



Stakeholder Roundtable Summary: Employment Insurance Special Benefits Consultations

November 18, 2016

As part of the Government of Canada's consultation on Employment Insurance (EI) special benefits, the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development hosted a stakeholder roundtable in Ottawa on November 18, 2016.

Participants included representatives from the medical community, health charities, family advocacy groups, labour groups, and business associations. The roundtable provided stakeholders with an opportunity to share their views on EI maternity, parental and compassionate care benefits and corresponding leaves under the *Canada Labour Code*.

As part of the consultation process, some stakeholder groups also sent in written submissions. The following is an overview of all the comments and suggestions shared by over 50 stakeholder groups.

With respect to caregiving benefits and leaves, we heard from stakeholders that:

- There are increasing pressures on caregivers due to the aging population;
- Caregivers often turn down promotions or reduce work hours to provide care to family members, and may not be eligible for benefits if they have insufficient hours;
- Eligibility for the compassionate care benefit should not be limited to those at risk of death within 26 weeks; it can be challenging for medical professionals to accurately predict the timing of death and some are uncomfortable signing the current medical certificate;
- Non-business stakeholders recommend the expansion of eligibility requirements for benefits to include individuals caring for someone with a critical illness, a long-term chronic or episodic condition, or with significant care requirements;
- Eligibility for caring for critically ill children should be expanded to any family member and not limited only to parents;
- The compassionate care benefit and leave should be extended after the care recipient dies;
- Partial weeks of benefits over a longer period should be allowed, so caregivers can be at work when they are not providing care;
- The impact of premium rates on employers, especially small businesses, requires careful consideration;
- EI compassionate care benefits should be better promoted;
- Professional care providers, family members and employers need to improve cooperation to help ensure caregivers remain connected to the labour market;
- There is concern that provinces and territories may scale back home care services if federal supports for caregivers are expanded;
- Other health and social services also need to be expanded, including hospice care and home care.

With respect to maternity and parental benefits and leaves, we heard from stakeholders that:

- Many women cannot afford or are ineligible to take benefits;
- Adopted children, who are often older (i.e., not infants) have different needs and require more time to bond with their parents;
- Allowing early maternity leave is a health and safety issue;
- A longer period of maternity/parental leave could have impacts on women's career development;
- Business stakeholders expressed strong concern with allowing an extended 18-month leave to be taken in blocks of time;
- Small businesses are concerned with the direct and indirect costs related to backfilling positions, as well as increased EI premiums;
- Quebec offers a comprehensive model of maternity and parental benefits and leaves that should be considered;
- Accessible affordable child care remains a widespread need.

Stakeholders also offered comments and suggestions relating to all EI special benefits:

- Consideration should be given to incenting employers to offer top-ups and/or introducing a minimum benefit threshold to ensure sufficient financial support is provided;
- New family structures create the need to let families define themselves so that non-traditional parents and caregivers (e.g., grandparents) are able to access benefits and leaves;
- The review of special benefits also needs to include a discussion of potential changes to EI sickness benefits, including extending the duration of sickness benefits; and
- Business stakeholders recommend a 50/50 split in EI premiums between employees and employers.