



Top 5 family issues of 2015

BY IMFC STAFF



As the year ends, it's clear that 2015 has been pivotal for families. Decisions made by our legislatures and courts will impact Canadian families in various ways – from how we raise our children and manage our finances to how we will die.

1. Euthanasia to be allowed – but for whom?

On February 6, 2015, the Supreme Court of Canada overturned an absolute ban on

assisted suicide/euthanasia and gave Parliament one year to create a "stringently limited, carefully monitored system of exceptions."

"Stringently limited" clearly means different things to different people. On December 12, 2015, a nine-member panel recommended that no arbitrary age limits for euthanasia should be set. Co-chair of the panel Maureen Taylor, widow of Dr. Donald Low who advocated for legal assisted suicide before his own death from a brain tumour in 2013, was quoted in [media reports](#) as saying: "I could definitely see 12-year-olds having that capacity, and I could see 16-year-olds not have that capacity." She suggests that decisions for minors could be made on an individual basis.

The new Liberal government has asked for a six-month extension of the deadline.

2. Canada's Child Benefit increased

In 2015, the Universal Child Care Benefit was expanded to include older children, aged 6 through 17. Their parents will now receive up to \$60 per month per child. Payments for children under 6 were increased to \$160 per month per child.

This summer, the Liberal Party promised to simplify the child benefit system by replacing the Universal Child Care Benefit, the Canada Child Tax Benefit and the National Child Benefit Supplement. The proposed Canadian Child Benefit would be tax-free, increase the total amount paid out to Canadians and would be geared to income.

Money for parents, tax-free, is a win. Yet there are other angles to consider.

The plan places emphasis on income level, not children. UBC economist [Kevin Milligan](#), who was asked by the Liberal party to provide technical advice on the plan, argues that removing the universality of the benefit reduces the recognition of the value of children in all families within the tax system. He says that instead, the primary value is placed on family income level rather than the recognition of the value of children.

More importantly, the plan calls for the elimination of income-splitting for families to help pay for the 22 billion dollar transfer. We'll see what finally happens in the upcoming federal budget. However, the IMFC has long argued that more money should remain in the pockets of parents, and that families of similar incomes should pay similar taxes, which is a key goal of income-splitting.

3. Family income splitting allowed – but possibly for one year only

In 2014, the Conservative government finally fulfilled its promise of allowing [income splitting](#) for Canadian families. This means that this year, for the first time ever, Canadian families were taxed as families, not as a random collection of individuals. The point of this was to remove a longstanding bias in the tax code whereby single-earner families pay significantly



higher taxes than their dual-earner neighbours. It also generally means lower taxes for families; income splitting benefits almost half of families with children in Canada. Subject to a smear campaign, the promise was watered down, with the benefits capped at \$2000 per family – an amount nevertheless valued by the families who received it.

Unfortunately, the Liberal government pre-election said they would remove income splitting. We hope they will reconsider, for the sake of the many Canadian families with children who benefit from taxing families as families.

4. A shift away from “universal” daycare

Families desire flexibility in their childcare arrangements. That’s why the absence of a promise to push for national daycare in the December 4, 2015 Speech from the Throne is a real win. The creation of so-called “universal systems” are never universal—and furthermore, [recent studies of Quebec](#), Canada’s only province with a “universal” plan, show they don’t provide benefits to children. That’s putting aside the [financial losses](#) that wrack up quickly.

Not having national daycare is something to celebrate. At the same time, we are applying ourselves to finding real solutions for *all* families, who have diverse desires and who need help with childcare.

5. An F for the Ontario Government on sex education

In Fall 2014, the Ontario government announced an update to the sex education curriculum for children in grades one through 12. Since then, (understatement alert) it has become a galvanizing issue for parents.

Large numbers of parents concerned about the age appropriateness of the material have protested publicly, signed petitions and pulled their children out of classes, and this continues. The Toronto District School Board, for example, has reported a 2,600-student [drop in enrollment](#) below what was expected this fall. Ontario is seeing a rise in new private schools as parents seek alternatives.



It's not just about age appropriateness. Other parents take issue with the values quietly promoted – there is no mention of love or marriage, for example, only consent. The curriculum also does a weak job teaching health, and makes no mention about the dangers of porn. For a rundown of concerns, [watch our video](#).

Adding insult to injury, instead of listening to parent's concerns, the government invested in an ad campaign to promote the curriculum.

The New Year

We at the IMFC hope for a 2016 in which Canadian decision-makers increasingly recognize families as the public good that they are. We hope they will take the time to learn what strengthens and what harms families. And we hope for public policy that supports the individual, diverse decisions that Canadians make to raise their children and care for each other as they know best.

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