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*The Key* is published four times per year

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Opportunity

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ISSN 1321-568X

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## Health attracts more nurses

### The Western Australian Department of Health recently launched a marketing and recruitment campaign to attract and retain nurses.

The department has undertaken extensive media coverage welcoming nurses back by offering improved pay and conditions, including:

- Flexible work options
- Six weeks paid parental leave
- Increased nightshift penalties
- Improved on-call rates
- Additional leave
- Family-friendly workplaces
- Employee development

In addition, there are a series of refresher courses to support nurses in their return or transition to clinical and acute settings.

The recruitment campaign promotes family flexible work practices, where nurses are able to balance work and family responsibilities. The campaign allows employees, particularly women, to further develop their skills by remaining part of the workforce and therefore being exposed to new technology and systematic changes. This in turn may lead to promotion and increased equity, diversity and representation of women in supervisory and management positions.

The Minister for Health, the Hon. Bob Kucera, has released a discussion paper on Family Friendly Initiatives and established a State Health Advisory Committee on Family Friendly Initiatives to look at ways to promote family friendly initiatives across the WA Public Health System.

One of the major factors contributing to the Health Department's success in attracting nurses back to public health is the provision of flexible work practices; some of the key benefits of adopting a balanced approach include increased morale, reduced absenteeism and resignations, and enhanced public image.

Employees are best able to effectively balance their work, family and carer responsibilities if they have access to the following three most important and frequently requested flexible work arrangements:

- Part-time / job-share opportunities
- Flexible working time arrangements
- Flexible leave arrangements

Employers can provide flexibility in employment by having a mix of employees working full-time, part-time or job-share. Flexible working hours could be a mix of flexible rosters, annualised hours or compressed working week. Flexible leave arrangements could include additional family leave, paid parental leave or the 48/52 week scheme.

For further information about nursing refresher courses or to obtain a copy of the discussion paper, telephone 1800-112-272 or email [nursinginwa@health.wa.gov.au](mailto:nursinginwa@health.wa.gov.au)

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## Director's Comment

I am delighted to be able to introduce myself to you as the new Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment, having recently been permanently appointed to this exciting role.

I have come to this new challenge from two years as the Director of Industry and Consumer Services in the Department of Consumer and Employment Protection and a year as A/Executive Director with the Office of Women's Policy. Previous roles include Manager of Customer Services at DOLA and four years at the Disability Services Commission as Manager of Access Improvement.

My experience in service delivery and strategic roles in a number of government agencies has enhanced my understanding of the Western Australian public sector. My new role now enables me to consolidate this background and follow on with the well-respected work of my predecessor, Maxine Murray.

As my key priority I intend to work in partnership with agencies and key stakeholders to meet the objectives established by the Equity and Diversity Plan for public sector employment. My goal is to progress the equity and diversity of the public sector workforce, particularly for Indigenous Australians, people with disabilities, people from culturally diverse backgrounds, youth and women.

I look forward to working with you to improve equity and diversity in public employment.

**Noela Taylor**  
**Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment**

## Family focus wins award

Practicing what it preaches, the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) has won an award for family-friendly work practices that mirror two of the three outcomes it works towards: families are strong and individuals reach their potential.

In September last year FaCS was a joint winner in the large business category of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) Work and Family Awards.

The FaCS portfolio is responsible for a broad range of social policy issues affecting Australian society and the living standards of Australian families, communities and individuals. It is a major employer, with over 1,700 employees and nine work locations.

FaCS spends just over \$56 billion a year providing programs and services including income support, housing policy, community support, disability services, child support and family relationships.

Some of the judges' comments noted the strong commitment from senior management to an inclusive and consultative work culture.

In a recent staff survey, a wide cross-section of staff confirmed FaCS is a supportive organisation for which to work. In return, there is strong employee commitment and high levels of job satisfaction.

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## Family focus wins award (cont.)

Some of the FaCS entitlements particularly benefit employees with young families (such as arranging hours to work only during school terms and extra money to cover child care and school holiday care fees).

There is also a program to retain older employees and an employee mobility program.

Available to all staff are free seminars on health issues, free flu vaccinations and an annual family fun day.

Specific outcomes for FaCS include no new workplace stress claims for the past three years, and a significant decrease in staff separations.

Part-time employment has grown from ten per cent in 1999 to fifteen per cent in 2001, and the representation of women in the senior executive service has increased to 58 per cent. The work/life balance is reviewed as part of the performance appraisal framework.

Tony Abbott, the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, said at the award presentations, "Creating a family-friendly workplace is good for companies because helping employees balance their family responsibilities with work ensures happier, more productive staff".

Kevin Cass-Ryall, the CEO of Hollywood Private Hospital in Perth, overall Gold Award winner from 2001, spoke at the plenary session of the conference organised in conjunction with the awards. He emphasised the return on investment that being flexible and family-friendly was delivering to the organisation, particularly in attracting and retaining quality employees.

Some of the initiatives offered by FaCS include:

- Flexible work arrangements such as access to annual leave taken as single days, part-time, career breaks, time-off-in-lieu, hours negotiated by employees and teleworking
- Unlimited personal leave (with supervisor approval)
- 12 weeks paid maternity leave and access to part-time work on return
- 12 weeks paid adoption leave for men and women
- Family-friendly meeting times for senior executives (9.30am start)
- A dedicated work-life diversity team and a network of contact officers
- Support for employee participation in volunteer work and a community work placement scheme
- Free work/life balance information and referral service, plus an employee assistance program for confidential personal, vocational and career counselling
- Breast pump loan scheme for breastfeeding mothers
- Flexible working arrangements such as school-term only work
- Learning at Lunch seminars promoting issues such as healthy eating, parenting, dealing with teenagers and stress management
- Extra family care costs if an employee is required to be away from home outside normal hours and a school holiday family care subsidy
- Strategy for flexible and balanced work for senior officers
- Older employees retention strategy and employee mobility program
- Annual health expo, health assessment program, ergonomic workstation assessments and free flu vaccinations.

Details of the win aroused interest throughout the Australian media.

For more information about FaCS visit the department online at [www.facs.gov.au](http://www.facs.gov.au)

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## Case studies: flexible working arrangements

### 1. Employee denied flexible finish times to care for her child

A recent finding of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission recently permitted an employee to work part-time hours for a trial period of three months. The complainant had worked for Commonwealth Serum Laboratories (CSL) for 14 years. However, after returning from maternity leave, CSL would not let her leave at 3pm in order to care for her school aged child even though she had offered to commence at 7.30am. CSL argued that Ms Angelis had to perform mail distribution duties after 3pm but the commission disagreed. It found that the manager of the team simply preferred not to break up the tasks and assign them to someone else. The commission was not satisfied that CSL had properly considered alternatives that would allow Ms Angelis to leave by 3pm.

### 2. Employee denied part-time work following maternity leave

An employee of Rainbow Printing wished to return to work in a part-time capacity following her maternity leave. When she returned to work, she was told that there was no part-time work available and her full-time job had been filled. The Federal Magistrates Court found that Rainbow Printing had unlawfully dismissed the employee because of her family responsibilities. She was awarded \$4825 for economic loss and was entitled to an apology from her employer.

### 3. Employee denied chance to work from home (carer responsibilities)

Strict attendance requirements were imposed on a woman employed as a Reporter and Sub-Editor at the Victorian Department of Parliamentary Debates. Due to her parental responsibilities, the woman wished to work from home two days a week while the Victorian Parliament was sitting. Her employer initially approved the arrangement but then did not provide the necessary facilities as senior management were concerned about setting a precedent. The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal found that the actions of the employer constituted discrimination on the basis of her status as a parent and carer compensation of \$161,307 was awarded.

### 4. Pregnant employee's working hours reduced without her consent

A kitchen worker / hostess employed by Captain's Girl cruise boats had her working hours reduced almost immediately upon notifying her employer of her pregnancy. Later, following 2 days of sick leave for a gastric complaint, the complainant was told that there was no work for her on the roster because she was "unreliable and absent from work too often". The WA Equal Opportunity Tribunal found that the actions of the employer constituted a dismissal and discrimination on the basis of pregnancy. The complainant was awarded \$6485 in lost wages and \$10,000 for hurt and humiliation.

### Implications for Employers

These cases illustrate the need to be flexible in negotiating arrangements with employees to enable them to meet their family responsibilities. It is important for employers to act fairly and responsibly when dealing with all employees. They must consider reasonable requests for flexible work arrangements and to genuinely look at each case on its merits while still having regard for the operational/business requirements. It is important to give thought to how each request may work rather than simply refusing it because it deviates from standard practice.

Case 1 adapted from AIRC C2002/2562. Cases 2-4 adapted from CCH Equal Opportunity Law and Practice (2002), 93-229, 93-217, 93-189.