



AUSTRALIAN
INSTITUTE
of BUSINESS

Empowering Choices:

Rethinking Reproductive Leave Policies
and Practices and Women's Career

SYMPOSIUM | 1 DECEMBER 2023

About the event

In this symposium, we will shine a light on the topic of “Reproductive Leave Policies and Practices and Women’s Career”, delving into the effects of reproductive health transitions on women’s careers.

We will explore challenges and opportunities in building inclusive workplaces that prioritise reproductive health choices and promote gender equity. Specifically, we’ll focus on challenges women face in balancing their reproductive health needs with their professional careers, delayed entry into the workforce, balancing work with caregiving, workplace discrimination and bias, occupational segregation, lack of support systems, and long-term career implications. The symposium will also examine entitlements focusing on menstrual and menopause leave legislation.

FUNDING ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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Keynote address



ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR ELIZABETH HILL
UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

Elizabeth is an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Economy at the University of Sydney. She is Deputy Director of the Gender Equality in Working Life Research Initiative, co-convenor of the Australian Work and Family Policy Roundtable and co-convenor of the Body@Work Project.

As a leading researcher on the future of women, work and care in Australia and in the Asian region, she has collaborated on research into gender equality, work and care with leading national and international institutions, including the International Labour Organisation and UN Women.

Elizabeth's research focuses on how economic institutions shape women's paid work, unpaid care and the care workforce, especially as they evolve in response to the rapidly evolving dynamics of the global political economy. Elizabeth has served as a non-executive director on a number of non-profit Boards and is an experienced media commentator and advisor to government, unions, and businesses.



MARY CROOKS AO
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, VICTORIAN WOMEN'S TRUST

After an extensive public policy career, Mary became the Executive Director of the Victorian Women's Trust at the end of 1996. She has designed and led ground-breaking community engagement initiatives, such as the Purple Sage Project and Our Watermark Australia. These were two early examples of the Trust's Kitchen Table Conversation model which has since become a nationally lauded approach to democratic engagement as exemplified in the successful application of the model in 2012/2013 which saw the election of Independent Cathy McGowan to the seat of Indi.

Mary has led other major Trust initiatives including the exhibition, Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Lives; the development of Here She Is! as a register of women; the Breakthrough for Gender Equality Conference in Melbourne in November 2016, the largest feminist gathering on record; the research and publication of About Bloody Time: The menstrual revolution we have to have; the creation of the Rosie website for girls; and the development of Club Respect as a harm-prevention initiative for community sports clubs across the country.

In 2012, Mary authored A Switch in Time - Restoring Respect to Australian Politics which was distributed widely across Australia. She also authored the Trust's publication of a one-page advertisement in four national newspapers called Credit Where Credit is Due, which paid tribute to the leadership and capacity of Julia Gillard as the nation's first female prime minister.

In June 2012, Mary was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia, for her distinguished services to public policy and advocacy for the advancement of women. In 2016, Mary won the Public Policy category as part of the AFR/Westpac's 100 Women of Influence for her years of work in shaping public policy in Australia.

Panellists



SYDNEY COLUSSI
CO-CONVENOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY
BODY@WORK PROJECT

Sydney is a PhD candidate at the University of Sydney, co-convenor of the University of Sydney Body@Work Project and member of the Women, Work and Policy Research Group. Her research explores the role of trade unions in advocating for legal and workplace protections for a range of reproductive health issues, including menstruation, pregnancy loss, fertility treatment and menopause. Sydney is a regular commentator on this topic and has co-authored academic and media articles on the relationship between reproductive health, paid work and gender equality.



JESSICA HERON
EMPLOYMENT AND INDUSTRIAL LAWYER AT
MAURICE BLACKBURN

Jessica holds a Juris Doctor from Monash University and is currently a practising solicitor at Maurice Blackburn Lawyers, specialising in Employment and Industrial Law. Jessica is part of a team in Brisbane that is listed as a top-tier law firm for plaintiffs, an achievement that her team are proud of as passionate advocates for workers' rights.

In September 2022, Jessica established a working group with some of her union clients to uncover ways in which reproductive health issues could be better dealt with by workplaces. The working group has grown significantly and now includes some of the largest unions in the country, covering every industry. The working group's advocacy efforts have been reported on by every major publication in Australia, which was one of their goals in helping to facilitate a national conversation on this topic.

Jessica currently provides advice to unions on how they can establish better workplace policies that address reproductive concerns, such as menstruation and menopause.



PROFESSOR REBECCA MITCHELL
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

Prof Rebecca Mitchell qualified in organisational psychology and HRM has led partnerships in evaluation and research across a wide range of health and employment-related industries. Her research interests lie in the area of organisational psychology and healthcare management, including wellbeing and health at work, leadership and professional roles in healthcare organizations.

Prof Mitchell leads the Health and Wellbeing Research Unit (HoWRU) at Macquarie University, which brings together scholars from a wide range of health, psychology and business disciplines in research on health and wellbeing at work.

In addition to her academic experience, Dr Mitchell has worked as State representative on several Council of Australian Government (COAG) working parties and has developed health, community and social services policy at a state and national level. Her work as State representative on several Council of Australian Government (COAG) working parties evidences her capacity to bridge academic research, policy and practice. She is a professional Member of the Australian Psychological Society (MAPS) and an Academic Member of the College of Organisational Psychologist.



VICKI DOHERTY GAICD
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, AUSTRALASIAN MENOPAUSE
SOCIETY

Vicki has more than 25 years of experience in the public, not-for-profit and government sectors. She is a C-suite Executive and Non-Executive Director. Vicki has extensive skills and experience in strategic planning, policy and program management. She has qualifications and experience in governance, quality and risk, as well as developing and delivering education for healthcare professionals.

Vicki has a health research background, with many peer-reviewed publications and promotes evidence-based practice. She has implemented health programs across the primary, acute and community health sectors and pioneered health education in midlife women's health. Her work interests are underpinned by her belief that physical and mental health, as well as social well-being are fundamental human rights.



DR RACHAEL POTTER
THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Dr Rachael Potter is a Research Fellow for Justice and Society at the University of South Australia. She is an experienced researcher, analyst, and communicator with a variety of specialist areas of inquiry such as work stress, national policy, digital communication management and gender equality. She is an 'outward-facing' academic whose work cuts across the disciplines of psychology, work health and safety, public health, and law.

Rachael's methodological stance is that research should give a voice to members in society and enact tangible and beneficial change. In alignment with this ethos, her unique contribution to academe is that she advocates for workers by focusing on the broader ecological system in which they operate.

This expands knowledge beyond the work design and organisational perspective to incorporate the surrounding policy context, thereby striving to change systems and wide-ranging behaviour. Rachael's work has been cited in national and international documents that put forward policy changes to improve worker health and safety and she has presented at numerous international conferences.

She is an active team member on a five-year project (2020 – 2025) at the Psychosocial Safety Climate Global Observatory (PSC-GO) called 'Mind the Worker: Transformative Change for a Human-Centered Corporate Climate' led by distinguished Australian Research Council Kathleen Fitzpatrick Laureate Professor Maureen Dollard. Rachael is currently leading the 2023 national review into workplace discrimination for pregnant persons, those on parental leave and parents returning to work, as well as the Australian Work Addiction project.



DR TERRI MAC DONALD
NATIONAL TERTIARY EDUCATION UNION

Dr Mac Donald is the Director of Policy and Research with the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), which represents the interests of some 30,000 Higher Education workers.

Terri has worked across a broad spectrum of issues that the NTEU has a public policy interest in, including higher education regulation and funding, academic freedom, workplace rights and conditions (including around the proliferation of precarious work), student participation and representation, international education, university research and development and gender equity. She has authored many submissions, articles and commentaries, and advises on the Union's political advocacy and sector engagement.

Prior to working with the NTEU, Terri worked in the university sector both as a professional staff member and as an academic. Terri represents the NTEU's interest on a number of committees, including the Federal Government's Education Visa Consultative Committee and the ACTU's Women's Committee.

TOPICS TO BE DISCUSSED AT THE SYMPOSIUM INCLUDE:

The challenges women face in balancing reproductive health and professional careers, including delayed entry into the workforce, difficulties in career advancement, and workplace discrimination.

Regulatory approaches to women's career advancement during reproductive health transitions, such as menopause and menstrual leave.

Organisational challenges and opportunities in building inclusive workplaces prioritising reproductive health choices and promoting gender equity.

The advocacy of trade unions in enshrining industrial protections during the reproductive health transitions.

Practical recommendations for how employers can support employees during their reproductive health transitions.

Event organisers

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