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Mums want real help, not cash as a dangling carrot

The abolition of the baby bonus in the recent budget has garnered mixed reaction. Nicole Madigan thinks it matters less than the fact that governments seem to think cash is the only thing mums want.



Nicole Madigan

Writer

Nicole Madigan is a freelance journalist, writer and communications consultant. Having spent several years... [Profile](#)

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By now, every parent in Australia knows that last night's budget saw the abolition of the Baby Bonus.

The controversial scheme was first introduced by the Howard Government, underpinned by then-treasurer Peter Costello's infamous suggestion that families "have one for mum, one for dad and one for the country."

Designed to increase birthrates and ease the financial burden of having a child, the payment was made available to everyone, regardless of income.

The ALP quickly introduced means-testing, making the payment available only to families earning less than \$150,000 per year.

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Now, Treasurer Wayne Swan has announced that the Baby Bonus will be scrapped from March 1, 2014 (so currently expecting mothers will still receive the payment).

Instead, Family Benefit Tax A will be slightly increased, meaning low-income families will still receive some additional benefit.

Mums have mixed reactions

Reaction to the Baby Bonus's abolition has been mixed.

Some are glad to see the back of a payment viewed as "cash ploy" by the government designed to buy votes.

But others feel that if working parents can expect to be paid while they're enjoying time off with their child through Paid Parental Leave, then it's only fair for stay-at-home-mothers – already struggling on a single income – to receive a similar benefit.

"Some women are not eligible for paid parental leave and the baby bonus enabled them to stay home with their baby," said mum Rosa.

"I don't think anyone considers having a baby just to get \$5k.

"If you believe that, then maybe the government should get rid of all policies for families because they get more from paid parental leave, family tax benefits, child care rebates etc."

They also reject the oft-heard rhetoric that payments are frequently wasted on flat-screen televisions and other non-necessities.

One mother said she used the payments to store cord blood, another said it made the difference between a public and private hospital. Others site IVF costs, nursery furniture and a general easing of the financial pressure brought about when a new baby arrives.

A pat on the head for mums

The extreme differences in the views of Australian mothers on a payment supposedly designed specifically for them is telling.

Coupled with the general confusion about entitlements, it begs the question – does the government have a real understanding of what families need? Do they even want to, or is it easier to simply move cash around, taking from some and giving to others?

When the Baby Bonus was first introduced, many viewed it as a metaphorical pat on the head for mums.

And now it's being ripped away as quickly as it was thrown at us.

Perhaps it's time for the government to stop using cash as a dangling carrot and start listening to the real needs and wants of all mothers, and create long term policies that truly benefit one of the most important demographics in our country.

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