



Affiliated with  
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## Budget's paid parental leave changes overlook infant social and emotional wellbeing

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The Federal Government's radical changes to its Paid Parental Leave Scheme, announced as part of its 2015 Federal Budget, are not in the best interests of an infant's mental health.

The first three years of life (infancy) are critical to an individual's emotional, physical and mental development.

The Australian Association for Infant Mental Health (AAIMHI) welcomes efforts that enhance an infant's development in these areas, particularly support that enables care to be delivered in the home.

For most infants, care is best provided at home by parents, with support where needed. Research shows that the quality of parental care has the most significant impact on infant development. Enabling this should be a priority for any government.

'We need to ensure we invest heavily in these early years, to ensure good outcomes later in life. What infants need most in order to develop into healthy children, adolescents and adults is warm, responsive, sensitive relationships with a primary attachment figure and a small number of other supportive adults', AAIMHI National President Sally Watson says.

Paid parental leave provides an opportunity for infants to develop these strong and supportive relationships with their parents, and the government's cuts to Parental Leave Pay will leave many unable to provide care in their own homes. More will have no choice but to seek alternative arrangements.

'We need to look at how parents can be supported to provide the kind of care their infant needs. Parental Leave Pay and family payments reduce the financial burden many families face when one parent chooses to stay at home and care for their infant in infancy and toddlerhood', Ms Watson says.

The government's two-year \$250 million Interim Home Based Carer Subsidy Programme goes part of the way in addressing the gap left by its cuts to paid parental leave.

As part of the two-year trial, the government will subsidise 4,000 nannies for 10,000 children.

'Nannies can be a way to provide what infants need one-on-one care, however, it is essential that anyone caring for infants has an understanding of infant wellbeing and infant safety, which includes commitment', Ms Watson says.

Nannying is often seen as a casual occupation, often seen as an interim or short-term role. A nanny leaving and another starting is disruptive and harmful to an infant, just as changes in child care staff can be. This inconsistency can disrupt attachment bonds and cause stress and anxiety for the infant.

AAIMHI supports any effort to continually raise standards of child care for infants, especially as many families will need to rely on this, as they try to balance work, education and family life.

'Parents need to be supported to make decisions around the care of the infant based on what is in the best interests of their infants rather than financial imperatives. Supporting parents to understand their infant's social and emotional needs is part of this', Ms Watson says.

Any care for infants must be of a high quality and infants should be encouraged and enabled to form secure attachment bonds to their caregivers.

'How our infants are nurtured now is very influential in how our future as a nation will be.'

### For more information

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