

NEW DATA SHOWS GROWING SME ATTENTION TO WORK LIFE WELLBEING

Australian SMEs are embracing the positive impact of being family-friendly

Key Points

- Australian Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are demonstrating a greater interest in being benchmarked and certified under nationally recognised standards aimed at improving family-inclusive workplace provisions, including paid parental leave, a commitment historically demonstrated only by larger corporates.
- Family Friendly Workplace data released by Parents At Work and UNICEF Australia today reveals that SME's are the fastest growing sector (55 per cent) stepping forward to be benchmarked under the National Work + Family Standards
- 38 per cent of the total number of organisations already certified are SMEs
- The data reveals that approximately two-thirds of all workplaces benchmarked are not meeting the minimum requirements under the National Work + Family Standards to be family-inclusive.
- Launch of the data coincides with National Families Week 2023 (15-21 May), which recognises the importance of families in the community and the opportunities of the future with the theme of *Living Real Dreaming Big*.

15 May (Sydney, NSW) – New workplace data released today, has revealed the rising number of Australian Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) interested in being benchmarked and recognised as a family-friendly employer is outpacing larger ones, but across the board, employers of all sizes still are falling short of being considered family-inclusive.

The workplace data released jointly by Parents At Work, a social impact business advisory group supporting employers to embed inclusive practices and UNICEF Australia, shows the number of employers with 500 employees or less applying to be independently benchmarked is 55 per cent.

In the last 12 months, the number of qualifying SMEs now certified represent 38% of all certified employers.

However, when benchmarked almost two thirds of all employers fell short of the minimum National Work + Family Standards.

Parents At Work CEO Emma Walsh said the results of the benchmarking clearly indicate it's time for some businesses to play catch up on embedding practices that support greater work life wellbeing and gender equality, post the pandemic.

"SMEs have a lot on their plate, but it's really encouraging to see there's a growing interest in learning and adopting better family-inclusive workplace practices for the benefit of their employees, knowing it will ultimately be good for business as well.

"The benchmarking communicates to organisations that fall short of minimum expectations where there's work to do to come up to speed and reap the benefits," Ms Walsh said

Launched in May 2021, with the support of corporate Australia, the National Work + Family Standards provide employers with a benchmark of guidelines that support their workplace to be family-inclusive.

In Australia, the low unemployment rate combined with post-pandemic worker expectations for flexible working as a standard in corporate workplaces, has seen employers give greater attention to ESG and their social responsibility to their employees. This is reflected in the survey results, with employers acknowledging flexible working will continue as a requirement for workers into the future.

“As we mark National Families Week 2023 with the theme of *Living Real Dreaming Big*, Australians’ work and family life demands have never been more interwoven. People want to work for employers who understand and support them to thrive at work and at home. The work life juggle is a universal challenge for all employees, whether they work in an SME or a large organisation. No matter what their size or industry, it’s important for companies to create workplaces that are culturally fit for an employee to manage work with home life and caring commitments if they want to attract, retain and see productivity and wellbeing benefits for their people and their families,” Ms Walsh said.

“Greater flexibility and work life balance is consistently reported as a priority for employees. Certification enables organisations to set a roadmap for being more inclusive of their employees’ work and home life needs, and sends a clear signal to employees that their work-life wellbeing matters,” she said.

Australian SMEs employ 41 per cent of the population and with 75 per cent of the Australian workforce identifying as a parent or carer, the recent growth of interest in certification by SMEs reflects growing awareness of the positive benefits of providing flexible and family friendly workplace culture in the context of persistent workforce pressures and changing employee expectations.

UNICEF Australia’s Chief Advocate for Children Nicole Breeze said: “Many Australian employees are juggling complex caring responsibilities alongside their responsibilities at work. We know from prior research that without adequate attention by employers on creating the conditions to best enable people to balance these tensions it’s taking a negative toll on both health and productivity.

“Some of Australia’s largest companies were the first to step up and be benchmarked against the National Work & Family Standards, and we are encouraged to see a growing appetite among SMEs to boost wellbeing and productivity in the workforce. There are clear social, economic and business benefits of inclusive workplaces that acknowledge the family and caring responsibilities of their employees,” Ms Breeze said.

Since its inception, more than 104 private and public sector employers have qualified and agreed to be certified under the National Work + Family Standards as a Family Inclusive Workplace.

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Additional Resources

Case studies: <https://familyfriendlyworkplaces.com/case-studies/>

Bridging the Work and Family Divide Report by Parents At Work and UNICEF:

https://familyfriendlyworkplaces.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/FFW_Bridging-the-work-and-family-divide_Report_2022-DIGITAL.pdf

About Parents At Work

[Parents At Work](#) is a social impact global advisory group providing work and family care solutions to businesses to create family-inclusive workplaces. Since 2007, they have provided over 500,000 families in their workplaces with vital family, career and wellbeing services.

In Australia, Parents At Work partners with UNICEF Australia, industry leaders and community organisations to improve gender equality, flexible working and work life wellbeing outcomes.

[Family Friendly Workplaces](#), a joint initiative by Parents At Work and UNICEF Australia, encourages employers to adopt family-inclusive policies and has benchmarked and certified ASX 200 companies, government agencies and not-for-profits across 17 industry sectors on their family-inclusive policies progress including Commonwealth Bank, Deloitte, QBE, Novartis, Randstad RiseSmart, ING, Microsoft, Medibank, APRA, HESTA, KPMG, Norton Rose Fulbright, oOh!media, PEXA, Volvo and Genea.

In 2022, UNICEF Australia and Parents At Work released [***Bridging the work and family divide: Understanding the benefits of family friendly workplaces***](#)¹, research outlining Australian workplace policy progress when it comes to supporting working families and to explain the benefits to both organisations and employees.

About UNICEF Australia

UNICEF operates in more than 190 countries in some of the world's toughest places to reach the most disadvantaged children. UNICEF Australia works with local partners to raise children's voices, defend their rights, and help them reach their potential at all stages of life, here and in neighbouring countries. We rely entirely on voluntary donations to provide lifesaving support; improve maternal and child health, education, and nutrition; and to respond to global emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic.