



# NEWS RELEASE

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

THE HON DARYL WILLIAMS AM QC MP

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## **WORKPLACE PREGNANCY GUIDELINES RELEASED**

The Commonwealth welcomes today's launch of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's pregnancy guidelines that are designed to give practical assistance in dealing with pregnancy and potential pregnancy issues in the workplace.

With more Australian women joining the workforce, the Howard Government remains committed to equality of opportunity for women and the elimination of discrimination in the workplace. Since March 1996, we have created more jobs for women and have encouraged more family-friendly workplaces. The Government has also given in principle support to new federal award provisions allowing parental leave to long term regular casual employees.

In 1998 I asked the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) to conduct the first ever national inquiry on pregnancy and work issues in Australia.

The guidelines released by Sex Discrimination Commissioner Susan Halliday today were developed following this inquiry.

They are intended to provide practical assistance through clarifying issues around pregnancy and work. They are not legally binding but they provide a useful guide to employers and employees about their legal obligations.

The Government is implementing a number of initiatives that will be of particular benefit to pregnant and potentially pregnant women.

We are amending the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 to clarify that discrimination on the grounds of breastfeeding is prohibited, to ensure that there is no confusion about the prohibition on asking questions at job interviews about pregnancy or potential pregnancy and to ensure that information gathered from medical examinations about pregnancy is not used for discriminatory purposes.

We are also developing a public information campaign to raise awareness of and inform employers and employees of their rights and responsibilities regarding pregnancy and potential pregnancy issues in the workplace.

The development and distribution of the guidelines is an important aspect of increasing awareness, educating and providing practical guidance to employers and employees about these important issues.

We welcome the Commissioner's focus on this educative role, and the series of launches that she is conducting around the country over the coming weeks.

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