustained access with on-demand resources and ongoing touchpoints rather than a single session
- Measurable outcomes that include participation, feedback and wellbeing indicators that can be reported to WHS committees and executive teams

TELUS Health has partnered with Win Win Parenting over many years to provide evidence-based, practical programs tailored specifically for working parents and carers delivered across all levels of government and across small, medium and large workplaces.

These programs address the many challenges families face today, including work-family conflict, family mental and physical wellbeing, parenting stress, bullying, screen time challenges, child development, family relationships, and strategies for preventing burnout while supporting healthy family functioning.

Learn more: Explore how the program works | Work and family catalogue | Psychosocial safety programs

Feedback from program participants

Practical solutions for managing daily parenting struggles and impact on productivity

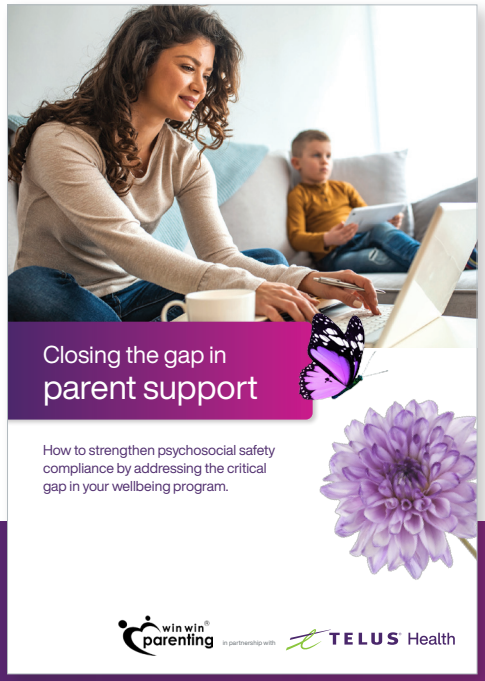
> “This has been very helpful for managing my family life which has a direct impact on my ability to work well.”

Overcoming parent guilt

> “As a single parent, I often feel torn between work and home—this program made me feel supported.”

Ways to raise issues with managers

> “This has given me confidence to speak with my manager about flexibility to better balance work and parenting.”



Closing the Gap in Parent Support:

A practical five-point guide for organisations, developed by Win Win Parenting in partnership with TELUS Health.

Download here

"Reframing parent wellbeing as shared social infrastructure, rather than an individual responsibility, is essential if governments are to address rising psychological distress among parents and build stronger foundations for child mental health, productivity, and long-term social wellbeing." [1]

1 Parenting Research Centre, Parent Mental Health and Wellbeing Insight Brief (April 2026) https://www.parentingrc.org.au/tools/parenting-today/ Pg 12