



## Family Caregivers of British Columbia

### **Strategies to Make the Workplace More Caregiver Friendly**

Business and employee needs are complex. One type of benefit or policy may make sense for one company and not the other. Employed caregivers' needs are diverse as well. Flexibility is the word of the day. Below are some programs, benefits or policies that can help employed caregivers (Note: some are in place, some require action).

#### **Supportive Policies, Benefits and Programs**

- Flexible benefits such as telecommuting, flex time, job sharing and compressed work weeks
- Paid sick leave that can be used to care for relatives or friends who are ill or disabled
- Funeral or bereavement leave policies
- Leave without pay options
- Temporary reduction of hours
- Shift-exchanging, allowing employees to switch shifts in an emergency
- Employee leave-sharing, where employees donate a portion of their leave time to other workers in need
- Gradual return-to-work policies
- Travel discounts to help long distance Caregiving
- Hospice inclusion in company sponsored health insurance
- Work/Life programs: information, referral, counseling, and case management services
- Employee and employer funded long-term care insurance that can also cover spouse, parents and in-laws
- Educational programs, web-sites, and support groups i.e. financial and retirement planning seminars, community resources
- Onsite adult daycare
- Publicizing the Compassionate Leave Bill and how it may help employed caregivers
- Education workers about local community services and information and referral services that reduce caregiver strain. i.e. Canadian Association of Retired Persons (CARP)
- Distribute info packets to employees

# Compassionate Care Explained

By Meg Federico

*Please note the information below is not conclusive. Contact Human Resources Skills Development Canada for information specific to your particular circumstances.*

The Federal Government is responding to the plight of family caregivers. Since January of 2004, Compassionate Care benefits are available to employed family members caring for a severely ill relative. From January to September, 4,568 people applied for the benefit. Slightly over half, 2,522 caregivers, were qualified to receive it (Department of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada).

The benefits consist of six weeks total compensation – that means, six weeks per ill person, not six weeks per family member. Your employer cannot fire you because you need time off to take the six weeks plus the two weeks unpaid waiting period. In a nutshell, to qualify for the benefit:

- You must have worked a total of 600 insured hours in the last 52 weeks or since your last EI claim.
- You must be able to demonstrate that you will lose more than 55% of your current weekly earnings to a maximum of \$413. Some situations qualify for higher payment rates.
- You must obtain a Medical certificate from a doctor indicating that the person you care for has a significant risk of dying within 26 weeks, and requires care. If your doctor requires a fee to fill out this form, you are stuck paying for it.
- When you leave work, you need to get a termination notice from your employer. You'll need to file that document when you apply for Compassionate Care.

According to the Human Resources Skills Development Canada, the type of care the benefit covers includes:

- providing psychological support
- arranging for care by a third party
- directly providing and participating in care

You may share the six week benefit with another family member; you can, as long as the person qualifies for the benefit. Each caregiver must make their own application. If you are already receiving EI benefits, you can apply, but you will have to go through an evaluation in order to get help.

After your application is complete and you are accepted, you should get your first payment about 28 days from the day your benefit starts. Compassionate Care benefits end when the person you care for recovers, dies, or when the six weeks have been exhausted.

Employers and caregivers alike need to be aware that though the benefit covers six weeks, there is an initial two week waiting period, pushing the total up to eight weeks away from work. However if you are sharing the six weeks with other family members, the waiting period only applies to the first applicant.

You may earn \$50 per week or 25% of your weekly benefit amount without jeopardizing your Compassionate Care benefit.

## **Who is considered a family member?**

You can receive compassionate care benefits to care for the following members:

- your child or the child of your spouse or common-law partner:
- your wife/husband or common-law partner

- your father/mother;
- your father’s wife/mother’s husband;
- the common-law partner of your father/mother.

**Common-law partner** means a person who has been living in a conjugal relationship with that person for at least a year.

Effective the week of **June 11, 2006**, the definition of “Family member” has been expanded. You can now receive compassionate care benefits to provide care or support to the following family members”

You can receive compassionate care benefits to care for your:	Or to care for the following family members of your spouse or common-law partner:
Brothers or sisters and stepbrothers and stepsisters	
Grandparents and step grandparents	Grandparents
Grandchildren and their spouse or common-law partner	Grandchildren
Son-in-law and daughter-in-law, either married or common-law, and their step children	
Father-in-law and mother-in-law, either married or common-law	
Brother-in-law and sister-in-law, either married or common-law	
Uncle and aunt and their spouse or common-law partner	Uncle and aunt
Nephew and niece and their spouse or common-law partner	Nephew and niece
Current or former foster parents	Current or former foster parents
Current or former foster children and their spouse or common-law partner	
Current or former wards	Current or former wards
Current or former guardians or tutors and their spouse or common-law partner	

You can also receive compassionate care benefits to care for a gravely ill person who considers you like a family member. **For instance a close friend or neighbour.** A signed “Compassionate Care Benefits Attestation” is required from the gravely ill person or their representative.

Please note: Benefits are only available as of the date the EI regulations change. You cannot claim compassionate care benefits to care for your newly eligible family members **prior to June 11, 2006.**