

# Time to Attach

## Canadian Parental Leave Benefits Study Preliminary Findings

Researchers from Western University are currently partnered with Adopt4Life–Ontario's Adoptive Parents Association to study parental leave benefits in Canada.



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# An Argument for Attachment Benefits

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There is a problem with Canada's system of parental leave benefits. The problem is that it fails to recognize the unique challenges that adoptive parents face<sup>1</sup>. Consider that these parents are eligible only for what the government calls 'parental benefits,' whereas biological parents are eligible for parental benefits *plus* 'maternity benefits.'<sup>2</sup> 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 their unique needs as adoptive parents.

Ultimately, what the system does then is treat adoption as though it is *parenting minus pregnancy and birth*, which it clearly is not.

Central among the unique challenges that adoptive parents face is that of encouraging their child<sup>3</sup> to attach to them as their parents. To be sure, all parents can experience difficulties with attachment and bonding. But the difficulties are heightened and much more common with adoption than with biological reproduction.

Adopted children often have trouble forming secure attachments to their new parents, understandably so given the kinds of experiences they tend to have before being adopted. Relevant experiences include the loss of an attachment or connection to birth parents, maltreatment by parents or caregivers, and multiple placements from foster care. The result is often an 'insecure pattern of attachment,' as it is called in the literature. This condition affects not only one's ability to form attachments with others, but also one's overall social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development.

Despite these difficulties, adoption has been shown to be effective in helping children develop more healthy patterns of attachment. This outcome takes time, however, as well as patience and commitment on the part of adoptive parents. It is particularly important that adoptive parents have time at the beginning of an adoption placement to help their child grieve the loss of previous attachments or minimize that loss

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<sup>1</sup>This argument centres on adoptive parents, although a similar argument could be made for customary or kin caregivers (only some of whom legally adopt the children in their care). We focus on adoptive parents for simplicity but also because we simply have more data on them than we do on customary and kin caregivers. We hope to gather more data on these other groups in the future.

<sup>2</sup>To clarify this system, the following benefits are available to parents who qualify for EI:

- Maternity benefits (15 weeks) for biological mothers;
  - Standard (35 weeks) or extended (61 weeks) parental benefits for parents of a child or children who was/were born to them or placed with them 'for the purpose of adoption.'
- Customary or kin caregivers can also qualify for parental benefits, but only if they have adopted the child in their care, or commit, at the time of placement, to adopting this child.

<sup>3</sup> For simplicity, we refer to a single child, although some parents do adopt a sibling group.

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through openness to kin, where that is appropriate. At the same time, they need the child to start attaching to them as their parent, which in turn will help them bond to the child.

Attachment is therefore a challenge with most adoptions, and this makes adoption unique compared to biological parenthood. There are, of course, other special challenges that arise in the context of adoption. An example is caring for a child with physical or mental health needs, since adopted children are overrepresented among children with these needs. But the problem of having one's child attach to you as their parent is more widespread among adoptive parents. It is also important that these parents see some progress in overcoming this problem in the early stages of an adoption. Otherwise, they can become seriously disheartened and can even give up on the adoption, which may be the worst possible outcome for the child.

In short, adoption is *not* parenting minus pregnancy and birth. Instead, it involves providing love and security to a child who once had these things but lost them or who may have never had them before. The Canadian government should recognize this fact and also value adoption. It should therefore create a whole new category of benefits: attachment benefits for adoptive parents. The details we recommend for these benefits are the following:

- In terms of the benefit rate and number of weeks one can receive them, attachment benefits should, at the very least, be equal to maternity benefits (and thus available at a rate of 55% of average weekly insurable earnings and for 15 weeks).
- Like maternity benefits, they should be available as early as 12 weeks before the expected date of arrival of the child and as late as 17 weeks after that date (i.e., because the transition toward or preparation for bringing a child into one's home after being matched with them can take place over a number of weeks, or even months).
- Where there are two adoptive parents, rather than a single parent, either parent should be eligible for attachment benefits.
- These benefits should be offered in addition to parental benefits.

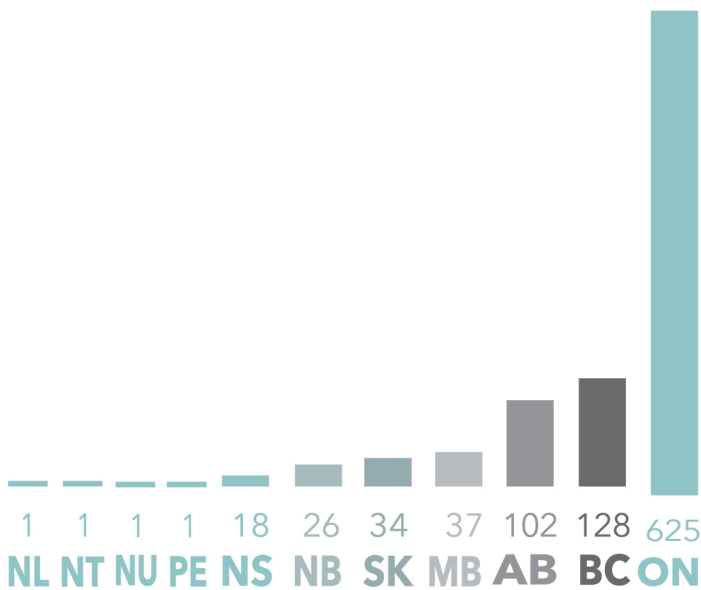
In the report that our research team at [timetoattach.com/team](http://timetoattach.com/team) is writing, we advocate for the introduction of attachment benefits, which will allow for what we call 'time to attach': that is, time for adopted children to attach to their new parents. We argue that:

- adopted children need time to attach
- adoptive parents want time to attach (as our survey of 974 parents reveals)
- time to attach saves government money in the long-term
- international standards (e.g., UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) support time to attach

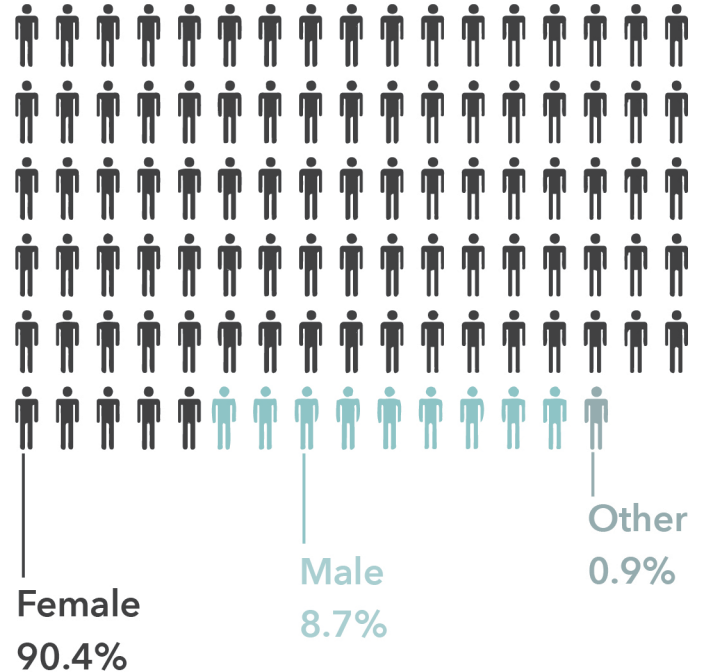
### Participation Numbers

Received Responses **974**

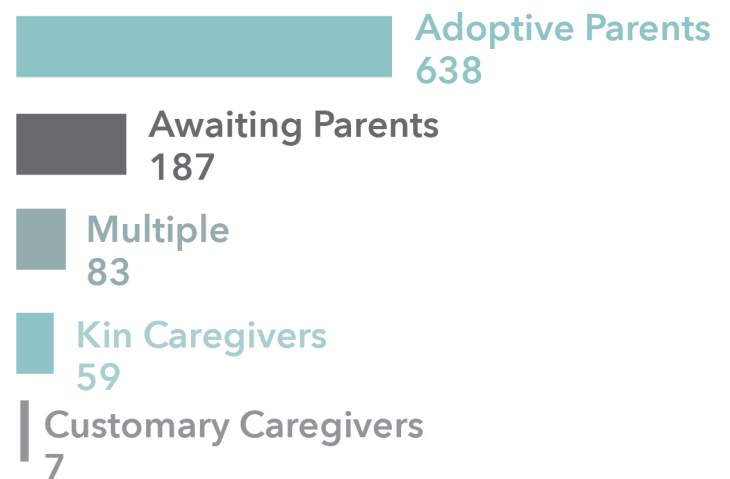
### By Province/Territory



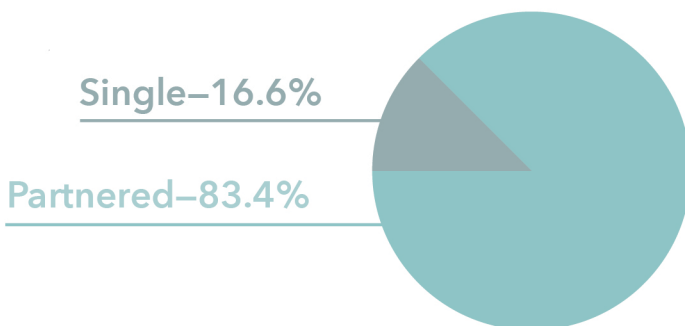
### Gender



### Type of Caregiver



### Marital Status



# Time to Attach Survey Results

## Experiences of Children

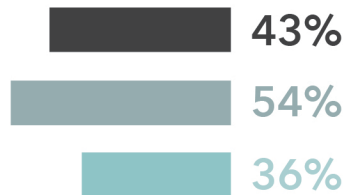
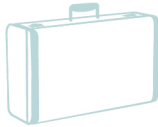
Adoptive Children

Customary Care Children

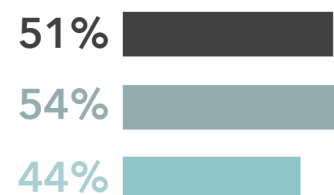
Kin Care Children



### Significant sadness during transition



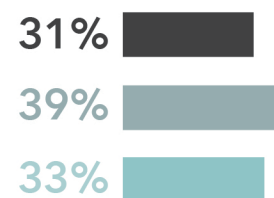
### Complex and/or special needs



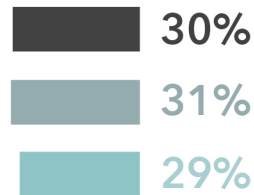
### Mental health challenges



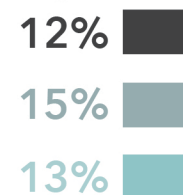
### Mental health diagnosis



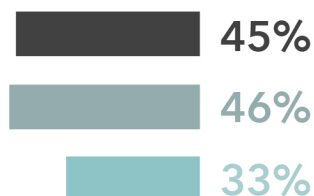
### Physical health challenges



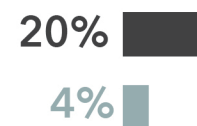
### Physical disability



### IEP at school



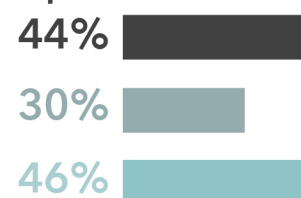
### Different language of origin



### Contact with birth family



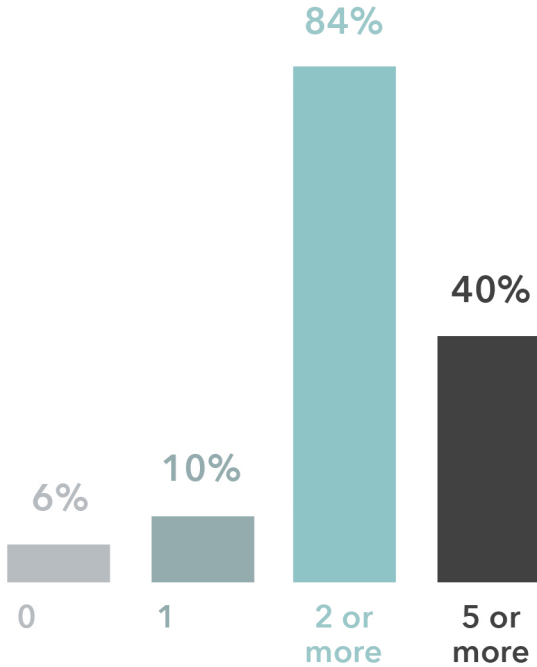
### Openness order or agreement



# Time to Attach Survey Results

## Parents and Caregivers on Employment Insurance

Number of Child characteristics reported by respondents



**84%**  
Disagree

The amount of parental leave income available to new adoptive parents is adequate.



**94%**  
Agree

Adopted children and their families would benefit from a 15-week attachment leave.

**88%**  
Agree

If a 15-week leave was available, I would have taken it.



The parental leave benefit system prevented me from adopting a sibling group.

**16%**  
Agree

**76%**  
Agree

The parental leave benefit system did not provide me with the time needed to adjust to parenting.

The parental leave benefit system prevented me from adopting a child with complex/special needs.

**21%**  
Agree

**72%**  
Agree

The parental leave benefit system did not provide enough time for my adopted child(ren) to adjust to a new family.

