

Bonus for mothers returning to work [AU]^[1]

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EXCERPTS

A pharmaceutical company will give employees returning from parental leave up to \$6000 for child care in a policy that breaks new ground for family-friendly workplaces.

Aventis has introduced the deal in an attempt to retain its female staff, after it found about half of those who went on maternity leave did not return.

The new arrangements include eight weeks' paid leave for primary care-givers and one week for secondary care-givers.

While the Australian Catholic University offers 52 weeks' paid leave (12 weeks on full pay with the rest at 60 per cent) and Sara Lee gives its staff 16 weeks on full pay, the Aventis payment is different because it offers up to \$1000 a month for six months after the primary caregiver returns to work.

Corporate observers, including the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency and the ACTU, describe it as creative and generous and say it sets a new benchmark in Australia.

Aventis has 500 employees in Australia, 60 per cent of whom are women, mostly working in sales and marketing.

The managing director, Colin Hannah, said Aventis invested highly in the skills of its staff and did not want to lose talented women when they started their families. "If they are the primary care-giver, then potentially we could lose that. And we don't think that's good for us and maybe not for them.

"For many people it [juggling work and family] was too difficult to crack. We hope this might help them to establish the newborn in the family, then return to work."

As the third plank of its policy, Aventis will allow parents to retain their company car or car allowance for three months during parental leave.

Susan Biggs, the deputy director of the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency, said the policy was exciting and would be a great incentive for mothers to return to work knowing they had financial assistance for childcare expenses.

"I think they are creating a new benchmark. I don't know of any other company that's doing anything at all like that," Ms Biggs said.

An ACTU industrial officer, Cath Bowtell, said the high cost of child care was one of the biggest hurdles that mothers contemplating a return to work faced.

"Alleviating that financial pressure makes returning to work economically rewarding, as well as providing career certainty."

Leah Goodman, the director of Aventis's business unit, said the cost of child care was a "shock to the system" when she returned to work seven months after having her daughter Kate, now 22 months old.

While Ms Goodman will not receive the payment - it is available only to parents returning to work since the policy was announced earlier this year - she said it would increase retention rates.

"We actually found close to 50 per cent of people weren't coming back [after parental leave] ... this will certainly have a big impact."

-Reprinted from The Sydney Morning Herald

Region: Australia and New Zealand^[2]

Tags: maternity and parental leave^[3]

work/life balance^[4]

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/03/08/bonus-mothers-returning-work-au> [2]
<https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/australia-and-new-zealand> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/maternity-and-parental-leave> [4]
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