STRIKING A BALANCE GETTING HARDER FOR WORKING MUMS

Victorian working mothers are finding it harder to balance work and family responsibilities now than they did five years ago according to the results of a State Government on-line consultation.

The Minister for Women’s Affairs, Mary Delahunty, said the on-line consultation, which received more than 1000 responses from women across Victoria, showed that greater acceptance and support for flexible working arrangements was needed to help ease the burden of working mothers.

61 per cent of respondents said that balancing work and family responsibilities had become harder in the past five years.

“This on-line consultation about work and family balance is the first of its kind undertaken by the State Government and provides us with detailed information about the real-life experiences of working mothers in Victoria,” Ms Delahunty said.

“It also provides the Government with a roadmap for continuing our efforts to help working mothers balance work and family responsibilities.

While 60 per cent of women reported satisfaction with the availability of flexible work arrangements, half said they have used their own sick leave and a third had taken leave without pay to care for children in the past 12 months.

“Half expected to use sick leave to care for their children in the coming 12 months.

“56 per cent of respondents also told us they need more help with running their households.

“The results of the consultation highlight areas where Government and employers need to direct their energies to redesign workplaces to better support working mothers,” Ms Delahunty said.

“More flexibility around managing school holidays, working from home and negotiating work hours emerged as key issues from the consultation.

Releasing the Work and Family Balance Action Agenda Report Card, Ms Delahunty said the Bracks Government was working on a number of fronts to help families care for children and other family members, while continuing to participate in the workforce.

“Nearly half of working Victorians are responsible for caring for a family member, so creating communities and workplaces that place a high value on balancing work and family will be increasingly important to Victoria’s future prosperity.
Amongst the achievements outlined in the Report Card is the Parents Returning to Work Program, which has provided 5000 training grants of $1000 to parents wishing to return to work after more than two years caring for children, of which 94% have been provided to women.

“As well, the Better Work and Family Balance Grants Program, run by Industrial Relations Victoria, has provided funding for nine projects to help organisations offer employees choice rostering, nine-day fortnights and home-based work.

Early evaluation is showing increased productivity, reduced absenteeism and improved employee morale as a result of the changes,” Ms Delahunty said.

Other achievements outlined in the Report Card, released at the mid point of the Government’s Work and Family Action Agenda, included:
– Extending paid maternity leave from 12 to 14 weeks for public service employees; and,
– Providing funding of $8 million over 3 years to establish multi-function children’s centres.

“While there were some positive results in this consultation, Government and employers have an important role in ensuring that working parents, both men and women, have better access to flexible working arrangements.

“Central to this is management and co-workers being more understanding of the difficulties facing working mothers and more supportive of them taking up flexible working options,” Ms Delahunty said.