

Workplace protections needed for menstruation and menopause, says paper

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As the Australian government announces a Senate inquiry into the

impact of menopause on women's health, careers and finances, academics from the Body@Work Project have published a paper in the [University of Oxford Human Rights Hub Journal](#) examining international law as it relates to reproduction and the right to work.

"It's now nearly universally accepted that pregnancy and childbirth shouldn't impact the right to work, but other reproductive issues—notably menstruation and menopause—have not yet received adequate attention in [international law](#)," said lead author Sydney Colussi, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Sydney.

"This is important for the young woman working a trade on a job site without access to adequate bathroom facilities, for the older professional experiencing hot flushes in an unventilated office, and the hundreds of millions of other workers experiencing potential discrimination every day because of inadequate support."

The researchers examined two human rights conventions, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, to which many countries are signatories, including Australia.

They found these international conventions offer a range of important anti-discrimination protections for pregnancy and childcare, health protections for pregnant workers, the right to paid maternity leave, and some workplace breastfeeding rights—but no explicit recognition of menstruation and menopause.

"There are cases of direct discrimination against workers for these issues, and in the UK, US, and New Zealand, workers have brought anti-discrimination claims alleging [unfair treatment](#) and dismissal related to menstruation and menopause," Ms Colussi said.

"Closer to home, [research from the Australian Institute of Superannuation Trustees](#) suggests that society's attitude to menopause is costing Australian women \$17 billion in lost earnings and retirement savings.

"There are few studies on the role menopause plays in influencing retirement decisions, but in Australia, we know that women retire earlier than men. A recent [Australian Bureau of Statistics report](#) revealed that women retire on average at 54, compared to 59 for men, and 34 percent of retired women relied on their partner's income to meet their living costs, compared to 7 percent for men," she said.

"Australia is also facing a workforce sustainability crisis in feminized industries such as [health care](#), [social assistance](#) and education. All this means it is critical to ensure that menopause is not having an adverse impact on women's careers."

"International law has moved in the right direction in protecting [women workers](#) for pregnancy and childcare, but we have further progress to make to accommodate other fundamental reproductive issues. This is central to the UN Sustainable Development Goals of gender equality and decent work and economic growth."

"The result could be greater equality and economic independence for women and a stronger, more resilient global economy."

More information: Paper: [ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/u ... -Right-to-Work-2.pdf](http://ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/u...-Right-to-Work-2.pdf)

Provided by University of Sydney

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