

Adoptive parents seek longer leave

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Western researchers are leading a national push for 15 more weeks of work leave for adoptive parents as an important way to strengthen the bond between parents and their adopted children.

Biological and adoptive parents currently receive [parental leave](#) of up to 35 weeks; biological mothers receive an additional 15 weeks of maternity leave.

"There are unique challenges that come with adoption, and there are unique challenges that come with biological parenting too, and we think the 15-week maternity leave responds to that," said Philosophy and Women's Studies & Feminist Research professor Carolyn McLeod.

"The problem is there isn't a similar leave for parents who provided permanent homes for children in care.

The team's main partner is Adopt4Life: Ontario's Adoptive Parents Association, of which McLeod is chair. McLeod said the 'attachment leave' would offer adoptive parents caregivers and children more time to address the unique needs of adoptive families.

"We want to call this 'attachment leave' because these children have suffered trauma, loss and they need to grieve and heal," she said.

"They are strangers at the beginning and often these kids are older too. We know that kids in care, a disproportional number of them, do have mental and physical health challenges. They are challenges that may go away if they're cared for well in a permanent home," McLeod said.

"The face of adoption is different than what most people picture," said Cathy Murphy, executive director of the Adoption Council of Canada. "The reality is that most children or youth awaiting adoption in Canada are older, many over the age of 10. Many have experienced trauma and have complex needs. A 15-week attachment leave is long overdue to help support these children or youth and their parents."

McLeod and other [community partners](#) recently travelled to Ottawa to meet with several MPs and policy advisors to advocate for this new class of employment insurance benefits for adoptive parents, kin caregivers and customary caregivers.

The latter involves the placement Indigenous children with someone who isn't their parent, but in accordance with the child's band or community.

As part of their research, McLeod and her Time to Attach team, which includes a number of graduate students, surveyed almost 1,000 adoptive parents, kin, and customary caregivers.

About 75 per cent believed the current employment insurance benefits did not give them or their children enough time to adjust to their new family.

Researchers also asked survey participants about the complex challenges that their children experienced, such as navigating an openness agreement with birth [parents](#), mental health challenges or a [physical disability](#); 84 per cent reported two or more significant challenges and 40

per cent reported five or more challenges.

McLeod said the data about the realities of adoption supports the need for an attachment leave.

"This is an issue that is close to the heart of many [adoptive parents](#)," said McLeod. "It's no longer about bringing a newborn baby to your home who hasn't suffered in any way. There are over 30,000 [children](#) in child welfare in Canada and many are over the age of 10."

She added the initial response received from their recent trip to Ottawa was positive.

After conducting additional research – including short-term costs and long-term savings among other findings – the group will return to Ottawa again in February for further advocacy.

"Outcomes if they stay in foster care, or age-out of foster care, are very poor. I'm confident it's going to happen. (It's only) a matter of when. There is a lot of momentum behind this now," said McLeod.

Provided by University of Western Ontario

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