Advancing Parental Leave Equality and Introducing Shared Care in Australia

The business case for action



'I didn't hesitate as I always knew it was an unmissable time in my life. It ended up being the most rewarding, scary, exciting, tiring and challenging two months of my life.'

Ross, 33, Banker. On leave with Charlie for two months.

Introduction

Australia's approach to Paid Parental Leave (PPL) requires an urgent rethink from both government policy makers and employers to meet the diverse and changing needs of modern families, if Australia is to eliminate gender inequality.

Encouraging, facilitating and supporting fathers to share caring responsibilities is fundamental to achieving gender equality.¹

Introducing a shared parental leave scheme which provides fathers and mothers - including same sex parents - equal access to leave and tackling gender bias by eliminating unhelpful definitions which force parents to decide who will be the primary versus secondary carer, are all critical elements of the solution. Employers are key to revolutionising the way we design policy to ensure Australia's standing and progress on parental leave catches up with international best practice standards.

Employers can help to achieve the change needed by offering paid and non-paid parental leave policies that are specifically designed to promote shared caring. They can also take the front foot by intentionally creating workplace cultures that support men as caregivers.

Parental leave policies enable employees to combine paid work with their caring responsibilities and to date, parental leave policies and workplace practices in Australia have predominately focused on supporting mothers.

It remains the case that in the majority of Australian house-holds, mothers take extended leave upon the arrival of a new baby or child while fathers or partners adopt a 'secondary' caring role and take very short breaks from work. This perpetuates stereotypical gender norms where women are expected to do the caring and men are expected to do the earning.² This approach has not caught up with the reality that women now play a significant role in the earning too.

Shared parental leave policies can help to break this cycle and foster a more equal division of unpaid care and paid work and improve the work-life balance of families.³ It enables fathers to bond with their children while they are infants which can result in greater satisfaction in their relationships with their children.⁴

With the exception of the United States, all OECD nations have introduced some form of partner/father specific leave. Sweden was the first country in 1974 to introduce paid parental leave specifically targeting fathers/partners and in 2013, the OECD recommended providing paid leave to working mothers and fathers to promote gender equality.⁵

Australia's parental leave policies are outdated and lag OECD nations.⁶ The competitiveness of our economy and our individual workplaces are at a disadvantage as a result. Best practice employers – domestically and abroad – are specifically providing support and entitlements to both working parents in a bid to promote shared caring.

Encouraging more fathers to take parental leave is a key challenge that employers can help overcome by introducing policies and practices to normalise the uptake of PPL among fathers and care-giving generally. In addition to policies, workplace culture is key to increasing the uptake of parental leave among men. Managers can be particularly influential in driving new behaviours to create this change.

Managing paid and unpaid responsibilities remains an unsustainable proposition for many Australian families. Aside from the cost to those individuals, it means employers are running at diminished capacity in productivity and performance as they struggle to retain talent and create an optimally diverse workforce.

Providing contemporary, equitable and supportive arrangements for both parents that allow men and women to be both caregivers and financial providers, is a key way to advance gender equality and to distinguish quality employers from competitors in helping recruit and retain the best workforce talent. Most critically, this approach allows employees to care for their families whilst pursuing their careers with flexibility, fulfilment and purpose.

'Westpac Group is proud to support the campaign to help normalise men taking parental leave. As Australia's oldest company we believe in providing an inclusive and flexible work environment for all of our employees with a range of flexible working options, including paid parental leave. We know that when we provide our people with flexible work arrangements to help manage the things that are important to them, we are enabling them to bring their whole selves to work and to thrive in their roles.'

Westpac

About Parents at Work

Parents At Work is Australia's leading provider of working parent education programs and designs world class parental leave policies.

Parents At Work is leading an equality campaign aimed at workplaces and the community to normalise and support fathers taking time out to share caring for their children.

By collaborating with employers, policy makers, researchers, government and other advocacy leaders, Parents At Work is spearheading the push for reform on family friendly work practices and the introduction of a shared care policy approach that enables more Australians to flourish in their homes, workplaces and lives.

Australian fathers are not taking parental leave

Overall, in Australia the use of parental leave by fathers and partners remains very low by global standards. Figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics from 2017 show that just one in 20 dads take primary parental leave, with 95% of all primary leave taken by mothers.⁷ A 2014 study by the Human Rights Commission revealed that 85% of the fathers and partners surveyed took less than four weeks leave.⁸

According to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency's (WGEA) latest Gender Equality Scorecard for 2016-2017, Australian reporting organisations (non-public sector employers with 100+ employees only) reveal that:

- Approximately 27.4% of all employees who took primary or secondary carer's leave were men
- Men represented 4.7% of all employees who took primary carer's leave, and 94.8% of those who took secondary carer's leave.⁹

This compares with Swedish fathers who take roughly 25% of the total number of days available to the couple. Sweden offers 480 days paid leave to share with 90 days preserved for each parent. According to global parental leave expert and researcher Professor Linda Haas, only 26% of Australian fathers are even aware that they are eligible to take primary parental leave. Overseas evidence shows that the use of parental leave by fathers increases when entitlements are generous and when policies offer flexibility about when and how leave can be used. As it stands, Australian policies are restricted in both ways.

'One of the most effective ways we can make an impact that matters in achieving gender equity, is through the support we give to parents and individuals with caring responsibilities.'

Deloitte

You actually come back to work with a whole lot more skills and a different mindset and point of view which massively benefits the company and your own career. Once you take parental leave you'll feel like an integral and indispensable part of your family.'

Renn, 38, Senior Retail Architect on leave with Lourdes for 4.5 months, on leave with Enzo for 4.5 months.

What are working parents entitled to?

Working Australian parents are entitled to PPL from both the government and their employer when there is an applicable policy. The government's PPL scheme is the least generous amongst OECD countries, offering just 7.6 weeks full-time equivalent pay, which compares to 39 weeks in the UK and 35 weeks in Canada.

It also splits the caring roles performed by mothers and fathers into 'primary and secondary carers'. 'Primary' carers receive 18 weeks of pay based on the minimum wage while secondary carers receive 2 weeks of 'Dad and Partner' Pay based on the minimum wage.

From working closely with organisations and their employees, Parents At Work understand:

- Men do not have as much opportunity to bond with their children and experience the work-life balance squeeze, particularly in the home.
- Women are most likely to take a career break and/or return to work part-time, leading to less opportunity to upskill or get promoted, less pay and less superannuation.
- Organisations miss out on the value that a well-balanced, newly upskilled father brings to an organisation, as well as women in leadership positions.
- Children miss out on a true reflection of gender equality due to the long-held beliefs and ideals around women and men's roles in the home and workplace.

Among non-public sector Australian organisations with more than 100 employees, in 2017:

- 45.9% of employers offer PPL for primary carers, and the average length offered was 10.1 weeks
- 39.3% of employers offered PPL for secondary carers and the average length offered was
 7.3 days
- 54.1% of employers offer NO PPL payment for primary carers in addition to the government scheme
- 68.3% of employers have either a policy and/or strategy for flexible working arrangements
- 51.9% of employers offered non-leave based measures to support employees with caring responsibilities. The most common nonleave based measures were breastfeeding facilities (32.9%) and referral services to support employees with family and/or caring responsibilities (24.7%)
- 11.1% of employers offered coaching for employees returning to work from parental leave
- 5.5% of employers offered on-site childcare
- · 3.7% of employers offered a return to work bonus on return from parental leave
- · 3.4% offered employer-subsidised childcare

'One of the most effective ways we can make an impact that matters in achieving gender equity, is through the support we give to parents and individuals with caring responsibilities.'

Gilbert + Tobin

'What I would say to other men is - you'll always have work but you'll never have that time again with your kids. The memories I made during the parental leave will stay with me forever, including Harvey's first steps. This wouldn't be the case if I hadn't taken the time off.'

Andrew, 34, Sustainability Manager, Urban Regeneration. On leave with Harvey for four months, on leave with Fletcher for four months.

Men want to be more involved with their children

Despite the low uptake of PPL among fathers, men want to be more involved in the lives of their children. Three in four dads told the HRC they would have liked to take additional leave. 10 Over half of the fathers and partners who wanted to take additional leave to care for their child but did not take it, reported that it was because they could not afford to.

Other reported reasons for not taking additional leave included not knowing it was possible (15%), not having annual leave entitlements (11%) and not thinking it would be granted (9%).

Even in countries where men's involvement in care work is limited, recent global research found that half or more of the men surveyed said that they spend too little time with their children due to their jobs.¹¹

In the United States, a 2013 survey found that 46% of fathers said they were not spending enough time with their children.¹² New research from the State of America's Fathers showed that the majority of men and women alike, across all age categories, disagreed with the outdated notion that 'it is best if men work and women take care of the home and children'.¹³

National Australian research has also shown that dads who struggle with combining work and care report less warm, consistent interactions with their children. Supporting fathers via workplaces to balance their work with the needs of their families is good for dads, their partners and children.¹⁴

It is clear dads want to be more involved and employers can help make that happen.

Transitioning to Fatherhood - The Work-Life Balancing Act

- Men often feel expected to carry on at work like nothing has changed after their baby is born (despite everything changing in their personal life!)
- Many men do not know they are able to take primary carer's leave (most assume this is only for Mums)
- Men feel guilt too for not being home enough, for not being at work as much as they used to be.
- Men would love to work flexibly, but it's not always understood by managers as to why. There's still stigma about care taking being seen as 'a woman's job'.
- Men appreciate having each other to talk to – akin to 'mothers groups', men want to connect and reflect on parenthood too.

Learning from leading global practice

Global evidence underscores the effectiveness of well-designed leave policies in levelling the balance of unpaid care work between men and women. Paid leave for fathers has the power to contribute significantly to the redistribution of care work and to transform deeply rooted inequalities between men and women.

A Swiss study in 2014 showed that if parental leave policies are available to each parent, it enables a more equal division of work between women and men by fostering paternal involvement in the care for a child.¹⁵

A 2015 study found that the Norwegian PPL policy, which provides 46 weeks of parental leave at

'At Spotify, we are proud to provide all of our employees with a global parental leave policy that reflects our belief in the importance of a diverse and inclusive workplace. Stemming from our Swedish inspired culture and values, our plan offers equal benefits to all new parents, providing the flexibility to take the time away from work that's right for them during their child's first years. Spotify offer six months fully paid parental leave globally to all parents both mothers and fathers. It can be taken all at once or broken up until their child's third birthday. With our global parental leave policy not differentiating between dads and mums, we give dads the equal opportunity to fully engage in their child's early years, without the stereotypical gender pressure of returning to work."

100% of the salary with 10 weeks of leave reserved for the co-parent, contributes to a shortening of women's career interruptions and a more equal division of paid and unpaid work among parents. ¹⁶ Australian employers can look to emulate global counterparts in improving parental leave policies and a leading exemplar is Sweden.

Since 2002 the Swedish Government has implemented what is academically regarded as an 'equality-promoting' PPL policy.

The key features of the Swedish policy framework include:

- Working parents are offered 480 days of parental leave per child which can be shared out between mothers and fathers as they see fit, but with each parent entitled to at least three months on a use-it-or-lose-it basis.
- The Parental Leave Act in Sweden states that you have a right to shorten your hours at work too and only work 75% up until the child is 8 years old.
- Parents can also take leave in a way that shortens their working day, e.g. half a day, a quarter of a day and even an eighth of a day.
- You can take the pay and time off until the child is 12 years.
- After the child is 4 years old you can save and use 20% of the days until the child is 12.
- Parents receive a 'caring for a sick child' benefit.
 This entitles parents to 120 days per year per child of pay.
- All organisations with more than 25 employees must adhere to national employment reporting standards. They are required to proactively put in place programs to ensure the antidiscrimination and work / family policy is effectively implemented and illustrate how they have done so.
- Municipalities have to give you a childcare place within 4 months of you putting your child's name down.

It has produced positive results. Men in Sweden take nearly a quarter of all parental leave and the government remains committed to continually improving this rate. Bads taking extended parental leave is now thoroughly normal and as a result, women of all socio-economic groups find it easier to get back into work after they have children. There is a more equitable sharing of unpaid work between both parents, contributing to higher wellbeing in Swedish households.

The business case for promoting shared care

Aside from potentially delivering a more equal division of unpaid care and paid work, promoting shared care is unequivocally good for business. The commercial benefits associated with the provision of paid parental leave are well established and lead many employers to report the rewards outweigh the costs.

Employee Retention.

The retention of talent and lower rates of staff turnover, resulting in lower recruitment and training costs, is a key reason some employers provide paid family leave. In many instances, companies determine it is more cost-effective to pay parents to go on parental leave than it is to lose them. Women who take paid leave are 93% more likely to be in the workforce 9 to 12 months after a child's birth than women who take no leave. First-time mothers who take paid leave are more likely than those who take unpaid leave or no leave to return to the same employer. When Google increased its paid leave program from 12 to 18 weeks, the rate of female turnover after maternity leave was reduced by 50%.

'Providing dads with access to our parental leave offering creates flexibility and gives our employees and their partners the chance to make the best choices for their families and careers.'

Lendlease

'KPMG is committed to providing an environment which enables everyone to succeed, and provides equal access to both men and women in achieving their family and career goals. Engaging men in parental leave and flexibility is necessary to achieve gender equality within our workplace, to challenge the status quo and to enable a shift within our communities.'

KPMG

Talent Attraction.

As demand grows for paid parental leave, these policies are an increasingly relevant differentiator. A 2016 survey by Deloitte found that 77% of employees with access to benefits reported that the amount of paid parental leave had some influence on their choice of one employer over another.

Improved Engagement, Morale, and Productivity.

A 2017 study by BCG showed that providing paid family leave translates into better employee engagement, morale, and productivity.²¹ A 2016 EY study of more than 1,500 employers found that more than 80% of companies that offer paid family leave reported a positive impact on employee morale, and more than 70% reported an increase in employee productivity.²²

A 2015 report for the Center for American Progress, found that company policies to promote work-life balance are correlated with company performance. Research from the University of Cambridge found that businesses with workfamily policies were more likely to have above-average labour productivity than those without such policies.

Reinforced Company Values & Increased Brand Equity.

Paid parental leave is a powerful signal that a company is genuinely committed to its employees. BCG evidence shows that many American organisations that offer PPL do so because it reinforces company values.²³ Aside from potentially being recognised as an employer of choice, companies that offer generous and innovative parental leave policies are increasingly likely to be showcased favourably in the media. In 2018 Medibank Private and L'Oreal both introduced 14 weeks of paid parental leave to all new parents regardless of whether they are the primary or secondary carers, and both garnered considerable positive media coverage as a result.

It is cost-effective.

American researchers surveyed 253 employers and 500 individuals about their experiences with paid parental leave and the majority of employers responded that the program had minimal effects on their business operations; 87% said it had not resulted in any cost increases.²⁴

Small businesses, those with 100 employees or fewer, were even less likely to report negative effects of paid family leave than larger organisations. Of the survey respondents with fewer than 50 employees:

91% said the law had a 'positive effect' or 'no noticeable effect' on profitability and performance.

'The gender discrimination around 'fear of hiring women because they'll get pregnant and leave' is no longer an issue because, as one hiring manager said: 'It doesn't matter if you hire a women or a man - both will want to take parental leave and will have caring responsibilities when they start a family.'

PwC Sweden employee

- 89% said the law had a 'positive effect' or 'no noticeable effect' on productivity.
- 92% said the law had a 'positive effect' or 'no noticeable effect' on turnover.
- 99% said the law had a 'positive effect' or 'no noticeable effect' on morale.

When parental leave policies encourage and allow men to take on more caregiving at home, employers can also benefit from a corresponding increase in women's participation at work. An uptake in the number of men caring will ease the motherhood penalty that women face.

At a national level, best practice parental leave policies can help improve women's workforce participation rates, narrow the pay gap, deliver increased productivity and enable more families to more readily combine their work and caring responsibilities.

Implementing best practice PPL policies, in particular schemes that promote and support shared caring, will reduce the financial impact the conflict between managing work and family life has on the economy.

'HSBC Australia is committed to creating an inclusive environment where every colleague is able to bring their full selves to work. This means supporting our employees in every stage of life, regardless of their gender, age, faith, ethnicity, sexuality, responsibilities or physical ability. We believe in gender equality, both at home and in the workplace, and are fully supportive of our staff who are working parents. To achieve this, it is important that we continue to break down gender stereotypes and in particular to continue to advocate men's participation in parental leave.'

HSBC

A vision for reform: What organisations can do to promote shared care

Progressive employers can support shared caring in a number of ways.

'Paid leave, equally shared between mothers and fathers (or in other co-caregiver arrangements), is essential to achieving an equitable distribution of caregiving. The foremost policy recommendation... for the realization of gender-equal caregiving is that governments (and failing that, employers, corporations, and others in the private sector) provide paid, non-transferable, jobprotected parental leave for mothers and fathers, in accordance with the best standards of such policies. Leave should be guaranteed for all caregivers, of all genders, in equal duration, adequately paid, and nontransferable. Anything less reinforces gender inequality, perpetuates women's lesser participation in the paid labor force, impedes women's career advancement relative to men's, and reduces men's opportunity to be caregivers.'

State of the World's Fathers Report 2017²⁵

MEDIBANK RE-WRITES THE 'RULES' ON PARENTAL LEAVE

'All eligible prospective parents, regardless of whether they're the primary or secondary carer, will be able to take 14 weeks of paid leave within the first 24 months. This includes taking leave at the same time as their partner. This significant change sees Medibank leading the way nationally in encouraging equal and shared parenting responsibilities.'

Medibank Press Release - March, 2018

'When parental leave was offered, I knew deep in my heart if I didn't take it that I would regret it for the rest of my life. With Liam I got to see his first four months of life and at the end of those four months I felt like Liam looked at me differently. I feel like there's that bond with my children, that trust that I didn't really feel I had before I took the leave.'

Peter, 36, Business Adviser On leave with Liam for 4.5 months

Rest Practice PPL

PPL policies that facilitate equitable caring have the following key characteristics in common.

They are equal for women and men.

Best practice employers provide the same parental leave provisions and access to PPL to men and women and they ensure gender equal access to parental leave provisions is implicit in the policy wording and communicated clearly to all expectant parents. The policy language used is gender neutral: they do not define parents as 'primary' or 'secondary' carers or assume mothers are the predominate carers.

Leave is non-transferable between parents.

Non-transferable quotas, which are commonly known as 'use it or lose it' provisions or 'fathers' quotas', are one of the most important factors to encourage men's uptake of leave and equal participation in care work. In Iceland, fathers averaged 39 days of leave in 2001 and after the fathers' quota was instituted in 2008 this rose to 103 days.²⁶

Best practice employers offer leave policies allotted as individual entitlements — designated for each parent — offered as 'use it or lose it'. This helps to encourage both men's and women's caregiving and supports a diversity of family structures.

It is paid according to each parent's salary.

To best support new parents and increase men's uptake of leave, PPL must be adequately paid. When it is not paid adequately, many individuals simply cannot afford to take it and this is particularly the case for fathers. Across the European Union insufficient compensation is the most frequently cited reason for men not taking leave.²⁷ In Estonia the uptake of leave among eligible fathers increased from 14% in 2007 to 50% in 2008 after paternity leave benefits were increased to 100% of previous earnings.²⁸ Some studies show men's uptake of leave is highest at an income replacement rate of 80% or greater.²⁹

It is flexible in its application.

Best practice employers empower parents to take PPL in a manner that best suits their circumstances. PPL that is flexible in application includes letting employees take leave at any point during the first few years of a child entering the family and/or enabling parents to take leave in single chunk or by working part-time for a set

period, taking it together or separately. Not being prescriptive about how and when parental leave is taken is key.

It is adequate in length for each parent.

The European Union recommends 16 weeks as the minimum length of leave necessary to adequately support parents in their roles as caregivers and in developing lifelong patterns of equality in caregiving. Best practice employers offer between 16 - 26 weeks.

It is actively encouraged and incentivised.

Having a policy is not sufficient if its use is not actively encouraged. For employer-supported parental leave policies to be successfully implemented, companies must actively develop an organisational culture that encourages the uptake of leave among men. Company leaders and staff managers need to identify informal blocks or stigmas that obstruct uptake and work to remove them in collaboration with human resources and other staff. This requires leadership and commitment.

To be successfully implemented and accessed by fathers in a manner that promotes shared care, parental leave policies must be equal, generous, flexible and supported.

'Scentre Group is committed to parental leave equality – equal rights and opportunities for men and women to share the care. Sharing the caring allows both women and men to pursue their career aspirations, eliminating breadwinner versus carer stereotypes which hold back gender equality progress.

Organisations can encourage men and women to consider their caring role as a part of their career, not a break in their career.'

Scentre Group

Supporting shared care without PPI

If the provision of paid leave is beyond an organisation's reach, there are still a number of initiatives that can be introduced to effectively facilitate shared caring and ease the juggle between family and work. The principles from best practice PPL apply and organisations can consider any or all of the following to encourage it.

- 1. Create a parental leave policy and process. An internal PL policy can make parents aware of the government entitlements they can apply for, explain how to apply for the paid and unpaid leave elements, make provision for staying in touch with employees on leave and outline what support will be available to parents when they are returning to work. This process can also explain any flexible work options that will be available to them and reassure employees about how they will be respected during the parental leave transition and beyond.
- Remove primary and secondary caring labels in policies and allow all eligible employees to apply for leave. Explicitly communicating that men and women taking parental leave is expected and accepted can be powerful.
- Be intentionally supportive and respectful of individuals who take parental leave. Foster a company culture that welcomes open communication about family life.
- 4. Allow parents to use leave concurrently or separately. Let employees choose the arrangement that works best for their family.
- 5. Recognise the significance of a new arrival for all parents, regardless of gender.
- 6. Making flexible working arrangements the norm, rather than the exception, regardless of gender, position or circumstance.
- 7. Provide parental leave and return to work training to employees and managers.
- 8. Be innovative/creative. Consider what arrangements can be designed to achieve a good outcome for everyone. Ask employees what they would like to help make their transition easier.
- 9. Top up the gap between the government PPL and an employee's salary. Doing this for even two or four weeks can make a big difference to a family.
- 10. Create a space for breastfeeding. Offer emergency childcare.
- 11. Provide Keeping In Touch leave. This enables employees on parental leave to return to work for up to 10 days, for which they are paid their usual salary, to stay in the loop at work.

INS is a boutique career-management and HR firm that caters to all aspects of the 'career life cycle' with 45 employees. The business aims to not only create a positive work environment, but provide a structure that allows both mothers and fathers to work equally.

'Our starting point is that there has to balance between work and home, or work and play. I don't call it work and life because it sounds like work is not a part of life, but it is. And there has to be balance between the different parts of your life – and you can't get that if you can't do the things that are critical during working hours,' INS CEO Sophia Symeou says.

After losing two staff members when they left to have children, Sophia felt she needed them back and searched for a way to provide easily accessible and affordable childcare facilities.

Establishing a childcare centre was financially unrealistic but hiring qualified nannies and setting up an onsite creche was something the company could do.

INS acknowledges the difficulty that Australian school holiday times present to parents so there is assistance with Vacation Care Programs available as well as the option of working from home. Employees with older children are able to work reduced hours to accommodate drop-off and pick-up times. Staff with aging parents are also given flexibility for their added responsibilities – leave is given to them in the same way as it is for parents with child-rearing responsibilities.

'I always knew I wanted to be actively involved in the primary care of my children. It was also important that I maintain momentum in my career and equally wanted to ensure my wife had the same opportunity to continue to pursue and advance her own career. That's why I chose to take my paid parental leave flexibly as one day a week over 12 months. This arrangement allows me to be the primary carer for our daughters one day a week whilst continuing to make an impact at work.'

Justin, 32, Consultant. Working flexibly with twins Harriet and Matisse for 12 months.

Conclusion

Australia is lagging in implementing shared parental leave policies that facilitate and promote equal opportunity for women and men to participate in caregiving, which impedes gender equality.

Inadequate policies and practices supporting mothers, fathers and carers result in families and organisations running at diminished capacity.

Employers have a positive role to play in bringing about change. By following the lead of international peers and actively promoting men and women as equal carers, leading employers have the capacity to narrow the gender gap, retain talent and boost productivity.

The provision of best practice parental leave policies that intentionally encourage fathers to engage at home is guaranteed to positively impact gender equality at an organisational level and beyond. It takes a community to raise a child, and that includes the business community.

To read case studies from employers implementing progressive parental leave reform please visit www.parentsandcarersatwork.com.au.

'PwC believes in equal access to parental leave. While 33% of our paid parental leave is taken by men, we still have a way to go for equality of uptake of unpaid parental leave and part-time work. Change comes step by step and allowing parental leave to be taken flexibly, interspersed with days of work, has started to shift attitudes and behaviours. Our targets for increasing uptake of parental leave and part-time work by men will accelerate this change.'

PWC

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