

Woman's Health Policy



Review Date: 25/02/2027

Introduction

Women make up 92% of the Early Childhood Education workforce, and fewer than 3% of educator and teacher roles are currently filled by men in Australia.

Evans Head Preschool Association acknowledges our responsibility to provide a supportive work environment in a female dominated sector. By supporting our employee's health and wellbeing, we enable team members to promote a positive climate for each other, for children and families. Providing a female specific policy in no way diminishes our service's commitment male colleagues who have health related support needs or their partners health needs.

Goals – What are we going to do?

This policy aims to:

- Provide clear guidelines in order to de-pathologise normal bodily functions at different life stages such as menstruation health, fertility and menopause.
- Acknowledge the emotional trauma associated with grief and loss of a child through miscarriage, still birth, unsuccessful fertility attempts or SIDs and providing support on a case by case basis, above current industrial law requirements.
- Foster an environment in which colleagues can openly and comfortably instigate conversations, or engage in discussions about their health and wellbeing.
- Ensure everyone has access to current information about common health conditions, in order to confidently conduct supportive conversations that reflect the preschool's policy and practices.
- Educate and inform staff about the potential symptoms of women's health conditions, and how they can support colleagues.
- Ensure that women feel confident to discuss their symptoms or treatment, and ask for support including any reasonable adjustments so they can continue to be successful in their roles or studies.
- The health and wellbeing needs of LGBTQI+ educators are acknowledged and supported.
- Retain staff and reduce absenteeism due to symptoms related to chronic health conditions or fertility related treatments including but not restricted to menopause, endometriosis, polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), IVF and hormone treatment.
- Assure women that we are a responsible employer, committed to supporting their needs during all stages of their lives as well as chronic or acute health issues.
- Acknowledge the complexities associated with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's health and wellbeing

The Approved Provider will:

- Support the Nominated Supervisor to maintain policies and procedures that promote a supportive work environment for staff.
- Provide the Nominated Supervisor with assistance to update information to support the health and wellbeing of all preschool stakeholders as required.
- Handle staffing matters they become aware of within the preschool, or the wider community, with complete confidentiality and bring relevant matters to the attention of the Nominated Supervisor with utmost discretion.

The Nominated Supervisor will:

- Keep abreast of current industrial relations reforms which pertain to supporting women in the workforce
- Balance the need to support employee health and wellbeing with the responsibility to meet legislative requirements in providing for children's need for continuity of **quality** education and care.
- Research current health information and ensure it is accessible in a user-friendly format for staff.
- Initiate intentional, supportive conversations around women's health and wellbeing topics in group and one on one settings, providing invitations for private conversations from time to time.
- Ensure staff are aware of their entitlements and understand the procedures to access these as well as their responsibilities to colleagues, children, families and management.
- Use the policy collaboratively to review, formulate, agree and implement a plan with the individual on how best they can be supported, and any adjustments required. Record adjustments agreed, and actions to be implemented. Ensure ongoing dialogue and review dates. Ensure that all agreed adjustments are adhered to.
- Where adjustments are unsuccessful, or if symptoms are proving more problematic, discuss a referral to external sources for further advice. Review external support advice, and implement any recommendations, where reasonably practical.
- Update the action plan and continue to review.
- Provide a supply of feminine hygiene products, available for all educators and volunteers

Educators will:

- Source information or seek support if they have health and wellbeing challenges that may impact their ability to perform their position description.
- Initiate conversations with a trusted manager as needed; to explore options for assistance (they may wish to have a support person present). Follow through with any agreed plan, and communicate regularly about their progress, collaborating on updates as required to fulfill their position description.
- Provide practical and emotional support to colleagues who may be struggling with their health and wellbeing and invite conversation, if their colleague is open to it.
- Discretely alert the Nominated Supervisor if they have grave or immediate concerns for a colleague's undisclosed health and wellbeing, which could reasonably have dire consequences for the colleague or the children in their care.
- Show professionalism in reading and implementing this policy and procedure, asking for clarification and providing feedback as needed, as per our Core Values and Staff Code of Conduct.

Families will:

- Be mindful that teachers and educators are balancing highly responsible and demanding careers, with their own health, wellbeing and home lives.
- Follow the Family Code of Conduct in their interactions with preschool staff, display respect and refrain from placing unrealistic expectations upon preschool staff during, and outside, work hours

Appendices:

1. Menopause
2. Chronic Health Conditions
3. Fertility and Reproductive Health
4. Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Women's Health

Appendix 1

Menopause

Introduction:

Menopause is a natural part of every woman's life. It should not be treated as a taboo topic or 'hidden' away. We want everyone to understand what menopause is, and to be able to talk about it openly, without embarrassment.

While there are several common symptoms, it is important to note that not every woman will notice every symptom or require support. However, 75% of women do experience some symptoms, of which 25% could be classed as severe. Women should be advised to seek medical advice from their GP in the first instance.

With the right support, this life transition can be much smoother. Symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically including, but not exclusively, hot flushes, poor concentration, headaches, panic attacks, heavy/light periods, anxiety, and loss of confidence. Some women also experience difficulty sleeping.

Whilst every woman does not suffer with symptoms, supporting those who do will improve their experience at work. Menopause not just an issue for women, men should be aware too.

Strategies:

Hot Flushes

- Request temperature control, such as supervising indoor play where possible on hot days, a fan, air conditioning, moving near a window or away from a heat source for their work area.
- Easy access to drinking water.
- Permission to adapt clothing.
- Have access to a bathroom for breaks if their work involves long periods of standing or sitting, or a quiet area if they need to manage a severe hot flush.

Heavy/light Periods

- Permanent access to bathroom facilities.
- Access to alternative clothing if changing clothing is required. Ensure storage space is available for a change of clothing.
- Ensure sanitary products are available in the bathroom.

Headaches

- Have ease of access to fresh drinking water.
- Where possible move to a quiet play space to work area.
- Consider if noise-reducing headphones are possible.
- Have time out to take medication if needed.

Difficulty Sleeping

- Consider flexible working hours when suffering from a lack of sleep.

Low Mood

- Identify a 'time out space' and make a plan for communicating the need for time out to be able to go to 'clear their head', when required if practicable.
- Identify a 'buddy' for the colleague to talk to – in or outside of the common work area.
- Utilise the EAP and contact additional external support if necessary.

Loss of Confidence

- Ensure there are regular Personal Development discussions.
- Have regular protected time with their Nominated Supervisor/Educational Leader to discuss any concerns.
- Have agreed protected time to catch up with work.

Poor Concentration

- Discuss if there are times of the day when concentration is better or worse, and adjust working pattern/practice accordingly.
- Review task allocation and workload.
- Provide resources for making lists, action boards, or other memory-assisting strategies/equipment.
- Offer quiet space for documentation.
- Consider noise-reducing headphones to wear in open spaces.
- Plan for ways to reduce unnecessary interruptions.
- Have agreed protected time to catch up with work.

Anxiety

- Utilise the EAP and promote counselling services and support
- Identify a 'buddy' for the person to talk to – either a colleague or someone outside of work.
- Provide breaks to undertake relaxation techniques.
- Identify and undertake mindfulness activities such as breathing exercises, or going for a walk.

Panic Attacks

- Plan strategies for agreed time out, when required, without needing to ask for permission.
- Identify a 'buddy' for the person to talk to – either a colleague or someone outside of work.
- Provide time away from their routine to undertake relaxation techniques.
- Identify and undertake useful mindfulness activities such as breathing exercises, or going for a walk.
- Discuss whether the member of staff has visited their GP or Women's Health at The Base Hospital for support, particularly if the areas of difficulty are sleeping, panic attacks or anxiety.

Useful Links:

For most current links see the Women's Health Padlet

<https://padlet.com/fluidcaporganization/women-s-health-information-qb7d7k35kvamfkd3>

<https://www.menopause.org.au/health-info/find-an-ams-doctor/nsw/item/dr-gillian-smith>

<https://www.menopause.org.au/hp/information-sheets/what-is-menopause>

<https://www.jeanhailes.org.au/health-a-z/menopause>

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/women/Pages/menopause.aspx>

<https://www.menopause.org.au/health-info/fact-sheets/menopause-and-the-workplace>

<https://www.jeanhailes.org.au/news/attitudes-to-menopause-leave-what-women-want>

Appendix 2

Chronic Women's Health Conditions such as Polycystic Ovaries (PCOS) and Endometriosis

Similarly to strategies outlined for workplace support for employees dealing with the symptoms of menopause, managers will follow the Women's Health policy to educate themselves and colleagues, maintain open communication, work collaboratively with staff to identify strategies which will support an individual team member the depending upon specific symptoms that person is dealing with. They will implement and monitor the action plan and update as needed.

Polycystic Ovaries Syndrome (PCOS)

PCOS is a hormone imbalance that affects about one in 10 women. It is more common in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island women. The condition is associated with increased levels of two hormones in the body – insulin and androgens (male-type hormones).

Symptoms may include:

- irregular or no periods
- excess facial and/or body hair on your (hirsutism)
- hair loss (alopecia)
- skin conditions such as pimples, acne or a darkened rash
- Mental Health challenges including stress, anxiety and depression, poor body image
- weight gain
- Insulin resistance
- possible difficulty falling pregnant

https://www.jeanhailes.org.au/health-a-z/pcos/symptoms-causes?gclid=Cj0KCQjw4MSzBhC8ARIsAPFOuyXR7sWHZn4wqApBGtUDFbCNcg_-cmPSkhshFNM4uUJDIGD0jA2-vpsaArlWEALw_wcB

Endometriosis

1 in 7 women, and those presumed female at birth (PFAB), are impacted by endometriosis. by the age of 44-49. Yet many people have not heard of the condition, and it can take many years for someone to receive a diagnosis. This is partly because endometriosis is commonly associated with

reproductive health and the menstrual cycle, often making workplace discussions challenging. **It is important to note that endometriosis can affect the whole body** regardless of the phase of the menstrual cycle and can occur even if the uterus is removed. While endometriosis is commonly associated with the menstrual cycle, it is not a menstrual disease per se.

Symptoms:

- Fatigue.
- Pain that stops the person on or around your period.
- Pain on or around ovulation.
- Pain during or after sex.
- Pain with bowel movements.
- Pain when urinating.
- Pain in the pelvic region, lower back or legs.
- Having trouble holding onto a full bladder or having to go frequently.
- Heavy bleeding or irregular bleeding.
- Challenges with fertility

Research shows that one in six people with endometriosis will lose their employment due to managing the disease. Those with endometriosis who gain and keep jobs attribute their success to flexible and reasonable workplaces and understanding and empathic managers and colleagues.

<https://endometriosisaustralia.org/endometriosis-downloads-and-resources/>

Appendix 3

Fertility, Reproductive Sexual Health

Evans Head Preschool Association prides itself on being a family friendly employer. The Nominated Supervisor will give weight to fertility and reproductive health when formulating and implementing the Leave Policy for our predominantly female workforce.

Women may deal with diverse physical and mental health challenges whilst managing their sexual health, fertility and reproductive lives including but not restricted to menstruation, contraception side effects, sexually transmitted disease (STDs), abortion, pregnancy and loss, birth and postpartum health and other journeys to parenthood/caring for children and aged parents.

While it is not practical, or desirable, to have an explicit policy for each, the Nominated Supervisor will follow the framework set out in our Women's Health Policy, adjusting strategies to meet an employee's individual set of circumstances. A range of information on will be sourced and stored on our Women's Health Padlet for easy, up to date and confidential access by staff as required.

Pregnancy Support

Staff may not have disclosed a pregnancy to colleagues or the Nominated Supervisor in its early stages due to fear of possible miscarriage, or they may be experiencing the shock & uncertainty of an unexpected pregnancy. They may have concerns about how the news will be received, their job security or possible discrimination.

Health and Safety during pregnancy:

Early pregnancy is the most dangerous time for a woman, and their unborn child, to contract some infectious diseases which are common in an early childhood setting such as **Cytomegalovirus (CMV)**. Nominated Supervisors will ensure that all educators are educated on safe work practices and have access to PPE and information on these illnesses including **Rubella (German Measles)**, regardless of an educator knowing or communicating that they are pregnant. Staff records will include immunisation status. The preschool will reimburse staff for immunisation costs. As per the policy, the Nominated supervisor will work to maintain open and transparent communication to reassure

staff that their health and wellbeing is important to our preschools as valued team members. Communication and active, collaborative planning and between managers and staff are seen as essential in supporting pregnant staff and new parents. Support plans will be reviewed regularly as the need evolves.

Fair Work Australia sets out various parenting leave entitlements including when complications arise such as miscarriage, premature birth, still birth, adoption etc.

Pregnancy Loss:

Pregnancy loss can take many different forms. Miscarriage refers to the loss of a baby up to and including the 19th week of pregnancy, while stillbirth is the loss of a baby from the 20th week of pregnancy onwards. Loss can also be experienced because of an unsuccessful fertility treatment cycle, or when all avenues for pregnancy have been exhausted.

How pregnancy loss may affect our employees

Pregnancy loss may manifest in a variety of symptoms of emotional and physical strain.

These may include:

- Emotional upheaval associated with loss—grief, anger, shame or fear of stigma.
- Uncertainty or fear about future pregnancies.
- Struggling with the physical recovery of pregnancy, including possible surgery or the trauma of delivering a stillborn baby.
- Supporting the grief of a partner and other children.
- Managers will also be aware of the logistical challenges that grieving parents may face during recovery.

These may include:

- Managing the care of other children in the family – e.g. caring for children while grieving and the logistical challenges such as school drop-off and pickup.
- Medical or specialist appointments
- The mother may be unable to drive if she has undergone surgery.

In addition, there are also specific workplace concerns relating to pregnancy loss. Some people may not have told colleagues they were pregnant or trying to conceive. Others will be unsure about how to inform their manager, colleagues or preschool children & families about their loss.

How we can support our employees through pregnancy loss:

Nominated Supervisors, Educational Leaders and colleagues are mindful that pregnancy loss can impact a colleague's workplace performance and affect their mental and physical health.

Support Strategies:

Implement clear policies and educate employees

- Ensure policies explicitly cover perinatal loss, and that this is clear and easily accessible to everyone.
- Educate all stakeholders about pregnancy loss, explaining what support is available to those impacted, and how they can support grieving parents (and families).
- Acknowledge that a grieving parent may not yet be ready to discuss their situation.

Hold no expectations about how an employee 'should' grieve

- Recovery takes time and is not linear—some days will be better than others. There is no 'set' amount of time a person takes to grieve.
- Ask what leave they need and be prepared to be flexible as their needs change. Be aware that some people will want to keep busy as part of their recovery—they may not wish to take leave.

Remind employees of EAP assistance and additional 1-1 counselling service, if available

- Offer EAP services counselling to immediate family members, remind them of this service for partners and other children. Close co-workers and managers may also benefit from EAP counselling.

Allow flexibility to attend any medical appointments or manage childcare logistics for other children

- If appropriate, prepare a return-to-work plan. You may consider a range of options including temporary part-time hours, gradual transition back to regular work, compressed hours or another option our employee requests.

Carefully consider communication to others

- Ask our employee what communication they would like, and what they would prefer to do themselves as opposed to having it done for them. They may, for example, prefer

you to inform their colleagues and possibly preschool families about their loss to spare them having to repeat the same conversation numerous times.

- it may be necessary to discuss this more than once as and when it becomes necessary or appropriate.

Consider financial assistance where possible

- If possible consider some form of financial assistance, for example, contributing to expenses, funeral costs, vouchers for childcare to provide grieving parents some time or even vouchers for meal delivery to help in this difficult time.

Practical issues for your employees

Leave entitlements

- As pregnancy loss often isn't openly discussed, your employees may face uncertainty regarding their leave entitlements.
- Parents of a stillborn baby, or in the case of infant death, are entitled to 12 months of unpaid parental leave. In addition, special maternity leave may be available for eligible employees not fit for work because the pregnancy ends in loss, within 28 weeks of the expected date of birth.

<https://www.fairwork.gov.au/leave/parental-leave/during-parental-leave/stillbirth-premature-birth-or-infant-death>

Financial and administrative concerns

Parents dealing with pregnancy loss may also be unfamiliar with their legal or financial obligations.

- By law, all stillbirths in Australia must be registered with Births Deaths and Marriages in the relevant state or territory.
- It is also a legal requirement to arrange a burial or cremation for a stillborn baby.
- There may be additional medical costs, particularly for emergency or specialist care.

Link: Cope.org.au

<https://www.cope.org.au/how-workplaces-can-support-pregnancy-loss/>

Appendix 4

Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Women's Health.

Evans Head Preschool Association acknowledges the gap in health outcomes for our Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander women compared to their non Aboriginal colleagues. We also acknowledge the effects upon health and wellbeing for our First Nations educators of inter-generational trauma, societal racism and educating non Indigenous colleagues and the wider community.

Evaluation

President's Name: Lauren Heath.....

President's Signature:

Date:25...../.....02...../.....2025....

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25/02/2025	Lauren Heath	25/02/2027