

Will \$50 help poor families? [CA-ON] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

There will be something extra for Rose Carreiro's 16-year-old twins and almost 1.3 million other low-income children in Ontario when their national child benefit cheques arrive tomorrow.

The extra cash & up to \$50 per child & is the Ontario Child Benefit, announced in the 2007 provincial budget as the centrepiece of the McGuinty government's efforts to cut child poverty.

The province issued a down payment of up to \$250 per child last summer. But tomorrow's cheque marks the beginning of monthly payments that will grow to \$92 per child by 2011. Families with net incomes of \$20,000 or less will get the maximum benefit.

Anti-poverty advocates have heralded the benefit as a historic move that will take children off welfare and help lift families out of poverty.

But some say cuts to welfare and the loss of back-to-school and winter clothing allowances to make way for the benefit will hurt the most vulnerable families.

"For a government that has made a commitment to reduce poverty, your first step shouldn't be cutting an allowance that people count on," said Mary Maronne of the Income Security Advocacy Centre. "They should not be making any cuts before the improvements are in place."

Carreiro, a Toronto single mom, was forced to go on welfare to care for Jonathan, one of her twins, who was born with spina bifida and hydrocephalus. She doesn't know how she will cope without the back-to-school and winter clothing allowances that would have given her an extra \$245 per child this year.

Children's Minister Deb Matthews, who heads the province's poverty reduction cabinet committee, has asked municipalities & which will see welfare savings as a result of the restructuring & to help families adjust. And many have plans in place, she said.

Toronto will be giving families on welfare \$246.95 per child in mid-September to make up for the loss of the two allowances, said Darrin Vermeersch of the city's social services division.

Advocates' other concern is that as children are being moved off welfare, benefits to parents are being reduced by different amounts, meaning some families will end up better off than others and almost none on welfare will see a \$50 per child increase in their monthly income this year.

According to the advocacy centre, a couple with one child under age 13 will see a \$45.75 per month net change. A single mother with a teen will end up with about \$11 more per month when this year's federal child benefit increase is included.

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Matthews acknowledges families with younger children will see bigger increases than those with older children. But the amounts are small and affect a relatively small number of children, she said. Of the nearly 1.3 million children who will get the new benefit, just 195,000 of them are in families on social assistance.

It's a bitter pill for Carreiro, who doesn't see returning to her job as a medical secretary anytime soon due to her son's condition.

"We're living so far below the poverty line now, I don't see how any of this helps very much," she said.

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

Region: Ontario ^[2]

Tags: poverty ^[3]

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/08/07/will-50-help-poor-families-ca> [2] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7856> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/poverty>