

**BENCHMARKS RELEASE  
SPEAKING POINTS**

**9 JULY 2007**

**INTRO**

I would like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of this land and pay my respects to them.

Thank you for inviting me to be here today.

It is inspiring to see the development of a set of strong, clear benchmarks being put forward for our all political leaders to consider.

I congratulate the roundtable on this fine piece of work.

It will be helpful in providing additional evidence and direction around what's good for families and their children, especially in relation to the role that work plays in the lives of families.

**Work/family balance dilemma**

It is clear from this that the work and family balance dilemma is a concern that has moved from being a fringe issue to being at the centre of how Australian families live.

Like all of us, our elected representatives are grappling with the way our society has evolved and how families have also changed to adapt to the expectations of modern life.

It has become increasingly clear that we can no longer continue to operate on an arrangement of child rearing that no longer exists.

We also can't go back to the days of most families having one wage earner, with another parent taking care of the care of kids and other family members.

Young children and their families have been forced to find ways to fit into – and accommodate - the demands of the new working structures.

Increasingly, it has been our children who have been bearing the impact of societal change.

Our working arrangements need to catch up to the changing family forms or it will be children who will continue to be sacrificed and marginalised.

## **Setting a new standard that is good for kids**

As Barbara outlined, a strong focus of these new benchmarks is on what would be good for families, particularly working mothers.

But for me the more important reason these benchmarks are so crucial is because of the impact these policies can have on kids.

And I suspect for women and men who have children, its also why they're so important.

One of the main driver in their lives is that they care so deeply about their children and want what is best for them.

We know from a growing body of research that children's experiences have a lifelong impact on their health, well-being and competence.

What happens to children now will be with them for next 70 years.

As a society we only have one window of opportunity to give kids a good start to life, to set them up with the strong foundations for a healthy adulthood.

Parents and families are critical to babies and infants' survival so we need to make adults available to them now – they can't wait until it fits with mum or dad's work schedule.

It means as a society, as a business, as a community we need to help parents meet their babies and infants needs.

It means having a greater balance in our approach – where children and their needs are placed at the centre of the debate.

## **Conclusion**

If we are to support families to establish secure and trusting relationships with their young children - and to provide environments that help them grow and develop - we need to make it easier for parents to have the time to do this.

This requires a strong national approach that must keep children's development at the centre of our choices.

Parental participation in the work force should not be at the cost of children's needs or families establishing and maintaining strong and nurturing relationships with their children and being involved in their school and social lives.

Regardless of what political party we choose, as a society it is clear we need to adjust our thinking around how we combine families and work.

How we choose to do this – so that Australian families can better meet their work and family responsibilities - is both a challenge and an opportunity.

We need to make it an opportunity for children's wellbeing and development, not a daily challenge for parents as they struggle to both participate in the workforce and nurture and care for their babies and children.

But above all, we must value the lives of our children and the work of those who care for them.

And if we truly value the lives of our children the policy decisions foreshadowed in this document will be easier to make – and to implement.