

Opinion Editorial -- January 14, 2007  
Sent to Globe and Mail, Toronto

I am the Director of Communications for Multiple Births Canada/Naissances multiples Canada (MBC). As such, I have fielded many questions this week regarding the unique challenges faced by our multiple-birth community. One topic which has hit the nerve of some Canadians is our *call to dialogue* regarding the current status of Employment Insurance (EI) benefits for multiple-birth families.

Some of the letters MBC received this week were from individuals with opposing opinions who continue to perpetuate the stereotype that most multiple-birth families choose to have multiple-births. This is not the case. In fact, two thirds of all multiple-birth pregnancies are spontaneous (without infertility assistance). The rise in incidence of multiple-births is also a reflection of maternal age, maternal weight and better prenatal care.

Some comments refer to our request for extended EI benefits for multiple-birth families as a “hand out”. EI is an earned benefit that Canadians pay into; it is not a hand out. Further, families who have single babies are able to access as many maternity and parental EI benefits as they have children, and as the parent has paid into the EI program. It could be argued that the multiple-birth community has been saving taxpayer money for years!

Regrettably, 57% of twins and 98% of higher order multiples (triplets, quads and more) are born preterm with low birthweight and post-natal concerns. Parents of singleton babies may face similar complications as those with multiples, but they are able to concentrate their care and attention to one child at a time.

Improving EI benefits for multiple-birth parents is not going to cost Canadians a lot of money. There are only about 5,000 multiple-birth deliveries a year, and some of these parents are not eligible for EI benefits. Conversely, improving EI benefits is going to give vulnerable children a better start in life.

Prematurity affects the development of most multiple-birth infants, in some cases it takes years before they “catch up” with other babies born at the same time. This is why we believe our government should review International best practices. They will discover other countries recognize the unique situations faced by multiple-birth parents, and have already extended their EI benefits.

There is a reason we have a national organization representing the multiple-birth community. MBC understands the issues and challenges faced by these families. We provide educational material and emotional support to these parents, directly and through local chapters, and to the professionals and educators who work with our multiple-birth children.

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Some multiple-birth families have challenged the current EI system. MBC has supported them during their appeals and presentations to the EI Boards of Referees. These families have spent weeks and months nursing their infants to health, sometimes while the mother is also recuperating. They have just started to bond with their infants when they run out of EI benefits and must return to work.

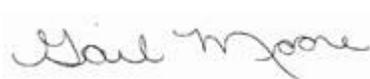
In general terms, MBC supports the organizations who are already advocating for changes to EI including opening up eligibility to self-employed workers and increasing benefits beyond the 55% currently being paid.

Further, we are asking for one maternity leave that starts after the mother has recovered. MBC also believes it is in the best interest of the babies if parental leave is allocated on a per baby basis. This means 35 weeks per baby. Ideally if both parents can take it concurrently, this could mean both parents are at home nurturing their little ones during the demanding first weeks and months.

EI benefits are earned, they are not handouts. MBC is asking the Government of Canada to reassess how they handle multiple-birth cases so that families can concentrate on the health and well-being of their babies, not on preparing appeal cases for EI. Compounding this issue is the difficulty faced by parents in regards to childcare availability when they return to work. There are not enough spaces for babies under 18 months old, which sometimes results in room for one but not for his/her co-multiple(s). As well, most home daycare providers are not as keen to take on the extra workload of two or three, which sometimes means having to split up the babies, not an ideal situation when their primary relationship is with each other. Extending EI benefits would help resolve this additional challenge.

I stress, 65% of multiple-birth pregnancies are spontaneous. Most multiple-birth pregnancies are twins or triplets, with only three or four births a year that are quadruplets or higher. Before you form an opinion on this issue, MBC encourages you to get all the facts. Talk to multiple-birth families about the challenges they have faced. Visit our website – [www.multiplebirthscanada.org](http://www.multiplebirthscanada.org) – and review the documents we have on file regarding this issue. Make sure your opinion is an informed opinion.

Respectfully submitted,



Director of Communications and Vice Chair, MBC