



**AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION FOR INFANT MENTAL HEALTH
SOUTH AUSTRALIAN BRANCH**

Thursday, 7 April 2005

Dear Committee Secretary

The South Australian Branch of the Australian Association for Infant Mental Health (AAIMHI) would like to thank you for invitation to submit to this inquiry.

As discussed in a follow up phone call we are submitting some dot points and would appreciate the opportunity to back them up with research and explanation in a verbal presentation to the inquiry, either in Canberra or Adelaide, whichever is most convenient to you.

We noted that the terms of reference do not specifically refer to children, especially infants, and would like to make our submission regarding the impact of work and family issues on the interests of infants and young children and, through them, the community.

- There are good economic arguments for this. Early childhood environments impact on future contributions to society including earning potential, juvenile delinquency, school retention and mental health.
- Early brain development and foundations for learning depend on secure attachment – someone to respond to infants' needs promptly, and holding and touching. This is impacted on by parental working arrangements.
- Long day care is crucial to parental working and quality of care – e.g. staffing ratios and staff skills impact directly on infant development. Infants in long day care which is not high quality have raised cortisol levels (indicating stress) throughout the day.

We know that:

- Guilt and anxiety about children do not support productivity eg when parents are worried about the kind of care their children are getting
- Inflexible work conditions keep parents out of the work force
- Where parental care is adequate infants do best in the care of their parents in the early months and years

We believe that a well functioning society values infants and young children both for their future contribution and their present well being and :

- Fosters the importance of connections
- Supports parents in providing optimum care for their infants, and in doing so maintains the wellbeing of the community



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- Offers truly flexible work conditions for parents – including work from home, job sharing, part time work, job security, work based child care
- Offers effective financial support for a parent who gives up work to stay at home with an infant in the early months – this applying to both parents
- Offers real choices for parents (both mothers and fathers)
- Ensures that promotional and staff development opportunities are not lost by parents taking time out of the workplace for parenting

My submission and presentation is also in my role as advocacy representative for the national directors of AAIMHI.

Yours faithfully

Pam Linke

President

SA Branch

Australian Association for Infant Mental Health

National Advocacy Representative

Australian Association for Infant Mental Health