



child care

# BRIEFing NOTES

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## Proposed changes to Canadian maternity and parental leave – October 2016

This BRIEFing NOTE provides readers with information regarding policy changes made to maternity and parental leave in Canada.

### Background and context

Paid maternity leave was first introduced in Canada in 1971. Since that time, improving it has been discussed on a regular basis. The duration of family leave benefits increased considerably when parental leave was added in 1990 and increased in 2000 but outside Quebec, improvements in other areas have not been made.

Responsibility for maternity and parental leave in Canada is split between federal and provincial/territorial governments, with the federal government responsible for benefits (payment) under Employment Insurance and provincial/territorial governments determining characteristics (such as duration) of job protected leave. Since 2006, Quebec has had its own program, the Quebec Parental Insurance Program, specifying both benefits and leave provisions.

Today Canada's maternity/parental leave program outside Quebec is considered to be less than adequate (see, for example, [The Child Care Transition](#), UNICEF, 2008) especially when compared to the advances that many of Canada's peer nations have made in the last two decades. Among the key identified problems with the Canadian program are: the absence of a paid leave earmarked for fathers; exclusion of many new mothers and fathers who do not meet the eligibility requirements; low benefit payment levels; multiple inequities between groups of parents by region, socioeconomic and job status, by status as adoptive parents or in the case of multiple births, by gender identity and between men and women.

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### Changes to maternity and parental leave

Over the years, there have been multiple recommendations for improvements to family leave in Canada. For example in 2009, the Standing Committee on the Status of Women recommended that "Human Resources and Skills Development Canada make maternity and parental benefits as flexible and equal as the Quebec

Parental Insurance Plan by expanding eligibility, benefit levels and duration of EI benefits".

In the 2015 federal election, the Liberals made a commitment to work with provinces to introduce new parental leave options, stating that these would "provide more flexibility and security - without increasing employment insurance".



In October, 2016, the Government of Canada released a discussion paper and consultation materials for considering two new options for eligible Canadians who are off work to care for a newborn or a newly adopted child, in addition to the current

possibility option of a combined 12 months of maternity and parental benefits.

The federal government is asking for online input between Oct 6 and Nov 4 with regard to the proposed new options and for other suggestions.

## Resources

The purpose of this BRIEFing NOTE is to inform discussion about the kinds of changes to maternity and parental leave that would support families and women. The list of resources (all available online) is a preliminary one. We will add additional resources as they become available.

Please see also the attached table on Canadian and Quebec Family Leave Benefits which provides an overview of type, length and payment caps on family benefits in Canada.

Cox, R. and Rose, R. (2007). [\*Improving maternity and parental benefits for women outside of Québec: proposals for law reform\*](#). National Association of Women and the Law (NAWL). Available online.

Doucet, A., Lero, D.S., McKay, L. and Tremblay, D.-G. (2016) Canada country note, in: Koslowski, A., Blum S. and Moss P. (eds.) [\*International review of leave policies and research 2016\*](#). Pg. 78. Available online. Extensive comparative material at beginning of report and in tables. This Canada chapter has a detailed description of the Canada/Quebec programs. Tables beginning on pg 34 and 38 are particularly interesting.

Hull, J. (2013). [\*Potential barriers to Aboriginal teenaged mothers' access to maternal and parental benefits\*](#). *International Indigenous policy journal*. Vol. 4, Issue 1. Available online.

International Labour Organization. (2016). [\*Maternity and paternity at work. Law and practice across the world\*](#). Geneva: Author. Available online. See international comparison tables in Appendices.

McKay, L., Mathieu, S. and Doucet, A. (2016). [\*Parental-leave rich and parental-leave poor: Inequality in Canadian labour market based leave policies\*](#). *Journal of industrial relations*, Vol. 58(4) 543-562. Available online.

Patnaik, A. (2015). [\*Daddy's home! Increasing men's use of paternity leave\*](#). A briefing paper prepared for the Council on Contemporary Families (University of Texas at Austin). Available online.

Standing Committee on the Status of Women. (2009). [\*Towards Improving access to EI benefits for women in Canada\*](#). Available online.



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TD Bank Financial Group. (20 ). [\*Career interrupted: The economic impact of motherhood\*](#). TD Economics Special Report. Available online.

Turgeon, L. (2011). [\*Reforming EI Special Benefits: Exploring alternative financing and delivery options\*](#). Toronto: Mowat Centre, University of Toronto. Available online.

## **Current maternity/parental benefit websites**

[Information about the Quebec Parental Insurance Program including a benefit calculator](#)

[Information about Canada's maternity/parental leave benefits](#)