

# It's 2015, and time for a more inclusive parental leave program <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

One election promise made by the Liberal party was to change parental leave provisions for Canadian parents. Now that you are Prime Minister, please do change parental leave. But when you do, we urge you to carefully consider what changes should take priority.

As you have argued so well, parents want more flexibility in their parental leave options. We agree that extending parental leave to 18 months is a good idea. However, these changes fail to address a key, and yet little known, problem: 40% of mothers who contribute to Employment Insurance (EI) are not eligible for maternity or parental leave benefits. These mothers, and a growing number of fathers, are employees without sufficient hours to qualify. They want access to paid leave to care for their infants.

Our research on parental leave points to how, increasingly, there is a problem of two classes of Canadian families: the "parental-leave rich" and "parental-leave poor." Your election promise to improve benefits for eligible Canadians is welcome, but it does not address, and even exacerbates, this growing divide. Instead, let's begin with inclusion, and then improve leave benefits for everyone.

A good start would be equalizing the playing field across the provinces by giving all Canadians what Québécois children and parents have benefitted from for the past decade. For example

- 3-5 weeks of paternity leave. Only in Québec do fathers have access to this "use it or lose it" individual entitlement, which international research studies demonstrate provides important leverage for men to lay claim to their right to take leave from work to care.
- lower eligibility criteria: \$2000 in total earnings is the minimum to be eligible for parental leave in Québec compared to 600 hours over the 12 months prior to a child's birth in other provinces.
- a higher wage replacement rate. In Québec this is 55% and 70% split over 50 weeks, or 75% for 40 weeks compared to 55% under EI (which was originally 67%) in the rest of Canada.
- higher ceilings on earnings in Québec. Québec parents receive about \$20,000 more in parental leave benefits than do parents in the rest of Canada.

What have these differences led to? Québec is currently achieving far greater gender and socioeconomic equality of access to parental care for their newborn children than other Canadian provinces because of its higher income replacement rates, higher ceilings on earnings, dedicated paternity leave, and lower eligibility criteria. Now, there are three startling differences between Québec and the rest of Canada:

- 30% more Québécois mothers receive maternity leave parental leave benefits than mothers in the rest of Canada
- For families earning less than \$30,000/year, 85% of Québécois mothers receive maternity leave and parental leave benefits versus 37% of such mothers in the rest of Canada.
- While only 12% of Canadian fathers take parental leave, Québec's paternity leave provision has led to over 80% of Québécois fathers caring for newborns for 3 to 5 weeks. This means that employers are now seeing men, not just women, as potential leave-takers when children are born.

Your government is off to a very promising start. As gender and class equality advocates, we are excited about your vision of equality for all Canadians. We are thrilled that you have appointed a cabinet with gender parity. But you can do more to fulfill your promise of "change."

As a father of young children from Québec, you are well placed to create an inclusive parental leave system. How? By extending the Québec parental leave model to the mothers and fathers in the other nine Canadian provinces and three territories. This would begin to

lay a foundation for increasing gender and class equality in the care of Canadian children. Why is that important? "Because it's 2015," yes. But also because it's almost 2016. It was a full decade ago, in 2006, that Québec, your home province, implemented its more inclusive parental leave program. What is good for Québécois parents and children is good for all Canadians.

-reprinted from Rabble

**Region:** Canada <sup>[3]</sup>

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**Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022):** <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/15/11/its-2015-and-time-more-inclusive-parental-leave-program>

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