

Parents go gaga over revamped leave program [CA-QC]^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Nurturing baby Michael has been Alba Mosca's full-time job for the past 14 months. Within two weeks, a new adventure is set to begin with the arrival of baby No. 2.

Thanks to a change in Quebec's revamped parental-leave program, Mosca did not have to return to her regular job between babies to qualify for benefit payments.

For Mosca and many other birth and adoptive mothers, the new parental-leave plan that kicked in yesterday also means higher payouts and more priceless time with their newborns.

The St. Leonard mother plans to take 50 weeks of leave - half at 70 per cent of her salary, the rest at 55 per cent.

"I'd rather stay home longer with my children than get paid more," said Mosca, 29, a project administrator at a Montreal high-technology firm.

"Time with your kids when they're this small is so valuable."

Mosca will have help from her husband, Jeffrey Kearsey, in the early weeks of their second baby's life.

Kearsey, a 28-year-old technical-services co-ordinator at a Montreal company, plans to take five weeks at 70 per cent of his salary, taking advantage of a new paternity-leave option.

The new program, run by the Quebec government, replaces one administered by Ottawa.

The province says it wants to encourage Quebecers to have children and to spend more time with their newborns.

The maximum amount parents can receive is higher, allowing them to take more time off without suffering as much financially.

The new plan also does away with the old program's two-week waiting period. Parents choose between a "basic plan" (lower benefits spread over a longer period) and a "special" plan (higher benefits over a shorter period).

For the first time, self-employed workers like doctors, hairdressers and accountants are eligible. Also, to qualify, Quebecers are no longer required to have worked a certain number of hours in the previous year. Instead, they must have earned at least \$2,000 in the 52 weeks before benefits begin (or in the previous 104 weeks if maternity leave interrupted work).

Dads now have exclusive access to "paternity benefits" of three to five weeks. As in the old plan, they can also share "parental benefits" of up to 32 weeks.

- reprinted from the Montreal Gazette

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