

Report advocates for adoptive parent leave

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A new report calling for paid "attachment leave" for newly adopting Canadian families is reaching the ears of policy-makers in Ottawa, where advocates hope their call find its way into federal party platforms.

The just-published "[Time to Attach: An Argument in Favour of EI](#)

[Attachment Benefits](#)" makes the case that Canada should offer the same paid leave to [adoptive parents](#)—15 weeks at a rate of 55 per cent of average weekly earnings—as received by women after giving [birth](#). While the [report](#) highlights the needs of adoptive parents to bond with their children, its main intent is to draw attention to children's need to attach to their new families.

"The focus is on the children and their best interests. Children need this time with their parents," said Carolyn McLeod, lead author and a professor in the departments of Philosophy and Women's Studies & Feminist Research. "The fact that there isn't equal leave suggests there's a lack of understanding of the complexity of bringing a child into your home who isn't born to you."

Adopted children often need more time forming secure attachments to their new parents because of the youngsters' history of disrupted [family relationships](#), states the report produced for Adopt4life (A4L): Ontario's Adoptive Parents Association and the Adoption Council of Canada (ACC).

There was virtually unanimous support among 1,000 parents and caregivers interviewed for attachment leave. A majority of respondents also said their child had academic, physical and mental-health needs that would have benefited from their having more time with a parent at home.

The group put its case before Members of Parliament and policy-makers in February, and again at the end of April. They have had meetings with officials of the major federal parties and received broad-based support, McLeod said.

With an election coming up in October, McLeod doesn't count on any changes taking place in the next few months but, "hopefully, you will see

this on some platforms."

The estimated [annual cost](#) of providing attachment leave would be \$12 million-\$20 million, based on about 2,300 adoptions in Canada each year.

McLeod and her group are preparing another report that identifies the savings, in forgone costs of mental-health counseling and educational supports, additional leave time could bring. "If the children were better attached to their parents before their parents went back to work, they would need fewer services later on," she said.

Adoptive parents, like birth parents, receive [parental leave](#) of as much as 35 weeks at 55 per cent of their weekly earnings, or 61 weeks at 35 per cent of earnings. Women who give birth are also entitled to 15 weeks of maternity benefits.

Yet, unique challenges accompany an adoption, the report says. "The purpose of maternity benefits is to respond to the special challenges that accompany pregnancy and birth. But there are no comparable benefits for adoptive parents, none that respond to needs that are unique to their families compared to biological ones. What the system does, then, is treat [adoption](#) as though it is parenting minus pregnancy and birth."

Instead, the report says, Canada should follow the lead of many other countries—Denmark, Germany, New Zealand, Australia, Sweden and the UK among them—that offer equal benefits to birth mothers and adoptive [parents](#) and caregivers.

More information: Time To Attach: An Argument in Favour of EI Attachment Benefits. *Adopt4life (A4L): Ontario's Adoptive Parents Association and the Adoption Council of Canada (ACC)*, Western University. 2019.

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