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## Media release

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### **Women's work no 'Magic Pudding' – Leading US economist**

The supply of feminine altruism is being exhausted by the relentless demands of the modern labour market and the unfair distribution of care in the home, according to leading US economist Professor Nancy Folbre.

Unlike the 'Magic Pudding' of Australian folklore, the supply of much-needed care for children, the sick and the elderly is not inexhaustible, and there is evidence that it is drying up. Professor Folbre, visiting Australia from the University of Massachusetts, was speaking at a public lecture for The Australia Institute.

"Having children is not a 'lifestyle choice'", Professor Folbre said. "Raising the citizens of tomorrow is a critical economic function and pays important public dividends. The time and costs involved in caring should not go unrewarded."

"But nor should it be borne disproportionately by women. Men and women have equal obligations to care for dependents, as well as equal rights to pursue their own priorities."

"We should not be tempted to return to a 'mum-stays-home' strategy. Given other options, many mothers would prefer to share both the financial and the time costs of rearing children more equally."

But families cannot do this alone. Professor Folbre argued that Australia is lagging behind the rest of the world in its efforts to ensure that the economy does not penalise those who care for others. She said that conventional economic measures ignore caring for dependents.

The Government should pay less attention to small-impact 'baby-bonus' style initiatives, she argued. Instead, it should instigate a shorter working week together with more flexible work schedules so that it is easier for everyone who has caring responsibilities to combine them with paid employment.

Nancy Folbre is the internationally acclaimed author of *The Invisible Heart: Economics and Family Values*. She is visiting scholar at the School of Social and Political Theory, ANU.

The full text of her speech will be posted on The Australia Institute's website under "What's New" at 1.00 pm today.

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