

ABOUT Women

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New compassionate care legislation benefits working women

Province meets Manitobans' needs

On January 4, 2004, legislation took effect in Manitoba that provides up to **eight weeks** of *unpaid* compassionate care leave, within a 26-week period, to help Manitobans respond to critical family health situations, specifically those that involve an immediate risk of death. During the eight weeks, an employee may also qualify for up to **six weeks** of federal Employment Insurance (EI) benefits under its new compassionate care program.

An equally important aspect of the Manitoba legislation is better job protection for workers returning from other leaves covered under the Employment Standards Code, namely maternity or parental leave, and compassionate care. It also provides a way for those who believe their rights have been violated to seek resolution. For example, if you return to work and find you have been replaced, you can launch a complaint with the provincial Employment Standards Branch. The Branch investigates complaints and, if appropriate, orders reinstatement or compensation for loss.

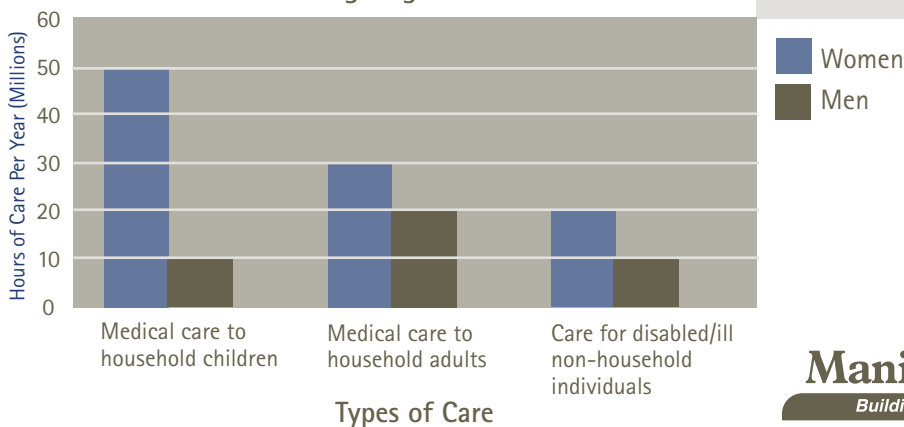
What could this mean to you?

People eligible for compassionate care benefits receive 55 per cent of their average insured earnings to a maximum of \$413 per week in taxable income (EI average insured earnings = T4 taxable income to a maximum of \$39,000 annual gross salary). You can also get extra help if your family income (both spouses) is less than \$25,921, and you receive The Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB). In this case, you are eligible for the federal Family Supplement – a feature of EI that provides additional benefits to low-income families with children.

For more information on the new provincial legislation, call the Manitoba Employment Standards Branch's 24-hour inquiry lines at 945-3352 in Winnipeg; toll-free at 1-800-821-4307; or visit their website at www.gov.mb.ca/labour/standards

For more information on the new federal legislation, or to apply for compassionate care benefits, call Human Resources Development Canada toll-free at 1-800-206-7218 or visit their website at www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca

Caregiving in Canada



As demonstrated in this chart, women remain the primary caregivers for ailing relatives and family members. Compassionate care legislation will make this task easier for Canadian working women.

* Statistics Canada Reference

Minister's Message



As we prepare to celebrate International Women's Day 2004, I am pleased to welcome you to this edition of *About Women*. This edition

looks at new government initiatives that will affect all women living in Manitoba.

Years ago, government initiatives designed to help women often focused on issues surrounding child rearing and domestic responsibility. Today, women face many complex challenges, including balancing career and family responsibilities, accessing post-secondary education and addressing domestic violence in the community. The Manitoba government is committed to providing women throughout the province with access to services that help you create equitable and balanced lifestyles for yourselves and your families. In this issue, we provide valuable information about some government supports available to Manitoba women, and how to access them.

Next month, we will celebrate International Women's Day. This year, the government's celebration of this landmark day will focus on the accomplishments of Aboriginal women. You can read more about one Aboriginal woman's achievements in this edition of *About Women*. I invite you to celebrate women's contributions – past and present – by joining me at a reception in the Legislative Building on March 8. Space is limited, so please call the Directorate if you plan to attend.

I look forward to meeting you at our International Women's Day celebration.

Nancy Allan
Minister responsible for
the Status of Women

Workplaces encouraged to play role in domestic violence prevention

A program to use the workplace to help domestic violence victims was launched in January, 2004. *Domestic Violence Prevention: A Workplace Initiative* is an important campaign to increase the awareness of a very real issue in the workplace.

"For generations, we have seen domestic violence as a private issue that shouldn't be discussed in public," says Minister responsible for the Status of Women Nancy Allan. "Sadly, victims often felt responsible for their own suffering and were ashamed to admit the problem existed. As a society, we thought what happened within families was strictly private and were hesitant to intrude."

Today, we know domestic violence needs to be publicly acknowledged because the effects spill over into other areas, including the workplace. Victims are still ashamed and afraid to speak up.

"I want to make it clear this campaign is not about exposing painful family secrets," Allan points out. "It's about providing help and support for victims who don't know where to turn or how to stop the cycle of violence."

Campaign to raise awareness

The campaign, developed by the Manitoba Women's Directorate, has two primary objectives:

- to show employers and unions how a supportive workplace can help employees begin to break the cycle of violence
- to encourage employers to help customers and clients recognize the signs of domestic violence

It includes a pamphlet, resource guide for employers and washroom door stickers with a province-wide information hotline number. To launch the campaign, information packages are being mailed out to 2,000 businesses across Manitoba and the material will be posted on the Internet at www.gov.mb.ca/wd.

The public is becoming more aware, not only of the human suffering, but also of the indirect financial costs to society. For employers, the issue can mean higher staff turnover, absenteeism, lower productivity and an increased risk of violence in the workplace.

The total, measurable costs in loss of health and well-being alone are estimated at more than \$1 billion every year in Canada (Day, 1995)*, in addition to the costs of hospital, police and judicial services. Many domestic violence victims spend eight hours a day in the workplace, making it an excellent location to get help and support.

* Day, T. (1995). *The health-related costs of violence against women in Canada: The tip of the iceberg*. London, ON: Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children.

Workplaces That Work – Changing Workplace Culture

Did you know?

- Women represent only seven per cent of the workforce in transportation, trades and construction work.
- Only one in five professionals employed in natural sciences, mathematics and engineering are women.

There are bottom-line reasons for ensuring that workplaces attract women and provide positive environments where female employees can work productively. It is important that employers recognize that a workplace culture attractive to women is good for business. It is equally important that women are aware of the growing employment options available to them in this highly competitive, global economy.

The past several decades have certainly seen significant progress for women in the labour force. Today, more women than ever before populate corporate boardrooms and professional associations, many earning wages comparable to their male counterparts. Yet, despite a marked increase in the number of women in the labour force, women remain under-represented in high-growth, high-pay areas like engineering, technologies and the trades.

These non-traditional industries, particularly those employing skilled trades workers, are experiencing worker shortages that threaten their growth potential. They cannot afford to overlook women as a potential labour pool. Many of these male-dominated industries, however, project a less than positive workplace culture for women, making recruitment of women difficult. When these industries do attract women, they often experience a high turnover of female workers and more absenteeism.

A recent publication designed to address this issue is *Workplaces That Work: Creating a Workplace Culture that Attracts, Retains and Promotes Women*. This initiative, funded through the Federal/Provincial/Territorial

Status of Women ministries, strives to create more opportunities and greater access for women in highly skilled fields. It also strives to help businesses increase profits by learning how to attract and retain female workers through improvements to the workplace culture. These kinds of initiatives, and other strategic partnerships between government and industry, help foster economic growth and increase the valuable pool of skilled workers, both male and female, in Manitoba.

For more information on this issue, visit the Manitoba Women's Directorate website at www.gov.mb.ca/wd or call 945-3476 in Winnipeg; toll-free at 1-800-263-0234 in Manitoba.



Women's Advisory Council appoints first Aboriginal chair

Crystal Laborero, the newly appointed chair of the Women's Advisory Council (WAC), is committed to enhancing the plight of all Manitoba women.

She notes that the past five years have seen increased diversity within WAC's membership – a good sign for the future. "I'm a strong believer that to get a realistic picture of community issues, you really need to include individuals who reflect that community."



Laborero is a member of the Sapotaweyak Cree Nation, located north of Swan River, but she grew up in Winnipeg's inner city. The 33-year old single mother honed her human resource skills at the Royal Bank and is currently director of the Aboriginal Employment Initiative, an initiative of the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce and the Business Council of Manitoba. Laborero works with businesses and the Aboriginal community to promote employment opportunities.

As the first Aboriginal chair of WAC, Laborero believes she brings a markedly different perspective to the post, one that should serve the council well in its advisory work. "I think there's a stronger impact on the listener when you can say, 'I know, I've been there.' That personal experience really adds to the ability to communicate with decision-makers."

Pay inequity, violence prevention key issues

A main priority for Laborero is to educate women across Manitoba and advise government on key issues like the inequity in women's earning potential. Violence prevention remains another issue with strong underlying effects for Manitoba women.

Laborero believes that WAC's ongoing round-table discussions on violence against women and girls are making an impact in the community. "The synergies involved in bringing groups of people together who are working towards the same vision are so valuable. We are providing a forum where organizations can learn from each other, share resources and collaborate on various issues."

Laborero looks forward to working with Manitoba's new Minister responsible for the Status of Women, the Honourable Nancy Allan, who is also Minister of Labour and Immigration, and responsible for Multiculturalism. "It's a good fit for the council," says Laborero. "Respecting the diversity of Manitobans is really important to me."

Province restores **full** National Child Benefit Supplement

The National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS) is a tax-free monthly payment provided by the federal government to low-income families with children under the age of 18. The goal is to reduce and prevent child poverty, support low-income families as they move into the labour market and reduce duplication and overlap of government programs.

When the NCBS was introduced in 1998, Manitoba reduced payments to families on Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) by the amount of the supplement, redirecting those funds into programs and services for low-income Manitobans.

Since July 2000, the provincial government has taken steps to restore the benefit for all eligible families, so they can directly access the funds needed to provide for their families. In July 2001, the supplement was restored to families with children 11 years old and under. As of January 2004, families with children aged 12 to 17 also receive the full supplement.

The restoration of the NCBS for families on income assistance puts \$13.7 million more in the hands of low-income families in Manitoba. This means that in 2003, a single parent with two children, ages 8 and 10, had 20 per cent more income than in 2001. Currently, a family with three children under 18 years old receives nearly \$3,900 more in disposable income each year.

For more information, visit the National Child Benefit website at www.nationalchildbenefit.ca or contact the Manitoba Employment, Income and Housing Division at (204) 945-0865 in Winnipeg; or call Citizen's Inquiry toll-free at 1-866-626-4862 in Manitoba.

ABOUT Women

About Women is a publication of the *Manitoba Women's Directorate* that focuses on issues of interest to women and provides practical, timely information they can use. It is available without charge upon request.

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This newsletter is also posted on the Women's Directorate website:
www.gov.mb.ca/wd

Cette information existe également en Français sur Internet à l'adresse suivante :
www.gov.mb.ca/wd/newsletter/newsletter.fr.html

Get off to a great start!

Fifty **\$1,000** scholarships

For women pursuing training in math, science or technology at eligible Manitoba colleges.



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Deadline for 2004/2005 is July 31, 2004

1-800-263-0234
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