

WCM

THE *PARENTAL LEAVE* PLEDGE

Paving the way towards
parent-friendly organizations



Fathers' and non-birth parents' use of parental leave is central to achieving workplace equity – and carries many additional benefits for multiple stakeholders – and yet fewer than 50% of fathers take paternity or parental leave¹. WCM encourages its sponsors to sign the Parental Leave Pledge committing to increasing fathers' and non-birth parents' use of leave. Together, the finance industry can pave the way towards a parent-friendly workplace culture that benefits all.

BARRIERS TO LEAVE USE

Organizations want to be family-friendly and inclusive of all parents – including 2SLGBTQIA+, heterosexual, and cisgender individuals – in their leave policies and practices. Yet even when gender neutral leave policies are in place, barriers and penalties can prevent fathers and non-birth parents from using them².

Gendered norms and perceptions in organizations, and in broader society, can result in penalties and career impacts for leave-users³. For instance, when fathers and non-birth parents take leave, or request to take leave, they can be met with skepticism and negative reactions^{4,5,6}. One study found that men who took a 3-month long leave for a child's birth were perceived as less altruistic at work compared to men who didn't take leave, and women who did⁷. Importantly, non-birth parents may not simply be perceived in a stigmatized fashion – they may also experience actual penalties for leave use. Experimental research has found that men who request leave can suffer from stigma and face judgments that have been shown to predict penalties like demotion and downsizing⁸. Another experimental study found that men described as taking parental leave in vignettes were less likely to be recommended for organizational rewards by participants compared to men who hadn't taken a leave⁹.

In our own research¹⁰ conducted in 2021 we found that only 50% of men respondents agreed that taking paternity leave was encouraged by their organization. A majority (82%) of men said an unsupportive work culture was a barrier to leave use and 100% of men said “traditional restrictive gender stereotypes” acted as a barrier. As long as leaves are seen as targeted towards birth parents, in particular, leave use amongst men and non-birth parents will likely remain low.

When non-birth parents are discouraged from using parental leave, this has implications for their partners, their children, and even their organizations. In fact, all these stakeholders benefit when *all* parents take leave.

THE PARENTAL LEAVE PLEDGE

Organizations can effect real and lasting change. WCM is calling on our sponsors in the finance industry to take action by committing to prioritizing the use of leave by all parents, including fathers and non-birthing parents, in recognition of the wide-ranging benefits for multiple stakeholders, and the central role parental leave plays in building equitable and inclusive workplaces. We are asking our sponsors to make the following commitments:

- **We commit** to providing paid leave (salary top-ups on EI payments) to all parents, including fathers and non-birth parents.
- **We commit** to fostering a supportive work culture that normalizes and embraces parental leaves for all parents, across all ranks and positions, including top leadership.
- **We commit** to making the leave process as easy as possible, by developing formalized pre- and post-leave transition plans, and by ensuring that during leave, parents' workloads are managed in a way that makes employees feel comfortable in taking time off to provide care.
- **We commit** to ensuring that career paths, promotion opportunities, and earnings are unaffected by leave use, regardless of the gender of the leave-user, the length of time they have taken, and any other details relating to their leave.
- **We commit** to clearly communicating leave policies across the whole organization, to both employees and managers, so that all employees know what is available to them and understand the complexities around leave use.
- **We commit** to collecting and analyzing parental leave data and experiences in order to confirm our efforts are having the desired effect and to continue to improve policies and practices as gender roles and expectations change over time.
- **We commit** to publicly stating our expectation that all parents who work at our organization will be supported in taking parental leave.

Firm: _____

Signatory: _____

RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR ACTION

1. Take the Pledge and commit to improving parental leave policies and practices for all parents, including fathers and non-birthing parents, at your organization.
2. Examine your workplace culture and consider whether parental leave use is normalized across all ranks and individuals, or whether some individuals still face barriers to leave use.
3. Examine your practices around leave. Are parents comfortable as they transition in and out of leave? Is the management of parents' workloads tailored to the particular individual according to their needs and interests?
4. Leverage your organization's Human Resources Information Systems (HRIS) to track and monitor promotion rates and earnings post-leave to identify any negative career impacts of leave.
5. Consider your organization's communication around leaves. Is information clearly communicated? Is it easily accessible for all employees?
6. If your organization doesn't already, start collecting data on parental leave use (and better yet, use of any available flexibility and family policies) and analyze them regularly. Consider conducting confidential employee surveys to understand perceptions around leave use and experiences both during and after leave. Analyze results to estimate differences across intersectional identities, leadership levels and ranks, and across other important factors that may affect leave use.
7. Last, but not least, verbalize the organization's commitment to supporting parents and parental leave.

¹ Statistics Canada. 2021. Family matters: Parental leave in Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210210/dq210210a-eng.htm>

² Choroszewicz, M. and Tremblay, D.G., 2018. Parental-leave policy for male lawyers in Helsinki and Montreal: cultural and professional barriers to male lawyers' use of paternity and parental leaves. *International Journal of the Legal Profession*, 25(3), pp.303-316. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09695958.2018.1456435>

³ Gartzia, L., Sánchez-Vidal, M.E. and Cegarra-Leiva, D., 2018. Male leaders with paternity leaves: effects of work norms on effectiveness evaluations. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 27(6), pp.793-808. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1359432X.2018.1540466?journalCode=pewo20>

⁴ Harvey, V. and Tremblay, D.G., 2020. Paternity leave in Québec: Between social objectives and workplace challenges. *Community, work & family*, 23(3), pp.253-269. [https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13668803.2018.1527756?journalCode=ccwf20#:~:text=Since%202006%2C%20fathers%20in%20Qu%2C%20A9bec,Parental%20Insurance%20Plan%20\(QPIP\).](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13668803.2018.1527756?journalCode=ccwf20#:~:text=Since%202006%2C%20fathers%20in%20Qu%2C%20A9bec,Parental%20Insurance%20Plan%20(QPIP).)

⁵ Pettigrew, R.N. and Duncan, K.A., 2021. Fathers' use of parental leave in a Canadian law enforcement organization. *Journal of Family Issues*, 42(10), pp.2211-2241. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0192513X20976733?journalCode=jfia#:~:text=The%20law%20enforcement%20organization%20we,their%20salary%20for%2035%20weeks.>

⁶ Alksnis, C., Gray, A. and Desmarais, S. 2013. Taking Parental Leave from Work: Experiences of Gay and Lesbian Employees in Canada. *Coming-out for LGBT*, p.293. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Hana-Smitkova/publication/305221562_Psychological_problems_and_support_for_LGBT_people/links/5785325a08aef321de2a9527/Psychological-problems-and-support-for-LGBT-people.pdf#page=294

⁷ Wayne, J.H. and Cordeiro, B.L., 2003. Who is a good organizational citizen? Social perception of male and female employees who use family leave. *Sex roles*, 49(5), pp.233-246. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1023/A:1024600323316>

⁸ Rudman, L.A. and Mescher, K., 2013. Penalizing men who request a family leave: Is flexibility stigma a femininity stigma?. *Journal of Social Issues*, 69(2), pp.322-340. <https://spssi.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/josi.12017>

⁹ Allen, T.D. and Russell, J.E., 1999. Parental Leave of Absence: Some Not So Family-Friendly Implications. *Journal of applied social psychology*, 29(1), pp.166-191. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227959383_Parental_Leave_of_Absence_Some_Not_So_Family-Friendly_Implications1

¹⁰ Women in Capital Markets. 2021. The Parent Potential: Parental and Family Leaves in Canada's Finance Industry. <https://wcm.ca/files/program/The-Parent-Potential-2021-FINAL-2.pdf>