

# Supporting Choices

**A model for Victorian University campuses to provide and assist with Informed Consent for students with an unplanned pregnancy.**

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# 1. Executive Summary

The act of decriminalising of abortion (currently being undertaken by the Victorian Parliament) is a significant achievement for Victorian women. The legalisation of abortion is the first step in empowering women to make choices about their body, and their lives.

The next step must be to ensure women are able to make genuine choices. It is not good enough just to provide options; our community must support women in the choices that they make.

This report examines the options and support structures available for women when they have an unplanned pregnancy whilst attending University.

The report primarily focuses on the support available for women who choose to continue with their pregnancy. Outside the scope of this report (but equally important) are the barriers that students still face in accessing abortions, which is a particular issue for students at rural and regional campuses.

## Key Findings:

There is little support on University campuses for women who choose to continue with their pregnancy.

At many campuses childcare is not provided, generally there are large waiting lists for expensive and inflexible childcare places that are ill suited to student needs.

Some campuses do not have health care, counselling, housing support, or parenting rooms.

Universities offer minimal financial aid for students with children, though some support is available from the government.

In general, information about support services is inaccessible. Few Universities host a dedicated website for 'students with children', or provide easily available information on their services.

Voluntary Student Unionism has adversely affected many of these services, with Student Unions and Universities scaling back operations and reducing funding to financial aid and childcare.

Due to this deficit in service provision Universities may be indirectly discriminating against pregnant students, breastfeeding mothers and parents in general.

These realities make it very difficult for a woman to decide to continue with a pregnancy and finish her degree.

## **2. Recommendations:**

Action: To be taken by the Federal Government

1. That money is allocated in the Federal Government's \$500 million Better Universities Renewal Funding announced in this year's budget for the building and establishment of new childcare centres at University campuses.

Grants are scheduled to be distributed by June 30 this year.

2. The Federal Government restore funding for campus services, most especially childcare, health care, counselling, parenting rooms, financial aid support and representation and advocacy.
3. The Job Education Training Childcare Fee Assistance is expanded to cover the length of a University degree.

Action: To be taken by the State Government

4. The Victorian State Government fund full time childcare for teaching rounds, medical, nursing and health science placements as part of its strategies to recruit more teachers and nurses.
5. The Victorian State Government establish a website and co-ordinate information on support services available to students with children.

Action: To be taken by Universities

6. That Universities review their equal opportunity policies (and legislation updates) in line with other Victorian Universities.
7. That Universities implement global flexible learning policies, that are made available to identified equity groups which should include pregnant students and students with children (if it is unpractical or undesirable to extend this to the entire student cohort).
8. Universities clarify special consideration policies as they relate to pregnancy and students with children.
9. That all University campuses have bulk billing General Practitioners on campus.
10. Universities offer free counselling at all campuses.
11. Universities publicise the availability of parenting rooms to their students.
12. Universities create dedicated rooms for breastfeeding, changing nappies and general parenting needs.

13. That Universities work towards accreditation with the Australian Breastfeeding Association.
14. That Universities provide targeted financial support for pregnant students and students with children.
15. Those Universities without on campus childcare come to short-term arrangements for their students with community providers.
16. That Universities develop long-term strategies for providing for childcare for students.
17. That Universities reserve places at on site or at local childcare centres for commencing (new) students.
18. That Universities increase the amount of childcare places particularly where lengthy waiting lists exist.
19. That Universities begin to collect and track data on students' family responsibilities at enrolment, and as the situation changes throughout their degrees so it can predict and cater for the demand on its childcare centres and other relevant services.
20. That childcare centres firstly prioritise students, and then staff and finally community members in the allocation of childcare places.
21. That Universities subsidize fees for students, either directly through the childcare centre, or via a rebate directly to students.
22. That Universities subsidize childcare fees during the summer period. Alternatively they need to develop financial plans for their childcare centres that avoid charging fees over this period.
23. That Universities publish timetables for the next semester at the end of the preceding semester.
24. That childcare arrangements are made available to student parents attending compulsory classes outside normal business hours.
25. That University childcare centres provide half day or sessional care rates for students.
26. That Universities provide information for students with children about appropriate housing around University campuses.
27. That Universities consider the needs of students with children in all new on campus housing developments.
28. Universities set up a 'students with children' website to centrally advertise the services they offer for pregnant students and students with children.

### 3. Introduction

Christine Campbell MP requested this report in March 2008 as part of the Victorian Parliamentary Internship program, amidst an emerging debate on the decriminalisation of Abortion.

#### 3.1 Abortion Law & Reform

The Victorian Law Reform Commission 'Law of Abortion' was tabled in the Victorian Parliament on the 29<sup>th</sup> May 2008. The report provides options for the legalisation of abortion that reflects current community practices.<sup>1</sup>

Abortion was legalised in a practical sense for Victorian women by the Menhennitt ruling of 1969. That ruling provides for access to abortion in cases where a women's physical or mental health is threatened.<sup>2</sup>

#### 3.2 Higher Education

In 2008 participation in tertiary education is a critical determining factor for individual success in our society. People with a University education earn more over their lifetime than people who finish their formal education at Year 12<sup>3</sup>. In 2006 the unemployment rate for people with a Bachelor degree or higher was 2.2%, for people whose highest level of education was year 12 it was 4.7%.<sup>4</sup>

Victoria also has a projected shortfall in University graduates from 2008 to 2022.<sup>5</sup>

For a society striving for gender equality, women's participation in higher education is essential if we are to achieve equality in the workplace and provide for equality of opportunity.

#### 3.3 Objective

Genuine choice, for our students and young people, can only occur when our community supports them, whatever decision they make.

A crucial challenge for our community is how we support women continuing with their education when they become pregnant.

The objective of this report is to produce recommendations for how Victorian University campuses might provide or assist with the concept of 'Informed Consent'.

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<sup>1</sup> Victorian Law Reform Commission, 'Law of Abortion Final Report', March 2008  
Available at: [www.lawreform.vic.gov.au](http://www.lawreform.vic.gov.au)

<sup>2</sup> 'Current Law' in Victorian Law Reform Commission, 'Law of Abortion Final Report', March 2008,  
Available at: [www.lawreform.vic.gov.au](http://www.lawreform.vic.gov.au), p16

<sup>3</sup> Michael Gallagher, Director Policy & Planning, Australian National University, 'Which way past the crossroads? - Reflections on Australia's policy directions for tertiary education and research', 2004 Monash Seminars on Higher Education, 6 July 2004

<sup>4</sup> 'Australian Bureau of Statistics, 4102.0 Australian Social Trends 2007 'Qualification profile of Australians', Released 07/08/2007

<sup>5</sup> Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, Office of Training and Tertiary Education (Victorian Government), 'Industry Demand for Higher Education Graduates in Victoria 2008-2022, October 2007

There are seven public Universities operating in Victoria, each with several campuses.

**Australian Catholic University**

Melbourne (St Patrick's)  
Ballarat (Aquinas)

**Ballarat University**

Ararat  
Ballarat; Camp Street, Mt Helen, SMB  
Campus  
Horsham  
Stawell

**Deakin University**

Burwood  
Geelong – Waterfront  
Geelong- Waurn Ponds  
Warrnambool

**Latrobe University**

Albury- Wodonga  
Bendigo  
Bundoora  
Melbourne (Franklin St & Latrobe St)  
Mildura  
Shepparton

**Swinburne University**

Hawthorn  
Lilydale  
Prahran

**Monash University**

Berwick  
Caulfield  
Clayton  
Gippsland  
Parkville  
Peninsula

**RMIT University**

Bundoora  
Brunswick  
City  
Hamilton/Regional Victoria

**The University of Melbourne**

Dookie  
Parkville  
Shepparton  
VCA

**Victoria University**

Footscray Park  
City Campuses  
Footscray Nicholson  
Melton  
Newport  
St Albans  
Sunbury

This report will examine institutional attitudes, academic attitudes and policy and support services; childcare, parenting rooms, counselling, housing support, financial aid, and health care, that exist on each campus.

The report focuses on support services for children up to the age of three years old. This is the average length of a full time University degree – the length of time a student with an unplanned pregnancy might require support from the University.

This report is primarily concerned with ensuring a student with an unplanned pregnancy can finish the initial degree in which they are enrolled at the time of pregnancy.

## **4. Limitations**

### **4.1 Ethical considerations**

Due to ethical considerations and approval, it was not possible to interview University students about their decision making process associated with an unplanned pregnancy.

The relationship between service provision and its influence on decision making is therefore hypothetical and derived from documented experiences of women more generally.

### **4.2 Scope of the report**

The scope of this report was limited to post abortion counselling and pregnancy support services and attitudes.

Equally important in the decision making model, but not investigated in this report, is the provision, accessibility and affordability of abortion services. Abortion services in rural and regional areas are limited.<sup>6</sup> Students at Victoria's rural and regional campuses lack adequate local support in accessing abortion.

### **4.3 Availability of data**

The lack of available data makes it difficult to assess the size of the demand for support services for students with children, or post abortion services.

Universities may collect information on dependents upon enrolment, but do not track changes in parental needs or childrens' ages across the degree(s).

The Australian Bureau of Statistics collects information on students and dependents in the Census, but accessing this information was too costly.

The political sensitivity around the issue of abortion means it is difficult to determine the rate of abortion in the student population.

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<sup>6</sup> Better Health channel and Womens Health Victoria, 'Abortion Services in Victoria', Last updated August 2007. Available at <http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au>  
Victorian Law Reform Commission, 'Law of Abortion Final Report', March 2008  
Available at: [www.lawreform.vic.gov.au](http://www.lawreform.vic.gov.au), Section 3.100- 3.103 'Rural and Regional Issues'.

## 5. Background

### 5.1 Informed Consent

Medical Practitioners have complied with informed consent for abortions, where they provide information about the procedure and associated health risks. The National Health and Medical Research Council sets out guidelines for what this information might include.<sup>7</sup>

There is some community debate about *what* information should be provided in order to satisfy informed consent. Some argue that information should be provided commensurate with other medical procedures (as is outlined by the NHMRC), while others argue that it should include such things as compulsory counselling, cooling off periods and graphic detail about the procedure.<sup>8</sup>

In a strict medical definition and under current guidelines Universities have no part to play in assisting with informed consent, as they are not abortion providers.

Some activists in the abortion debate argue that the services available on a University campus are so influential in impacting a woman's decision, that such information be covered in 'Informed Consent'.

### 5.2 Decision making model

Two thirds of all pregnancies in Australia are unplanned. It is reasonable to assume that this statistic would be much higher in pregnancies amongst University students. It does not generally figure into the plans and dreams of a student, to have a child whilst juggling part time, low paid jobs, with assignments due, and ever impending exams.

On top of the emotional, moral and relationship issues, Family Planning Support services suggest that when a women faces an unplanned pregnancy that they take the following issues into account<sup>9</sup>:

- Would having a child change my educational plans?
- Do I have the energy to raise a child and further my education at the same time?
- Would having a child change my career plans?
- Do I have the energy to raise a child and continue to develop my career at the same time?

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<sup>7</sup> National Health and Medical Research Council 'General Guidelines for Medical Practitioners on Providing Information to Patients', 2004, available at:  
<http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/e57syn.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Article refers to the debate in the USA: Rachel Benson Gold and Elizabeth Nash 'State Abortion Counselling policies and the Fundamental Principles of Informed Consent.', Guttmacher Policy Review, Fall 2007, Volume 10, Number 4.

<sup>9</sup> Dot points from: Children by Choice Association Inc. 'Making a decision...A woman centred approach to looking at pregnancy options', Available at:  
<http://www.childrenbychoice.org.au/nwww/decision.htm>

In addition pregnancy counselling considers practicalities such as housing support, and financial impact.<sup>10</sup>

Holmberg and Wahlberg's study of young men in Sweden and their decision-making process about abortion found 'psychosocial factors' are the main reasons for deciding on abortion. "Typical Reasons included insufficient economic means, ongoing education, and ambivalence regarding qualifications for fatherhood."<sup>11</sup>

While there are many factors that impact on this decision, the ability for a student to continue with her education, and be supported financially, socially and academically is an important consideration.

### **5.3 Why Universities?**

#### Universities as service providers

Increasingly many students access services off campus. The modern student works, as well as studies.<sup>12</sup> University is no longer the primary focus it once was in a student's life. For many students the services available on campus may be irrelevant, if they are also offered in their local community.

For many students, (most especially international students that lack other support networks in Australia), University is central to their daily lives, and is their key service provider.

From a community perspective of providing best service provision for our young people, Universities is well placed to be a key service provider.

#### Universities as academic institutions.

Universities obviously have a key role in determining a student's academic success. Their policies and support for students in this situation will affect how this major life event impacts on their studies and academic success.

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<sup>10</sup> Caroline Chisholm Society 'Pregnancy Counselling Resource Manual', September 2007

<sup>11</sup> Lars I Holmberg, and Vivian Wahlberg, 'The process of Decision Making on Abortion: A grounded theory study of young men in Sweden', Journal of Adolescent Health, Vol 26. No 3.

<sup>12</sup> Richard James, Emmaline Bexley, Marcia Devlin, Simon Marginson, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, 'Australian University Student Finances 2006', Universities Australia, February 2007

## 6. The current situation on Victorian University Campuses

### 6.1 University Policy and Attitudes

University policy determines an institution's attitudes and actions and defines acceptable boundaries of behaviour for its staff. For a student wanting to continue their pregnancy, the attitude of the institution to pregnant students and students with family responsibilities is vital in facilitating her continued education.

University policy is guided by Commonwealth and State Equal Opportunity Legislation that prohibits discrimination of pregnant students and students with children. However at an institutional level there is some variance in their commitment to equal opportunity.

#### 6.1.1 Relevant Legislation:

Sex Discrimination Act 1984

Victorian Equal Opportunity Act 1995

At both a federal and state level people who are pregnant, or have parental status, are protected from discrimination.<sup>13</sup> The Victorian Act also prohibits discrimination on the basis of breastfeeding.

#### a) Discrimination

Discrimination is defined as direct discrimination, which includes denying someone access to goods and services, or admission to an educational institution on the basis of one of the prescribed attributes, (e.g. that they are pregnant).<sup>14</sup>

#### b) Indirect Discrimination

Indirect discrimination is less clear, but basically refers to a person imposing a condition on someone with an attribute that is unreasonable, that they can't comply with, or are unlikely to be able to comply with, as compared with someone without the attribute.<sup>15</sup>

What is reasonable in evaluating indirect discrimination includes the cost of alternative requirements, conditions or practices, and the financial circumstances of the person imposing requirement (e.g. a University) and the consequences of failing to comply with the requirement.

#### c) Accommodation exemption

Exemptions exist for accommodation provision, where it might be unsuitable for children because of design or location.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Sex Discrimination Act 1984, Section 7, 7A

Victorian Government, Equal Opportunity Act 1995, Part 2, Section 6 (ab), (ea), (h)

<sup>14</sup> Victorian Government, Equal Opportunity Act 1995, Part 2, Section 8

<sup>15</sup> *ibid* Section 9

<sup>16</sup> Victorian Government, Equal Opportunity Act 1995, Part 5. Section 53.

### 6.1.2 How this applies to Universities:

Discrimination is prohibited in various areas of public life, but especially mentioned in regard to (among others) educational institutions and service providers.

In applying this to the issue of students with children, if the requirement were an attendance requirement for tutorials to pass a subject, a University would arguably need to put in certain measures to comply with equal opportunity.

Because of a prescribed attribute (parental status), a student with a child may find it more difficult than those without children to comply with the pass requirement of tutorial attendance.

Their requirements might be:

- Childcare while the student is in class.
- The need to bring the child to class if childcare falls through.
- The need for special consideration in this matter if the child is sick, or other complications arise.

#### a) Direct Discrimination and University Policy

All Victorian Universities comply with this legislation through a variety of Equal Opportunity and Anti Discrimination policies, which all state they will not discriminate on the grounds of pregnancy or carer status.

For a list of relevant Equal Opportunity and Anti Discrimination policies see Appendix 1.

#### b) Indirect Discrimination and University Policy.

Some Victorian Universities commit to a greater role in Equal Opportunity, and tackle more indirect discrimination issues within their policy documents.

Within Monash University's '*Work Study and Family Responsibility*' policy they commit to 'eliminate discrimination on the ground of family responsibilities'.<sup>17</sup> They do this through a commitment to a University wide information & advisory service, a family counselling service, support to Monash linked childcare services, and equivalent services on all campuses. They also commit to 'flexible and considerable application of University regulations affecting courses, assessment and academic progress'.

Monash University allows students to bring children into the classroom as prescribed in the *Children on Campus Policy*.<sup>18</sup> It also commits to providing facilities for breastfeeding in the *Breastfeeding policy*.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Monash University, Work, Study and Family Responsibilities Policy, Available at: <http://adm.monash.edu.au/workplace-policy/leave/parental/work-study-family.html> (Accessed on 2nd April)

<sup>18</sup> Monash University, Policy for Children on Campus (Students), Available at: <http://www.adm.monash.edu.au/sss/equity-diversity/student-equity/policies/children-on-campus.html> (Accessed on 2nd April)

<sup>19</sup> Monash University, Breastfeeding policy, Available at: <http://adm.monash.edu.au/workplace-policy/leave/parental/breastfeeding.html> (Accessed on 2nd April)

In Latrobe University's '*Children on Campus*' policy, the University commits to a 'long term aim' of childcare on campus, which is 'readily available and easily affordable'.<sup>20</sup> It intends to be a campus that is accessible, with pram entrances and ramps into buildings, and on campus parents' and breastfeeding facilities. Within their *Work and Family policy*, Latrobe commits to alternative/flexible arrangements for students, in exams and field trip arrangements.<sup>21</sup>

Melbourne University in its overarching *Equal Opportunity Policy* commits to 'continue to work towards the provision of childcare'.<sup>22</sup> In the University *Breastfeeding policy* it commits to providing appropriate facilities for staff and students to breastfeed their children, and refers to existing facilities in the Law School, and Student Union.<sup>23</sup> As per the *Children on Campus* policy students can bring their children into classes.<sup>24</sup>

Australian Catholic University allows children onto campus in its *Children on Campus policy (interim policy)* although includes restrictions and as compared to other University policies does not leave the reader inspired by their commitment to students with children.<sup>25</sup> ACU also commits to providing parenting rooms on each campus for breastfeeding in *Interim Policy on Breastfeeding*.<sup>26</sup> It also provides scope for a student with children to negotiate subject loads.

Ballarat University through its *Children in University policy & procedure and Breastfeeding Infants policy and procedure*, indicates the Universities commitment for breastfeeding and infants to be allowed but make no further commitments.<sup>27</sup>

Victoria University is impressive as a University dedicated to social justice and remedying equity issues. In its *Access and Equity policy for students* it commits to providing support for students requiring extra assistance, personal counselling on all

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<sup>20</sup> Latrobe University, Children on Campus Policy, Available At: <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/equity/eqpols/childpl.htm> (Accessed on 6 April)

<sup>21</sup> Latrobe University Work and Family Policy, Available at: <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/equity/eqpols/famwkpol.htm>

Work and Family Policy (Accessed on 6 April)

<sup>22</sup> Melbourne University, Equal Opportunity Policy, Available at: [www.unimelb.edu.au](http://www.unimelb.edu.au) (Accessed on 2<sup>nd</sup> April)

<sup>23</sup> Melbourne University, Breastfeeding Policy, Available at: [www.unimelb.edu.au](http://www.unimelb.edu.au) (Accessed on 2<sup>nd</sup> April)

<sup>24</sup> Melbourne University, Children on Campus Policy, Available at [www.unimelb.edu.au](http://www.unimelb.edu.au) (Accessed on 2<sup>nd</sup> April)

<sup>25</sup> Australian Catholic University, Interim Guidelines on the Implementation of the Children on University Premises Policy. Available at: [www.acu.edu.au/](http://www.acu.edu.au/) (Accessed on 2<sup>nd</sup> April)

<sup>26</sup> Australian Catholic University, Policy on Breastfeeding (Interim), Available at: [www.acu.edu.au](http://www.acu.edu.au) (accessed on 2<sup>nd</sup> April)

<sup>27</sup> Ballarat University, Children in University Policy, Available at: [http://www.ballarat.edu.au/aasp/equity/ub\\_resources.shtml](http://www.ballarat.edu.au/aasp/equity/ub_resources.shtml) (Accessed on 28/5/08)

Ballarat University, Children in University Procedure, Available at: [http://www.ballarat.edu.au/aasp/equity/ub\\_resources.shtml](http://www.ballarat.edu.au/aasp/equity/ub_resources.shtml) (Accessed on 28/5/08)

Ballarat University, Breastfeeding Infants Policy, Available at: [http://www.ballarat.edu.au/aasp/equity/ub\\_resources.shtml](http://www.ballarat.edu.au/aasp/equity/ub_resources.shtml) (Accessed on 28/5/08)

Ballarat University, Breastfeeding Infants Procedure, Available at: [http://www.ballarat.edu.au/aasp/equity/ub\\_resources.shtml](http://www.ballarat.edu.au/aasp/equity/ub_resources.shtml) (Accessed on 28/5/08)

campuses, financial counselling and loans for students, and affordable and flexible childcare services.<sup>28</sup> The University's *Breastfeeding policy* provides for facilities for breastfeeding and compels lecturers and teachers to provide reasonable flexibility in the study arrangements for breastfeeding students.<sup>29</sup> The *Children on campus* policy allows for Children on campus and reinforces the Universities commitment to the 'long-term provision of on-campus, accessible childcare.'<sup>30</sup>

Victoria University's commitment to anti-discrimination is most evident in its policy on *Managing Pregnancy in Work and Study*.<sup>31</sup> While avoiding making 'stereotypical assumptions' about pregnant women, it obligates teaching staff to provide cases where pregnant women might be disadvantaged. These include: providing access to regular breaks and toilet breaks, avoiding prolonged standing, avoiding long periods outside, and allows for alternative arrangements in the case that a student misses classes or assessment because of pregnancy related illness. Most importantly it provides an advisory service as part of the Equity and Social Justice Branch to help students gain access to the provisions outlined in policy.

RMIT University's, *Children in the Workplace and Classroom*, theoretically allows for children on campus, or at least recognises the need for children to come onto campus<sup>32</sup>. However the policy does not make it clear how a student would apply for a child to attend a class, (as is the case with policies at other institutions) and suggests factors such as a child's age might apply. This policy does not compel teaching staff to allow students to bring children into their classes. There appears to be no Breastfeeding policy, and even the Equal Opportunity Policy is called the Equal Employment Opportunity policy; students seem an afterthought.

Deakin University allows for children on campus by the *Children on Campus Operational Policy, and Procedure*<sup>33</sup>. In the *Supporting Breastfeeding Mothers-procedure*<sup>34</sup> Deakin makes a number of commitments for women breastfeeding. These include providing a dedicated facility on each campus, as well as flexible arrangements such as breaks, feeding during lectures and tutorials, flexible start and finishing times.

Swinburne University appears to have no Breastfeeding policy or Children on Campus policy. Basic legislative compliance is covered in the *Anti Discrimination policy*.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Victoria University, Access and Equity policy for students, Available at [www.vu.edu.au](http://www.vu.edu.au) (Accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> April)

<sup>29</sup> Victoria University, Breastfeeding policy, Available at: [www.vu.edu.au](http://www.vu.edu.au) (Accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> April)

<sup>30</sup> Victoria University, Children on Campus policy, Available at: [www.vu.edu.au](http://www.vu.edu.au) (Accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> April)

<sup>31</sup> Victoria University, Managing Pregnancy in Work and Study, Approved 16 December 2005, Available at: [www.vu.edu.au](http://www.vu.edu.au), (Accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> April)

<sup>32</sup> RMIT University, Children in the Workplace and Classroom, Available at: [www.rmit.edu.au](http://www.rmit.edu.au), (Accessed 28/5/08)

<sup>33</sup> Deakin University, Children on Campus – Procedure, Approved 29 March 2004, Available at: [www.deakin.edu.au](http://www.deakin.edu.au) (Accessed 28/5/08)

<sup>34</sup> Deakin University, Supporting Breastfeeding Mothers – procedure, Approved 23 October 2005. Available at: [www.deakin.edu.au](http://www.deakin.edu.au) (Accessed 28/5/08)

<sup>35</sup> Swinburne University, Anti Discrimination Policy, Available at: [www.swinburne.edu.au](http://www.swinburne.edu.au) (Accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> April)

c) Overall policy

Generally Universities are compliant with legislation and pledge that they are combating indirect discrimination.

Melbourne University, Monash University and Victoria University are remarkable in their policy commitments in this area.

The general attitude towards pregnant students, and students with children are largely positive. At a policy level, Universities seem willing to support students in their choice to continue with a pregnancy.

Whether these commitments are actually provided by Universities is considered later in this report (See Support Services).

It is recommended:

➔ That Universities review their equal opportunity policies (and legislation updates) in line with other Victorian Universities.

## 6.2 Academic Policies

### a) Flexible Learning

Flexible learning policies are essential to allowing pregnant students and students with children to participate equally in higher education.<sup>36</sup>

The technological advances of the Internet, lectures online and pod casting means that barriers that once made it very difficult for people in this situation to study, are no longer a problem.

Lectures online mean a parent can listen to lectures at home, in a time that is convenient. A University education need not be the physical lecture experience it once was.

Flexible learning is increasingly available at many Universities.

However there is often resistance from some academics and faculties. The typical argument against lectures online is that students don't attend classes because it is easier to listen online.

While there are some genuine and valid concerns about flexible learning for the overall University experience, it is important for groups such as students with children that it be made available.

Some Disability Liaison Units offer this service for prescribed equity groups, but pregnant students and students with children do not fall under most Equity and Diversity categories that would gain them access to such services.

It is recommended:

➔ That Universities implement global flexible learning policies, and it be made available to identified equity groups which should include pregnant students and students with children (if it is unpractical or undesirable to extend this to the entire student cohort).

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<sup>36</sup> Richard James, Emmaline Bexley, Marcia Devlin, Simon Marginson, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, 'Australian University Student Finances 2006', Universities Australia, February 2007 p125

## **b) Special Consideration:**

Special Consideration is assessed on a case-by-case basis and thus it is difficult to evaluate as a policy. They sit under the broad Equal Opportunity Policies that prohibit discrimination, so theoretically should be sympathetic to the position of students with children.

However special consideration policies are unclear on the circumstances for students with children.

University special consideration is stressed as being for 'serious' issues; they often list examples such as death of a close family member. It is not clear for example that a student with a sick child would receive special consideration.<sup>37</sup>

Special consideration usually relates to significant events or change in lifestyle. Pregnancy would likely qualify for special consideration. However in most policies there is no acknowledgement of long-term difficulties such as studying with a child and how they might impact on academic success.

It is recommended:

➔ Universities clarify special consideration policies as they relate to Pregnant Students and Students with Children.

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<sup>37</sup> For example: Deakin University, 'Study Support', Available at < <http://www.deakin.edu.au/current-students/study-support/special-consideration.php> > 20 May 2008

Monash University 'Special Consideration', Available at: <http://www.monash.edu.au/exams/special-consideration.html>

## 6.3 Support services

The following support services are important for pregnant students, and students with children:

- Health Care
- Childcare
- Counselling
- Financial Aid
- Housing

### a) Health Care

Having access to a doctor is essential for pregnant students, who require ongoing and regular medical check ups.

Most Universities in Victoria offer this service, bulk billed for local students and international students with overseas health cover.

While this is offered at most metropolitan campuses, often rural and regional campuses are not supported in this way.

Where Monash University Caulfield, Clayton, and Peninsula have access to General Practitioners as well as a campus nurse, Gippsland only caters for a campus nurse.

Similarly Deakin University only has a campus nurse at its Waterfront and Warrnambool whereas there is a full service at Burwood and Geelong Waurn Ponds.

Some Universities have dealt with this problem of servicing smaller campuses by having a relationship with local private providers. As is the case at Monash Berwick and VU Footscray Park.

Others manage to service very small campuses by having a doctor from their metropolitan campus spend one day a week at other campuses. This is the case at Melbourne University where a doctor visits Dookie campus on Thursdays, and three days a week at Victoria College of the Arts.

The following campuses have no doctors on campus:

Australian Catholic University, Melbourne

Australian Catholic University, Ballarat

Monash, Gippsland

Monash, Parkville

Deakin, Waterfront

Deakin, Warrnambool

Ballarat University: Everywhere except Mt Helen.

RMIT: All campuses

Swinburne: Everywhere except Hawthorn

Victoria University: Everywhere except Footscray Park

It is recommended:

➔ That all University campuses have bulk billing General Practitioners on campus.

## **b) Counselling**

### General Counselling

Women will often seek counselling when they first discover they are pregnant. Some women will require counselling, and specific family and pregnancy counselling throughout their pregnancy and once they have children.<sup>38</sup>

Most Universities provide free counselling.

### Post Abortion Counselling

There is significant disagreement on the impact of abortion, and the prevalence of what is termed by some 'post- abortion grief'.<sup>39</sup>

It is reasonable to assert that some women may be emotionally impacted by having an abortion, and that support should be available for those women.

Most University's counselling includes grief counselling.

Most counselling websites also refer to specific family planning and support sites that offer services such as post abortion counselling.

Most concerning is that some Universities do not offer any counselling services.

These include:

Monash University, Parkville

RMIT University, Hamilton/Regional Victoria

University of Melbourne, Shepparton

Victoria University, Newport

Potentially some Latrobe Campuses

It is recommended:

➔ Universities offer free counselling at all campuses.

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<sup>38</sup> Anonymous contributor 'Counselling and Unplanned Pregnancy...my experience', Health Sharing Women: the Newsletter of Womens Health Victoria, v.11, no.2, 2000

<sup>39</sup> Carol Nader, 'A Matter of Life and Death', The Age, 22 March 2008

### c) Parenting Rooms

A basic requirement for students with children is to have somewhere to breastfeed their child, and change their nappies. These facilities known mostly as 'parenting rooms' are surprisingly scarce at Victorian Universities.

When they are available they are not always provided at an appropriate standard. Dinah Humphries, co-ordinator of Family and Childcare services at Monash University commented that parenting rooms are sometimes doubled up as sick bays, or disabled toilets, and are not dedicated space for parents. Monash is in the process of upgrading its parenting rooms as they are seeking accreditation with the Australian Breastfeeding Association.<sup>40</sup>

RMIT Union conducted a review of parenting rooms in 2003 and found them in need of improvement, and poorly advertised.<sup>41</sup>

Whether a University has a parenting room is difficult to find, as they are not promulgated in obvious places on the website, or advertised on campus.

For instance Latrobe University claims to provide breastfeeding facilities on campus, within its policy documents<sup>42</sup>. Ballarat University in review of its Work and Family practices recommended the establishment of parenting rooms in July 2003<sup>43</sup>. Both Universities fail to provide information on the location of these on their website.

For all these recommendations and policy documents, there is little, to no mention of parenting rooms, breastfeeding or changing facilities on campus. Monash University and Australian Catholic University are exceptions to this, as details about their parenting rooms are clearly displayed on their Children's Services site.<sup>44</sup>

Parenting and carer rooms are a key aspect of gaining accreditation as a Breastfeeding family workplace with the Australian Breastfeeding Association. While this relates to Universities as employees, it is a good indication of the facilities provided more generally on the campus.<sup>45</sup>

No Victorian University is currently accredited, while University of Queensland, University of South Australia and Australian National University are all accredited<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> Dinah Humphries, Family and Childcare Service, Monash University, Interview, 21/5/08

<sup>41</sup> RMIT Student Union Student Rights; Childcare @ RMIT, Available at: <http://www.su.rmit.edu.au/rights/childcare.html>

<sup>42</sup> Latrobe University, Work and Family policy, <Available at: <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/equity/eqpols/workandfam.htm>>

<sup>43</sup> Michelle Waters, 'Work and Family Research Project', Ballarat University, July 2003, Available at: [www.ballarat.edu.au/aasp/equity/resources/executive\\_summary\\_and\\_recommendations.pdf](http://www.ballarat.edu.au/aasp/equity/resources/executive_summary_and_recommendations.pdf) -

<sup>44</sup> Monash University, 'Parenting Rooms' Available at: <http://www.adm.monash.edu/community-services/family/parenting-rooms.html>

<sup>45</sup> Australian Breastfeeding Association 'Breastfeeding friendly Workplace: Starter Pack and Application Form', Available at: [http://breastfeedingfriendly.com.au/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=22&Itemid=36](http://breastfeedingfriendly.com.au/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=22&Itemid=36)

<sup>46</sup> Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace, Accredited Workplaces, Available at: <http://breastfeedingfriendly.com.au>

Accreditation was recommended in the Work and Family report of Ballarat University in 2003 and is yet to be achieved; Monash University is currently in the process of applying.

It is recommended:

- ➔ That Universities publicise parenting rooms to their students.
- ➔ That Universities create dedicated rooms for breastfeeding, changing and general parenting needs.
- ➔ That Universities work towards accreditation with the Australian Breastfeeding Association.

#### **d) Financial Aid**

Financial Aid services are available at most campuses. Most have an advisory service that provides advice on areas such as dealing with Centrelink and budgeting. All Universities also have a student loan program, which is interest free and is for students suffering financial hardship.

There is little targeted help for students with children. Taking out a loan with the University is of little help, as it just defers the financial burden to a later date, rather than alleviating it.

Monash University, Melbourne University and Victoria University provides grants (also called Scholarships and Bursaries), to low income students, which many students with children would qualify for. The Monash Support bursaries also target equity groups, which students with children qualify for under the category 'people experiencing long term family difficulties'.<sup>47</sup>

The only targeted financial support offered by Universities is childcare subsidies. Melbourne University directly subsidises childcare places at its own centres, as well as providing a student rebate for students using childcare at any centre.<sup>48</sup> Latrobe University Guild offers a childcare discount for its members.<sup>49</sup>

It is recommended:

➔ Universities provide targeted financial support for pregnant students and students with children.

Government support

There is a variety of government support for students, and for parents, which many students with children can qualify for. The Childcare rebate is very important for lowering the cost of childcare for students. The rates of this have just changed, but should qualify students to receive 50% of out of pocket expenses for childcare.<sup>50</sup>

The Jobs Education Training Childcare Fee Assistance covers most of the Childcare costs for a student. Students who can access this payment pay just 10 cents per hour of childcare while they are studying. However this only lasts for 12 months regardless of the duration of the student's degree.<sup>51</sup>

It is recommended:

➔ The Job Education Training Childcare Fee Assistance is expanded to cover the length of a University degree.

<sup>47</sup> Monash University, Monash University Support Bursaries, Available at: <http://www.monash.edu.au/study/scholarships/opportunities/support-bursaries.html>

<sup>48</sup> Amy Poynter, Melbourne University Children Services, Phone interview, 7/5/08

<sup>49</sup> Latrobe University, 'Student Services- The Guild', Available at: <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/guild/>

<sup>50</sup> Misha Schubert, The Age, 'Middle class wins as Labor boosts child-care rebate', 3 May 2008

<sup>51</sup> Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs 'Jobs Education and Training Childcare from 3 July 2006 Factsheet' Available at: [http://www.familyassist.gov.au/internet/FAO/fao1.nsf/content/publications-factsheets-jet\\_child\\_factsheet.htm](http://www.familyassist.gov.au/internet/FAO/fao1.nsf/content/publications-factsheets-jet_child_factsheet.htm)

## e) Childcare

The accessibility and affordability of childcare on or near University campuses is crucial in students' attendance and participation in higher education.

This was highlighted in the Universities Australia 2007 study into Student Poverty. The report acknowledges that "the lack of affordable childcare no doubt prevents some students from even enrolling...others enrol and continue with their studies handicapped by the need to miss some classes and despite financial hardship."<sup>52</sup>

For those students already studying and faced with an unplanned pregnancy, the choice is not whether or not to enrol, but (presuming they want to continue with their degree) whether it is practical to continue with their pregnancy.

There are several issues raised by students and childcare providers to do with childcare provision at Universities in Victoria.

See Appendix 3 for all childcare providers.

- Provision of on campus childcare

Most campuses have some arrangements for childcare. Some are University run, some are affiliated; run by Parent Management or Community committee, or Student Unions, and some have arrangements with private providers.

The following campuses do not provide childcare, and simply refer their students to 'contact private providers'.

Australian Catholic University, St Patrick's (Melbourne) campus  
Australian Catholic University Aquinas (Ballarat) campus  
Monash University, Berwick campus  
Monash University, Parkville  
Ballarat University, Ararat  
Ballarat University, Stawell  
Ballarat University, Camp Street  
Latrobe University, Melbourne (Franklin St & Latrobe St)  
Latrobe University, Shepparton  
RMIT Brunswick  
RMIT Hamilton/Regional Victoria  
University of Melbourne, Burnley  
University of Melbourne, Dookie  
University of Melbourne, Shepparton  
University of Melbourne, VCA  
Victoria University, Melton  
Victoria University, City Campus  
Victoria University, Sunbury

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<sup>52</sup> Richard James, Emmaline Bexley, Marcia Devlin, Simon Marginson, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, 'Australian University Student Finances 2006', Universities Australia, February 2007

Deakin University, Geelong (Waterfront)

This is the biggest concern for students with children, where there is not childcare centres on the campus, it is impractical to undertake study as a parent at that campus, and presents added and unreasonable challenges for those students.

Childcare provision is centred at University's traditional campuses and at larger campuses; the "newer" campuses tend to be less supported.

However at some campuses the lack of childcare makes no sense, there seem to be no obvious features as to why not.

The students attending Australian Catholic University receive no support in childcare and are directed on to local private providers.

The Melbourne St Patrick campus has a student load of 4630; it is a comparable campus in size to Monash University Peninsula (3314 student load), which operates an on campus childcare centre. It is also in a similar geographical location to Melbourne University, which operates several childcare centres.

There is also a large amount of community demand for childcare in the CBD, which not only prohibits students accessing these private providers they are referred onto, but also would provide community demand to supplement student numbers in any centre that ACU might build.

There seems no obvious reason for the absence of a childcare centre at this campus. Latrobe Mildura has access to a centre despite having a student load of just 305 students. Swinburne Prahran with 1162 students runs a 52-place centre.

Student numbers might be a reason, but some campuses manage to make it work. Deakin University has an arrangement with the local council in Warrnambool to ensure its students have access to childcare.<sup>53</sup> A private provider Books & Blocks is built on Latrobe University land, providing childcare for Latrobe Bendigo students.<sup>54</sup> Many childcare centres supplement student childcare with community users to maintain financial viability and utilisation rates.

As for service provision at non-traditional campuses, this goes to the heart of the issue. Childcare provision is often as a result of historical factors rather than as a result of any sort of comprehensive plan. Childcare exists at many campuses because students and staff set up co-operatives in the 1970's that have remained ever since. As new campuses were built Universities did not prioritise childcare, and decades later students are still waiting for one to be built.

It is difficult to even gain data on the demand for childcare, as Universities seldom collect enough relevant information to predict current or future demand for its services.

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<sup>53</sup> Susan Brown, Assistant Co-ordinator, Warrnambool City Council Childcare Centre, (Deakin Warrnambool Campus), Phone Interview 7/5/08

<sup>54</sup> Anonymous staff member, Books + Blocks, (Latrobe Bendigo campus) Phone Interview 14/5/08

It is recommended:

➔ That money be allocated in the federal government's \$500 million Better Universities Renewal Funding announced in this year's budget for the building and establishment of new childcare centres at University campuses.

Grants are due to be distributed by June 30 this year.

➔ Those Universities without on campus childcare come to short-term arrangements for their students with community providers.

➔ Those Universities develop long-term strategies for providing for childcare for all students.

- Access to existing childcare centres.

Access at many University campuses is a real issue, with many childcare providers reporting waiting lists of well over 100 people.<sup>55</sup> Students studying for an average of 3 years cannot afford to wait over a year to gain a spot in the University childcare centre; particularly in cases of unplanned pregnancy, where the need for childcare is unexpected and more urgent.

Commencing students find this access issue particularly difficult, as childcare places are often allocated from October – January, while courses begin in late February/March. By the time many students are accepted into their course, childcare positions have already filled up.

RMIT recognises this as a problem for its commencing students and reserves 2 full time places at the City Campus Children's Centre for commencing students in recognised equity groups, until mid-February.<sup>56</sup>

It is recommended:

➔ Universities reserve places at on site or at local childcare centres for commencing (new) students.

➔ That Universities increase the amount of childcare places particularly where lengthy waiting lists exist.

➔ That Universities begin to collect and track data on students' family responsibilities at enrolment, and as the situation changes throughout their degrees so it can predict and cater for the demand on its childcare centres and other relevant services.

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<sup>55</sup> Various interviews with childcare providers.

<sup>56</sup> RMIT University, 'Reserved Student Childcare Places 2007, Available at: <http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse/Information%20and%20Services%2FCurrent%20Students%2FStudent%20Services%20Group%2FChildcare%2FInformation%20and%20Services%2F;ID=1rm80lr2xaz4;STATUS=A?QRY=childcare&STYPE=LOCATION>

→ That childcare centres firstly prioritise students, then staff and finally community members in the allocation of childcare places.

- Childcare fees

Many students mentioned the prohibitive cost of University childcare in the Universities Australia survey, with these students relying on relatives and other forms of childcare to avoid the cost.<sup>57</sup> Fees at Victorian University childcare centres range from a daily rate of \$51 to \$80. Many of these students will be eligible for the Childcare rebate, but this is still a major expense for the average student.

Some Universities offer subsidies to alleviate the financial burden of childcare on students. For instance Victoria University and Melbourne University directly subsidise student fees, advertising a student/staff rate and community rate.<sup>58</sup> Melbourne University also offers a student rebate for its students accessing any childcare centre. Latrobe University Guild offers a rebate for Guild members.<sup>59</sup>

It is recommended:

→ Universities subsidize fees for students, either directly through the childcare centre, or via a rebate directly to students.

- University break

Long waiting lists have meant students are forced to pay to hold their childcare place over the summer period when they are not at University.<sup>60</sup>

Undergraduate students who have University holidays from November to March may not require the childcare, and in many cases it may be impractical to use the on campus childcare. As one provider commented, it makes no sense for a student from Hoppers Crossing to drive to Monash Clayton every day over summer just to use childcare.

However the reality for most students is that if they give up their place over that period – when they don't actually need the childcare – they are unlikely to be able to get it back in the next academic year because of the high demand for the service.

Deakin University Student Life department provides a subsidy for low-income students to hold their childcare places over the summer period at the Geelong – Waurin Ponds, Burwood and Warrnambool campuses. This was previously provided by the Deakin University Student Association, and subsequently been taken over by the University, post VSU.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Richard James, Emmaline Bexley, Marcia Devlin, Simon Marginson, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, 'Australian University Student Finances 2006', Universities Australia, February 2007.

<sup>58</sup> Amy Poynter, Melbourne University Children Services, Phone interview, 7/5/08

Mary Olanda, Footscray Park Childrens Centre, Victoria University, Phone Interview, 8/5/08

<sup>59</sup> Jan Lewis, Latrobe Bundoora Community Childcare Centre Phone Interview, 7/5/08

<sup>60</sup> Various interviews with childcare providers.

<sup>61</sup> Sally Young, Deakin and Community Childcare Centre Co-operative, (Burwood campus) Phone Interview 7/5/08

Some University centres do not charge over this period.

An added concern is students are actually increasing their childcare 'use' over this period as they elect to pay full time childcare, greater than they would use during semester, in order to ensure they have a place on the days they require once their timetable is released, normally in late February/March of the next academic year. Once they receive their timetable they drop back to the required days.<sup>62</sup>

This issue of discrepancy between the University academic year and the childcare year presents students with an added financial burden.

In the case of timetabling this could be easily alleviated by Universities releasing timetables at the end of the semester before.

It is recommended:

- ➔ That Universities subsidize Childcare fees during the summer period. Alternatively they need to develop financial plans for their childcare centres that avoid charging fees over this period.
- ➔ Universities publish timetables for the next semester at the end of the preceding semester.

- Childcare hours

Many postgraduate courses and some undergraduate courses demand evening classes. Childcare is only available up to 5pm or 6pm; Universities currently provide no arrangements for childcare for its evening classes.

One student in the Universities Australia survey commented that they had to 'drop subjects due to lectures running later than day care hours'.<sup>63</sup>

It is recommended:

- ➔ That childcare arrangements are made available to student parents attending compulsory classes outside normal business hours.

- Flexibility

One of the biggest challenges for students accessing childcare is flexibility: childcare provision is generally on a daily rate, and requires users to book in a year at a time.<sup>64</sup>

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Lisa Blackwell, Deakin and Community Childcare Centre, (Geelong – Waurn Ponds campus) Phone Interview, 7/5/08

<sup>62</sup> Susan Brown, Assistant Co-ordinator, Warnambool City Council Childcare Centre, (Deakin Warnambool Campus), Phone Interview 7/5/08

<sup>63</sup> Richard James, Emmaline Bexley, Marcia Devlin, Simon Marginson, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, 'Australian University Student Finances 2006', Universities Australia, February 2007.

<sup>64</sup> Various interviews with University childcare providers.

Most University childcare providers charge on a daily basis. Half day and session rates are important in minimising the cost of childcare and better reflecting the schedules of undergraduate students who may have classes scheduled in one to two hour blocks, across the week.

As one student commented:

‘One two hour class means paying for one whole day at childcare centre.’<sup>65</sup>

The following campuses do not offer half day rates:

Deakin University Geelong (Waurm Ponds)

Latrobe University, Bendigo

Monash Clayton (Family Co-operative)

RMIT City

Swinburne Hawthorn

Swinburne, Prahran

The University of Melbourne

It is recommended:

➔ That University childcare provides half day or sessional care rates for students.

- Placements

Extended placements and internships, which require full time attendance, are a significant stress for students with children. For instance teaching and nursing rounds require taking leave from part time jobs and full time childcare for several weeks.

A student in the Universities Australia survey commented “my teaching rounds are difficult as I find it extremely hard to pay for childcare for a full two or three weeks at a time.”<sup>66</sup>

It is recommended:

➔ The Victorian State Government fund full time childcare for teaching rounds, medical, nursing and health science placements as part of it strategy to recruit more teachers and nurses.

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<sup>65</sup> Richard James, Emmaline Bexley, Marcia Devlin, Simon Marginson, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, 'Australian University Student Finances 2006', Universities Australia, February 2007.

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<sup>66</sup> *ibid*

## **f) Housing**

Most Universities do not offer accommodation support for students with children. Halls of Residence are targeted towards single students and students are unlikely to be able to maintain their residence if they become pregnant.

The Equal Opportunity Act provides an exemption for accommodation if the accommodation is unsuitable for children.<sup>67</sup>

Latrobe University offers family accommodation at its Bundoora Campus. The Barnes Way apartment facility is for students with children and families. The University also has a website 'Living on campus with Children'.<sup>68</sup>

Finding appropriate and affordable accommodation for students who become pregnant is a significant issue. They often cannot continue with current accommodation, which might be a Halls of Residence or share house. Finding new accommodation suitable and affordable for children is difficult in the University housing market.<sup>69</sup>

### It is recommended:

➔Universities provide information for students with children about appropriate housing around University campuses.

➔University consider the needs of students with children in new on campus housing developments.

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<sup>67</sup> Victorian Government, Equal Opportunity Act 1995, Part 5. Section 53.

<sup>68</sup> Latrobe University, Living on campus with children, Last updated September 2007, Available at: <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/accommodation/bundoora/children.html>

<sup>69</sup> Mary D'Elia CEO, Caroline Chisholm Society, Interview, 3/6/08

## 7. Accessibility of Information

Generally, information about all of these services is poorly advertised, and not co-ordinated centrally. Monash University has a good website for family and childcare services that are all located on one site.<sup>70</sup> RMIT also had an excellent page for pregnancy/family planning that co-ordinated all of the services, (although it seems to have been taken down).<sup>71</sup> The presentation of information is essential, particularly in web-based format, which is likely to be a student's first, and potentially in some cases the only, evaluation of the services available at their University.

See Appendix 4 for the RMIT information.

It is recommended:

➔ That Universities set up a 'students with children' website to centrally advertise the services they offer for pregnant students and Students with Children.

➔ The Victorian State Government set up a website and co-ordinate information on studying with children.

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<sup>70</sup> Monash University, 'Family and Childcare' Available at:  
<http://www.adm.monash.edu.au/community-services/family/>

<sup>71</sup> See Appendix, RMIT University 'Pregnancy/Family Planning', Previously Available at  
<<http://131.170.40.30/browse/Information%20and%20Services%2FCurrent%20Students%2FStudent%20Services%20Group%2FSupport%20and%20Advisory%20Services%2F:ID=kfdparg4v6moz:STATUS=A>> (Accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> May)

## 8. Impact of Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU)

The Federal Government VSU legislation has had an impact on childcare and financial aid for students with children. Previously these services were largely funded from amenities fees (fees for non-academic services) through student unions. VSU banned the compulsory collection of such fees, and has caused a dramatic decline in available funds for student unions.<sup>72</sup>

Melbourne University student rebate has been decreased, with much of the funding now coming from the University.<sup>73</sup>

Monash Student Association at Monash University Clayton has decreased its subsidy for its childcare centre SWiCh, and has committed to winding up its childcare operations. Monash University intends to build a new childcare centre at Clayton in 2010 to replace this centre.<sup>74</sup>

Deakin University Student Association ceased its funding for the summer break subsidy for low income students, and Deakin Student Life (University department) now funds this program.<sup>75</sup>

RMIT University now runs the City campus childcare centre instead of the RMIT Union.<sup>76</sup>

The childcare subsidy previously universally offered to all students by the Latrobe Student Union (then Guild) has been restricted to Guild members only.<sup>77</sup>

At various campuses student unions have been unable to maintain funding for childcare services and subsidies, forcing Universities to make up the difference using academic fees.

Reduced funding for advocacy and student representation has also impacted many campuses.<sup>78</sup> Women's Officer and Student Rights Officers that previously assisted students with children obtain special consideration and academic support have been cut back or abolished at many Universities.

### It is recommended:

➔ The federal government restore funding for campus services, most especially childcare, health care, counselling, parenting rooms, financial aid support and representation and advocacy.

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<sup>72</sup> Graham Hastings, National Union of Students, 'NUS First Annual Report into The Impact of Federal VSU Legislation', October 2007 Available at: [www.unistudent.com.au](http://www.unistudent.com.au)

<sup>73</sup> Amy Poynter, Melbourne University Children Services, Phone interview, 7/5/08

<sup>74</sup> Mathew Hilakari, President, Monash Student Association, Interview, 1/6/08

<sup>75</sup> Sally Young, Deakin and Community Childcare Centre Co-operative, (Burwood campus) Phone Interview 7/5/08

<sup>76</sup> Margaret Crosbie, City Campus Childrens Centre, Phone Interview, 8/5/08

<sup>77</sup> Jan Lewis, Latrobe Bundoora Community Childcare Centre Phone Interview, 7/5/08

<sup>78</sup> Graham Hastings, National Union of Students, 'NUS First Annual Report into The Impact of Federal VSU Legislation', October 2007 Available at: [www.unistudent.com.au](http://www.unistudent.com.au)

## **9. Conclusion**

The multi-campus strategy pursued by most Victorian Universities has been at the detriment of students' access to affordable on campus services.

Service provision in critical areas, such as supporting students with children, is deficient at most 'non traditional' campuses.

Reasonable access exists on the larger and established campuses of Universities; however regional, rural and newer campuses do not have adequate services.

Yet students are charged the same fees despite what campus they attend and are expected to perform to the same academic standards without the same support.

Where service provision is adequate, information on the services and support is poorly communicated, and/or services are unaffordable for many students.

The listed recommendations are the practical solutions to a multitude of problems. What is really required is greater prioritisation and greater investment in these students. Government and Universities are failing these women, as the harsh reality is that the support mechanisms are not there to allow women to have a child and continue to study. We are not providing our students and young people with genuine choice when they are faced with an unplanned pregnancy.

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