

Adoption Policies Across Canada

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Introduction

Adoption provides a pathway for Canadian parents to grow their family and for children to be placed in a safe, loving, and permanent home. The adoption process can be complex and expensive for families, and they frequently require post-adoption support.

There are a number of ways that children are welcomed into permanent families through adoption in Canada. Many adoptions are facilitated through the child welfare system. This includes children transitioning from foster care into a permanent family, and children adopted by family members through kinship adoption.

Other legally recognized adoptions are facilitated by parties outside the child welfare system. Some regions in Canada recognize Aboriginal or Indigenous custom adoptions. This process is facilitated by Indigenous communities through an appointed community member. The province or territory provides legal consent to the adoption as the final stage in the process. Licensed private agencies also facilitate some domestic adoptions outside the child welfare system, and international adoptions. Finally, blended families may also pursue adoption where a step-parent becomes legally recognized as a parent.

This brief presents an overview of government benefits available to adoptive families at the federal and provincial/territorial level that were in place as of April 2024. The federal government provides some funding, but primary responsibility for adoption policy and funding lies with the provinces and territories. As a result, benefits and eligibility vary by jurisdiction and by the type of adoption. Benefits available through the provinces and territories can be accessed in addition to the federal benefits.

Three kinds of benefits exist:

- Financial benefits, including subsidies, and tax credits and deductions, to compensate for costs incurred in the adoption process;
- Service support, including direct services or financial support for obtaining services during the adoption process or post adoption;
- Parental leave, which is primarily unpaid job-protected leave. Recipients may take this leave in conjunction with paid parental leave through the federal Employment Insurance program (or the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan in Quebec).

Information provided in this brief has been sourced from provincial and territorial publications and websites. In limited circumstances, information was collected from two foster care and adoption-support websites. In addition to collecting this information from government sources, Cardus hosted a roundtable discussion with adoption specialists, family counsellors, and adoptive parents in April 2023. Participants represented experience with public and private adoptions in British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario. Unstructured interviews were also conducted in April 2023 and March 2024 with adoption specialists with backgrounds in family counselling and social work, in British Columbia and Alberta. The roundtable and interviews enabled the researchers to better understand how federal and provincial adoption benefits and policies are applied, from the perspective of those who facilitate and participate in adoptions. These insights are introduced in the cross-national summary at the end of this brief.

Federal Benefits

The federal government provides financial support to adoptive families. The two main federal contributions are a tax credit and a paid parental-leave benefit.

Adoption Expense Tax Credit

Families who adopt through a public system or private licensed agency can claim up to \$18,210 (as of 2024) in expenses for a child under eighteen years of age. Eligible expenses include:

- Adoption fees paid to a licensed agency;
- Court costs and administrative expenses;
- Travel and living expenses incurred by the adoptive parents and child;
- Document translation costs;
- Fees paid to foreign institutions;
- Child's immigration expenses;
- Other expenses related to adoption requirements.

Eligible expenses must be incurred during the adoption period, which begins when the application for adoption is made to a Canadian court, an international jurisdiction, or through a licensed agency. The period of eligibility concludes when the adoption order is issued by a government in Canada, or recognized by a government in Canada in the case of an international adoption, or when the child begins to live permanently with the adoptive family. Expenses can be claimed only after the adoption period ends.¹

Paid Parental Leave

Paid parental leave is offered through the federal Employment Insurance program (Quebec administers a separate program). Adoptive parents are eligible for a shareable benefit. Parents have two options. As of 2024, they can select forty weeks of leave at 55 percent of their average weekly earnings, up to a maximum of \$688 per week, or sixty-nine weeks at 33 percent of their weekly earnings, up to a maximum of \$401 per week.²

The federal government has indicated that it will begin offering a fifteen-week adoptive-parent leave.³ With details forthcoming, it is anticipated that the new benefit will mirror the fifteen-week maternity leave, currently available only to mothers who have given birth.

¹ “Line 31300—Adoption Expenses,” Government of Canada, last modified January 23, 2024, <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/tax/individuals/topics/about-your-tax-return/tax-return/completing-a-tax-return/deductions-credits-expenses/line-31300-adoption-expenses.html>.

² “EI Maternity and Parental Benefits,” Government of Canada, last modified December 29, 2023, <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/ei/ei-maternity-parental.html>.

³ A. Bergeron-Oliver, “New Canada Parental Benefit Will Be Arriving ‘in the Coming Months,’” *CTV News*, March 12, 2023, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/new-canada-parental-benefit-will-be-arriving-in-the-coming-months-1.6310351>.

Benefits by Province and Territory

British Columbia

British Columbia placed about 114 children in adoptive homes in 2022–23.⁴ The province offers a Post-Adoption Assistance Program for children who have been placed through public adoption. Parents may qualify for a means-tested maintenance subsidy.⁵ Eligible families may also receive financial assistance for specific health services not covered by the adoptive parent’s health benefits, such as counselling, respite care, special equipment needs, speech therapy, and physio and occupational therapies. The benefits are means-tested and consider the child’s level of need.⁶ Parental leave is sixty-two weeks, unpaid. This leave can be extended an additional five weeks if the child has a physical, psychological, or emotional condition.⁷

Figure 1. Provincial Benefits for Adoptive Families, British Columbia

Benefit Type	Description	Eligibility
Financial		
Post-Adoption Assistance Program	A basic monthly maintenance payment.	For public adoptions of a child with special-placement needs. Families with a net income of less than \$80,000 are eligible for the full basic monthly maintenance, and payment decreases as income increases. Full payment is \$849.30 for a child under age 12, and \$1,135.81 for a child aged 13 to 19.
Service Support		
Post-Adoption Assistance Program	Financial assistance for services not covered by the parent’s private insurance, including counselling, health assessments, special-needs childcare; speech, physiotherapy, or occupational therapy; corrective dental and orthodontics, respite care, and tutoring.	Means-tested, as above, and based on a child’s level of need.
Parental Leave		
Parental Leave	Sixty-two weeks of unpaid leave. Five additional weeks are available if the child has a physical, psychological, or emotional condition.	

Sources: “Post-Adoption Assistance Program.” Government of British Columbia; “Employment Standards Act,” RSBC 1996, chap. 113, sec. 51.

⁴ “Adoption Services, Case Data and Trends,” Government of British Columbia, last modified January 18, 2024, <https://mcfcd.gov.bc.ca/reporting/services/adoption-services/case-data-and-trends>.

⁵ “Post-Adoption Assistance Program,” Government of British Columbia, last modified April 4, 2023, <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/life-events/birth-adoption/adoptions/how-to-adopt-a-child/adopt-from-foster-care/post-adoption-assistance-program>.

⁶ “Post-Adoption Assistance Program.”

⁷ “Employment Standards Act,” sec. 51, “Parental Leave.” RSBC 1996, ch. 113, https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/00_96113_01#section51.

Alberta

During the 2022–23 fiscal year, 158 public adoptions were completed in Alberta.⁸ The province offers a provincial Adoption Expenses Tax Credit that mirrors the federal credit. Adoptive parents can claim up to \$18,210 in expenses for public, private, and international adoptions.⁹ In addition, those with a household income below \$180,000 per year can receive a one-time subsidy of \$6,000 to cover the cost of private adoption.¹⁰ For children adopted from foster care, the province offers financial support to help with emotional or behavioural needs, counselling, medical needs, and respite care.¹¹ The province also offers enhanced benefits coverage for the cost of dental, vision, and other health needs, which can be claimed for public, private, and international adoptions through a licensed agency.¹² Parents may take sixty-two weeks of unpaid leave if they have been employed for the previous ninety days.¹³

Figure 2. Provincial Benefits for Adoptive Families, Alberta

Benefit Type	Description	Eligibility
Financial		
Adoption Expenses Tax Credit	\$18,210 to assist with adoption costs.	Public, private, and international adoptions.
Subsidies	A one-time, \$6,000 subsidy for families using private, licensed adoption services.	Household income must be below \$180,000.
Service Support		
Enhanced Benefit Coverage	Financial assistance for dental, vision, and supplemental health benefits.	Available for private and public adoption. For supplemental benefits, qualifying families must have no private insurance, or insufficient coverage.
Supports for Permanency Program	Financial support up to \$70 per week to support a child with emotional and behavioural needs, respite care to a maximum of 576 hours per year, 10 counselling sessions per year, treatment provided in a residential facility, reimbursement for travel costs for a First Nations child to the child's community, and orthodontics, medical, or psychological assessments needed to obtain programs and services.	Adoption or private guardianship of a child who was the subject of a Permanent Guardianship Order or a Permanent Guardianship Agreement.
Parental Leave		
Parental Leave	Up to 62 weeks of unpaid parental leave.	Must be employed for a minimum of 90 days before leave.

Sources: "Adoption Funding, Benefits and Tax Breaks," Government of Alberta; "Supports for Permanency," Government of Alberta; "Maternity and Parental Leave," Government of Alberta.

⁸ "Adoption Statistics," Government of Alberta, n.d., <https://www.alberta.ca/adoption-statistics>.

⁹ "Adoption Funding, Benefits and Tax Breaks," Government of Alberta, n.d., <https://www.alberta.ca/adoption-funding-benefits-and-tax-breaks>.

¹⁰ "Adoption Funding, Benefits and Tax Breaks."

¹¹ "Supports for Permanency," Government of Alberta, n.d., <https://www.alberta.ca/supports-for-permanency>.

¹² "Adoption Funding, Benefits and Tax Breaks."

¹³ "Maternity and Parental Leave," Government of Alberta, n.d.

Saskatchewan

Parents adopting sibling groups or children with complex needs through the Domestic Adoption Program may apply for Assisted Adoption Benefits equal to 90 percent of the foster-care maintenance payment. Kin adoptions are also eligible. Parents may also apply for a Special Needs Benefit for health services not covered by insurance plans or public services, including therapies, medical supplies, and dental treatment. The Special Needs Benefit also includes financial support for life-skills training. Children in foster care who are placed for adoption before an Order of Adoption has been granted by a court may be eligible for additional Supplementary Health Benefits, which covers items such as some prescription medicines, dental and optical services, and hearing services.¹⁴ The province offers unpaid adoptive leave for the primary parent in addition to a standard unpaid parental leave of sixty-three weeks.¹⁵

Figure 3. Provincial Benefits for Adoptive Families, Saskatchewan

Benefit Type	Description	Eligibility
Financial		
Assisted Adoption Benefits	Monthly maintenance equal to 90 percent of current rate for foster care.	Families adopting through the Domestic Adoption Program. The child must have complex needs, which can include being part of a sibling group or having a disability.
Service Support		
Special Needs Benefits	Supplementary health benefits, including medical, dental care, and therapies. The benefit also includes life-skills training.	In addition to the requirements for Assisted Adoption Benefits, services must not be covered by private insurance or through public services.
Supplementary Health Benefits	Additional medical supplies and prescriptions.	As above.
Parental Leave		
Adoption Leave	Nineteen weeks of leave.	Minimum of 13 consecutive weeks of employment. Only the primary caregiver is eligible.
Parental Leave	Parents who take adoption leave are eligible for 59 weeks of unpaid parental leave. Parents who do not take adoption leave are eligible for 71 weeks of parental leave.	Minimum of 13 consecutive weeks of employment. Parental leave can be taken with adoption leave, or separately.

Sources: "Adoption," Government of Saskatchewan; "Family Leaves," Government of Saskatchewan; "Saskatchewan Assisted Adoption Program," Government of Saskatchewan.

¹⁴ "Supplementary Health Benefits," Government of Saskatchewan, n.d., <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/health/prescription-drug-plans-and-health-coverage/extended-benefits-and-drug-plan/supplementary-health-benefits>; "Saskatchewan Assisted Adoption Program Factsheet," Government of Saskatchewan, n.d., <https://publications.saskatchewan.ca/#/products/78861>.

¹⁵ "Family Leaves," Government of Saskatchewan, n.d., <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/business/employment-standards/job-protected-leaves/family-leaves>.

Manitoba

Manitoba completed eighty-two adoptions in fiscal year 2022–23 through Child and Family Services and private licensed agencies.¹⁶ Parents adopting through Child and Family Services can receive financial assistance when adopting a sibling group or a child with special needs. This assistance can include a one-time payment for startup costs, ongoing support for special services, or maintenance costs.¹⁷ The province also offers a Non-Refundable Adoption Expense Tax Credit available for public, private, and international adoptions.¹⁸ Birth parents considering permanent-care options are provided with counselling. Adoptive parents may take sixty-three weeks of unpaid parental leave, though the province has a longer employment requirement compared to other provinces, at twenty-eight consecutive weeks.¹⁹

Figure 4. Provincial Benefits for Adoptive Families, Manitoba

Benefit Type	Description	Eligibility
Financial		
Adoption Financial Assistance	Covers one-time startup costs. Benefit amount of \$24,920 to \$32,045, based on family size. Maintenance payments are available based on household income and family size.	Public adoption of a sibling group, or a child with diagnosed special needs.
Non-Refundable Adoption Expense Tax Credit	Maximum of \$10,000 per child. Expenses reflect the federal credit and may include fees paid to a licensed adoption agency, legal and administrative expenses, necessary travel related to an adoption order, document translation, and mandatory expenses paid for child's immigration or to a foreign institution.	Adoptive parents can share the claim, but the combined total may not exceed \$10,000.
Service Support		
Adoption Financial Assistance	Financial support for special services for a child with a diagnosed special need.	Public adoption of a child with a diagnosed special need.
Counselling	Agencies must provide counselling to birth parents regarding their rights, and permanency options for their child.	Agencies may provide free counselling for birth parents, adoptive parents, adult birth-sibling of an adoptee, or an adult adoptee.
Parental Leave		
Parental Leave	Sixty-three consecutive unpaid weeks of leave for adoptive parents.	Must have been employed for a minimum of 28 consecutive weeks.

Sources: "Parental Leave Fact Sheet," Government of Manitoba; "Adoption Regulation," Manitoba Reg. 19/99; "Adoption Financial Assistance - Ongoing Maintenance," Planned Lifetime Advocacy Networks.

¹⁶ "Manitoba Families. Annual Report for the Year Ended March 31, 2023," Government of Manitoba, September 1, 2023, p. 107, <https://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/about/pubs/fsar-2022-2023.pdf>.

¹⁷ "Adoption of a Permanent Ward," Government of Manitoba, n.d., https://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childfam/adopt_wards.html.

¹⁸ "The Income Tax Act," sec. 4.6(10.1) "Non-Refundable Tax Credits." CCSM, chap. I10, <https://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/ccsm/i010.php?lang=en#4.6>.

¹⁹ "Parental Leave," Government of Manitoba, January 1, 2022, <https://www.gov.mb.ca/labour/standards/doc.parental-leave.factsheet.pdf>.

Ontario

The most populous province in Canada oversaw 456 adoptions through child-welfare agencies in 2022–23.²⁰ Ontario provides various subsidies for families adopting from foster care, based on a number of criteria, including financial need. The General Adoption Subsidy provides occasional or ongoing assistance for specific services, to facilitate placements for sibling, cultural, or religious compatibility, and to accommodate open adoption orders where children maintain contact with their birth family. The Targeted Subsidy for Adoption and Legal Custody is for children over age eight and for sibling groups. Household income must not exceed \$97,856 (as of October 2021). The Standard Adoption and Legal Custody Subsidy is based on financial need and geared to families adopting a child under age eight who is not part of a sibling group. Household income must not exceed \$97,856 (as of October 2021).²¹ The Aftercare Benefits Initiative offers coverage for prescriptions, extended health coverage, dental coverage, and life-skill training, to young adults under age twenty-six who were adopted from foster care.²² Parents can take up to sixty-three weeks of unpaid parental leave.²³

Figure 5. Provincial Benefits for Adoptive Families, Ontario

Benefit Type	Description	Eligibility
Financial		
General Adoption Subsidy	Occasional or ongoing financial support to assist with services such as medical, orthodontic care, and occupational therapy. Funds can also be used for renovations, transportation, and to facilitate openness agreements with birth families.	Legal custody of a child previously in foster care or voluntarily relinquished by parents. Amount based on household income.
Targeted Subsidy for Sibling Groups and Older Children	\$12,420/year until the child turns 21 years old.	Public adoptions of children over age 8, or siblings. Combined family annual net income must not exceed \$97,856.
Standard Adoption and Legal Custody Subsidy	\$5,700/year until the child turns 18 years old.	Public adoptions of children under age 8 and not part of a sibling group. Combined family annual net income must not exceed \$97,856.
Service Support		
Aftercare Benefits Initiative	Coverage for health, dental, and counselling benefits. Also includes life-skills training.	Former youth in foster care, aged 21 to 25. Youth adopted after June 2016, aged 18 to 25.
Parental Leave		
Parental Leave	Up to 63 weeks of parental unpaid leave.	Must be employed for a minimum of 13 weeks before beginning leave.

Sources: “2021 Ontario Permanency Funding Policy Guidelines,” Government of Ontario; “Aftercare Benefits Initiative,” Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies; “Pregnancy and Parental Leave,” Government of Ontario; Adoption Services and Supports,” Government of Ontario.

²⁰ “Adoption,” Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies, n.d., <https://www.oacas.org/childrens-aid-child-protection/adoption/>.

²¹ “2021 Ontario Permanency Funding Policy Guidelines,” Government of Ontario, September 28, 2021, <https://www.ontario.ca/document/child-protection-service-directives-forms-and-guidelines/2021-ontario-permanency-funding-policy-guidelines>.

²² “Services Delivered: Aftercare Benefits Initiative,” Government of Ontario, last updated May 23, 2023, <https://www.ontario.ca/document/mccss-service-objectives-child-welfare-and-protection/services-delivered-aftercare>.

²³ “Pregnancy and Parental Leave,” Government of Ontario, last updated June 13, 2024, <https://www.ontario.ca/document/your-guide-employment-standards-act-0/pregnancy-and-parental-leave>.

Quebec

Quebec facilitated 216 public adoptions in 2022–23.²⁴ The province offers a Tax Credit for Adoption Expenses equal to 50 percent of eligible expenses to a maximum of \$20,000. The province also provides a one-year subsidy to foster parents who wish to adopt a child who has been in their care for at least one year. The subsidy can be renewed for an additional two years, at a reduced rate.²⁵ Quebec administers a paid parental-leave program in place of the Federal Employment Insurance program, called the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan. This program offers benefits that can be shared between

Figure 6. Provincial Benefits for Adoptive Families, Quebec

Benefit Type	Description	Eligibility
Financial		
Tax Credit for Adoption Expenses	Credit equal to 50 percent of eligible adoption expenses, to a maximum of \$20,000 per child.	The adoption must be recognized as legal in Quebec.
Service Support		
	One-year subsidy, renewable at a reduced rate for two additional years.	Foster families who file an application for adoption for a child who has been in their care for a minimum of one year.
Parental Leave		
Shareable Adoption Benefits	Basic Plan: 32 weeks, with first 7 weeks at 70 percent of earnings, and remaining 25 weeks at 55 percent of earnings. Four extra weeks at 55 percent of earnings when each parent has used 8 weeks. Special Plan: 25 weeks at 75 percent of earnings. Three extra weeks at 75 percent of earnings when each parent has used 6 weeks.	Must earn a minimum of \$2,000 of insurable income during the qualifying period, or reduce weekly income or time spent on business activities by 40 percent.
Adoption-Related Welcome and Support Benefits (Shareable)	Basic Plan: 13 weeks at 70 percent of earnings. Special Plan: 12 weeks at 75 percent of earnings.	
Exclusive Adoption Benefits (Non-Shareable)	Basic Plan: 5 weeks to each parent at 70 percent of earnings. Special Plan: 3 weeks to each parent at 75 percent of earnings.	
Multiple Adoption Benefit (Non-Shareable)	Basic Plan: 5 weeks to each parent at 70 percent of earnings. Special Plan: 3 weeks to each parent at 75 percent of earnings.	
Single-Parent Adoption Benefits (Non-Shareable)	Basic Plan: 5 weeks to each parent at 70 percent of earnings. Special Plan: 3 weeks to each parent at 75 percent of earnings.	

Sources: “Benefits When a Child Arrives for Adoption,” Government of Quebec; “Quebec Parental Insurance Plan,” Government of Quebec; “En équilibre vers l’avenir,” Government of Quebec; Youth Protection Act, P-34.1, s. 132; “Quebec Adoption Assistance Program,” Rising Families.

²⁴ “En équilibre vers l’avenir,” Government of Quebec, 2003, p. 17, https://ciuss-centresudmtl.gouv.qc.ca/sites/ciusscsmtl/files/media/document/2022_2023_BilanDPJ.pdf.

²⁵ “Youth Protection Act,” P-34.1, sec. 132 (n.d.), <https://www.legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/document/cr/P-34.1,%20r.%204>; “Quebec Adoption Assistance Program,” Rising Families, n.d., <https://wearefamiliesrising.org/adoption-assistance/quebec-adoption-assistance-profile/>.

parents, and benefits that are non-shareable and exclusive to one parent. Parents can select a basic option and a special option, differentiated by the duration of leave. A combination of these benefits may be used, depending on the circumstances.²⁶

New Brunswick

New Brunswick provides adoptive parents with a one-time Adoption Grant of \$1,000, to offset the costs associated with adoption.²⁷ The grant may be used for public, private, and international adoptions. If the child has special-service or placement needs, the province may provide additional financial assistance.²⁸ Adoptive parents are entitled to sixty-two weeks of unpaid leave. This leave may be shared between parents but cannot exceed sixty-two weeks.²⁹

Figure 7. Provincial Benefits for Adoptive Families, New Brunswick

Benefit Type	Description	Eligibility
Financial		
New Brunswick Adoption Grant	One-time payment of \$1,000 to offset adoption costs.	Automatic for qualifying families who adopt through Department of Social Development. Families who choose private or international adoptions may also apply.
Financial Assistance	According to the <i>Family Services Act</i> , the Minister may agree to provide financial assistance to an adopting parent.	The child must have special needs or special-placement needs.
Service Support		
	Services for a child with special needs may be covered through an agreement with the province.	As above.
Parental Leave		
Child Care Leave	Parents may take up to 62 weeks unpaid.	Parents can share leave, but cannot exceed 62 weeks.

Sources: “Maternity Leave and Child Care Leave,” Government of New Brunswick; “Information and Guidelines Application for the New Brunswick Adoption Grant Department of Social Development,” Government of New Brunswick; “Adopting a Child or Youth,” Government of New Brunswick.

²⁶ “Quebec Parental Insurance Plan,” Government of Quebec, n.d., <https://www.rqap.gouv.qc.ca/en/wage-earner/adoption/benefits-child-adoption-after-january-2021>.

²⁷ “Information and Guidelines Application for the New Brunswick Adoption Grant Department of Social Development,” Government of New Brunswick, n.d., <https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/sd-ds/pdf/adoption/InformationGuidelinesNBAdoptionGrant.pdf>; “Frequently Asked Questions, Fostering or Adopting a Child or Youth,” Government of New Brunswick, last updated March 18, 2024, <https://drupal.socialsupportsnb.ca/sites/default/files/2024-01/Fostering%20or%20adopting%20a%20child%20or%20youth%20-%20Frequently%20Asked%20Questions.pdf>.

²⁸ “Frequently Asked Questions, Fostering or Adopting a Child or Youth.”

²⁹ “Maternity Leave and Child Care Leave,” Government of New Brunswick, 2018, <https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/petl-epft/PDF/es/FactSheets/MaternityChildCareLeave.pdf>.

Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia provides a subsidy for public adoptions for children with diagnosed physical, mental, or behavioural needs or for children with a special-placement need such as being part of a sibling group.³⁰ Parents must request the subsidy from the Minister of Community Services. The province provides a longer parental leave compared to most other provinces: up to seventy-seven weeks of unpaid leave.³¹ Employees must have worked one year with the same employer to qualify.

Figure 8. Provincial Benefits for Adoptive Families, Nova Scotia

Benefit Type	Description	Eligibility
Financial		
Adoption Subsidy for Children with Special Needs	Adoptive families may be eligible to receive a subsidy if child has special needs.	The child must have a diagnosed condition or special need, or require special-placement considerations such as being part of a sibling group, or have pre-existing relational ties to the adopting family, or shared cultural heritage with the adopting family.
Service Support		
Adoption Financial Assistance	The province covers some costs for service through the Adoption Subsidy for Children with Special Needs	As above.
Parental Leave		
Parental Leave	Parents may take up to 77 weeks of unpaid leave following the child's arrival.	Must take leave within 18 months of child's arrival and provide the employer 4 weeks' notice.

Sources: "Leaves from Work," Government of Nova Scotia; "Adopting in Nova Scotia," AdoptiveParents.ca; "Agency Adoption," Government of Nova Scotia.

Prince Edward Island

Prince Edward Island facilitated fourteen adoptions in 2021–22.³² Parents may request maintenance payments and/or special support. Eligibility for maintenance payments is determined by the Director of Child and Family Services, who must be satisfied that the care of the child will place an undue financial burden on the family. Payments must not exceed the amount available to foster families. Special-support payments are intended for medical expenses, transportation costs, or home renovations. This special support is granted only for public adoptions in which the child has special needs. Families adopting a child from foster care may also receive services such as counselling or therapy, remedial education, rehabilitation care, respite care, and parent training programs.³³ The

³⁰ "Agency Adoption," Government of Nova Scotia, 2011.

³¹ "Leaves from Work," Government of Nova Scotia, n.d., <https://novascotia.ca/lae/employmentrights/leaves.asp>.

³² "Department of Social Development and Housing. Annual Report 2021–2022," Prince Edward Island, January 2024, p. 10, https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/sites/default/files/publications/21-22_annual_report_final_web.pdf.

³³ "Adoption Act Supported Adoption Regulations," chap. A-4.1 (2006), <https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/legislation/adoption-act/supported-adoption-regulations>.

province provides free counselling for birth parents who are considering permanent care options for their child.³⁴ Adoptive parents may take sixty-two weeks of unpaid parental or adoptive leave. To qualify, they must have been employed for the previous twenty weeks. Leave can be extended five additional weeks if the child has a physical, psychological, or emotional condition requiring additional parental care.³⁵

Figure 9. Provincial Benefits for Adoptive Families, Prince Edward Island

Benefit Type	Description	Eligibility
Financial		
Adoption Support Agreement (Maintenance)	The province may provide maintenance payments that do not exceed the amount available to foster families.	The Director of Child and Family Services must determine that care of the child will place undue financial burden on the adoptive family.
Service Support		
Birth Parent Counselling	Counselling to explain permanency options, to ensure the placement decision is voluntary, and to offer emotional support.	Birth parents must be provided counselling as per the <i>Adoption Act</i> .
Adoption Support Agreement (Special Support)	The province may provide counselling, therapy, and rehabilitation care. Other services include remedial education, respite care, and parent training programs.	The child must have special needs, or be part of a sibling group.
Parental Leave		
Parental Leave	Parents may take up to 62 weeks unpaid. Leave can be extended for 5 more weeks if the child has additional care needs.	Must be employed for a minimum of 20 consecutive weeks. Combined leave for both parents cannot exceed 62 weeks.
Adoption Leave	Up to 62 weeks unpaid. May be extended for 5 more weeks if the child has a physical, psychological, or emotional condition that requires additional parent care.	Must be employed for a minimum of 20 consecutive weeks. Combined leave for both parents cannot exceed 62 weeks.

Sources: “Supported Adoption Regulations,” Chap. A-4.1; “Maternity/Parental/Adoption Leave,” Prince Edward Island; “Adoption Act,” Chap. A-4.1, Sect. 4 (2021).

³⁴ “Adoption Act,” chap. A-4.1, sec. 4 (2021), <https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/legislation/adoption-act>.

³⁵ “Maternity/Parental/Adoption Leave,” Prince Edward Island, last updated March 1, 2023, <https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/workforce-advanced-learning-and-population/maternityparentaladoption-leave>.

Newfoundland and Labrador

Families adopting in the public system may be eligible for a monthly maintenance payment in exceptional circumstances, in which the placement of the child would cause undue financial hardship that would prevent the adoption. Eligible circumstances may include children who are part of a sibling group, where a child has already formed an attachment with the prospective adoptive parent(s), or where the child is Indigenous and the benefit would facilitate a cultural or community placement. The amount cannot exceed the level of support provided for children in foster care. The province may also provide a subsidy for medical services and equipment, with these subsidy agreements negotiated prior to the adoption.³⁶ The province offers parental leave and adoption leave. Parental leave is sixty-one weeks, unpaid, and adoption leave is seventeen weeks, unpaid, and can be combined with parental leave. To have access to either of these types of leave, the parent must have been employed previously for twenty consecutive weeks.

Figure 10. Provincial Benefits for Adoptive Families, Newfoundland and Labrador

Benefit Type	Description	Eligibility
Financial		
Adoption Subsidy (Maintenance)	Supports children with special-placement needs that could otherwise present financial barriers to adoption. Financial support cannot exceed the amount received by foster families.	Applies to public adoptions only. The child must have a special need and the adopting family must demonstrate financial need.
Service Support		
Adoption Subsidy (Services)	Monthly financial support for medical care and equipment needs.	Applies to public adoptions only. The child must have a special need and the adopting family must demonstrate financial need.
Parental Leave		
Parental Leave	Up to 61 weeks of unpaid leave.	Must be employed for a minimum of 20 consecutive weeks.
Adoption Leave	Up to 17 weeks of unpaid leave. Can be combined with parental leave.	Must be employed for a minimum of 20 consecutive weeks.

Sources: "Adoption Policy and Procedure Manual," Government of Newfoundland and Labrador; "Supporting a Positive Workplace . . . Labour Relations at Work," Labour Standards Division, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

³⁶ "Adoption Policy and Procedure Manual," Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, October 28, 2022, <https://www.gov.nl.ca/cssd/files/Adoption-Policy-and-Procedures-Manual.pdf>.

Yukon

Yukon may provide an adoption subsidy for public adoptions equal to the foster-care maintenance rate. The amount is based on household income and number of dependents. The territory also provides funding for items intended to meet the special needs of the child. Aid must be determined to be in the best interests of the child.³⁷ Parental leave is sixty-three weeks, unpaid, with a minimum requirement of twelve months of continuous employment to qualify.³⁸

Figure 11. Territorial Benefits for Adoptive Families, Yukon

Benefit Type	Description	Eligibility
Financial		
Financial Assistance	Child and Family Services may provide a subsidy equal to the amount received by foster families.	Public adoptions only. Amount geared to household income and number of dependents.
Service Support		
	A financial subsidy for items and services.	Financial aid based on child's need.
Parental Leave		
Parental Leave	Up to 63 weeks of unpaid leave.	Must be employed for a minimum of 12 consecutive months prior to leave.

Sources: "Child and Family Services Act," SY 2008, c.1; "Employment Standards Act" RSY 2002, c.72; "Yukon Adoption Assistance Program," Families Rising.

³⁷ "Yukon Adoption Assistance Program," Families Rising, n.d., <https://wearefamiliesrising.org/adoption-assistance/yukon-adoption-assistance-program/>; "Child and Family Services Act," SY 2008, chap. 1, part 5, <https://canlii.ca/t/8mv2>.

³⁸ "Employment Standards Act," RSY 2002, chap. 72, part 6, <https://laws.yukon.ca/cms/images/LEGISLATION/PRINCIPAL/2002/2002-0072/2002-0072.pdf>.

Northwest Territories

In 2022–23 there were thirty adoptions in the Northwest Territories, of which twenty-nine were facilitated through Indigenous communities under the *Aboriginal Custom Adoption Recognition Act*.³⁹ These adoptions are between Indigenous families who apply for certification from an Adoption Commissioner nominated by a local Aboriginal organization.⁴⁰ Public Subsidized Adoptions can receive financial support equal to 90 percent of the foster-care maintenance payment. Amounts vary based on location (due to cost of living) and age of the child. Additional amounts are available for children with physical or mental-health conditions requiring treatment that imposes a financial burden on adoptive parents.⁴¹ Parents are eligible for sixty-one weeks of unpaid leave when they have worked for an employer for at least twelve consecutive months.⁴²

Figure 12. Territorial Benefits for Adoptive Families, Northwest Territories

Benefit Type	Description	Eligibility
Financial		
Financial Assistance	Public Subsidized Adoptions may receive assistance equal to about 90 percent of foster-care support payments. Funding can be used for medical aids, physical and speech therapy, assistance with special needs, respite care, counselling, and facilitating relationships with birth families.	Public Subsidized Adoptions only. Amounts vary based on location (due to cost of living), and age of the child.
Service Support		
	Additional financial support for children with special needs, including physical and mental-health issues.	Treatment must be shown to impose a financial burden on adopting families.
Parental Leave		
Parental Leave	Up to 61 weeks of unpaid leave.	Must work for an employer for 12 consecutive months.

Sources: “Adoption Act SNWT 1998,” c9; Adoption Regulations, NWT Reg (Nu) 141-98; “Employment Standards Act,” Government of Northwest Territories, SNWT 2007, c.13, Part 3 (2008); “Aboriginal Custom Adoption in the Northwest Territories,” Government of Northwest Territories; “Reimbursements,” Foster Family Coalition of the NWT.

³⁹ “2022–2023 Annual Report,” Director of Child and Family Services, Government of Northwest Territories, October 1, 2023, p. 39, <https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/sites/hss/files/resources/2022-2023-cfs-director-report.pdf>.

⁴⁰ “Aboriginal Custom Adoption in the Northwest Territories,” Government of Northwest Territories, n.d., https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/sites/hss/files/custom_adoption.pdf.

⁴¹ “Per Diem Rates for Foster Caregivers and Subsidized Adoptions,” Foster Family Coalition of the NWT, n.d., <https://www.ffcnwt.com/reimbursements>; “Consolidation of Adoption Regulations,” R-141-98 (1998), <https://canlii.ca/t/8kk5>; “Adoption Act,” SNWT 1998, chap. 9, sec. 41, <https://www.justice.gov.nt.ca/en/files/legislation/adoption/adoption.a.pdf>.

⁴² “Employment Standards Act,” SNWT 2007, chap.13, part 3 (2008), <https://www.justice.gov.nt.ca/en/files/legislation/employment-standards/employment-standards.a.pdf>.

Nunavut

Financial assistance is available for Subsidized Departmental Adoptions of children in foster care. Assistance is available in cases in which a physical or mental condition, or basic care need, would place a financial burden on the adoptive family. The subsidy amount is negotiated with adoptive parents and must be less than the foster-care maintenance amount. Additional services can be negotiated with adoptive families.⁴³ Parents are eligible for thirty-seven weeks of unpaid leave when they have worked for an employer for at least twelve consecutive months.⁴⁴

Figure 13. Territorial Benefits for Adoptive Families, Nunavut

Benefit Type	Description	Eligibility
Financial		
Financial Assistance	Negotiated financial assistance for Subsidized Departmental Adoption.	Subsidized Departmental Adoptions where there is a physical or mental health condition that would place a financial burden on the adoptive parent.
Service Support		
	Families adopting through Subsidized Departmental Adoptions may negotiate additional services.	
Parental Leave		
Parental Leave	Parents can take 37 consecutive weeks of unpaid leave.	Must work for an employer for 12 consecutive months.

Sources: “Adoption in Nunavut,” Government of Nunavut; “Nunavut Adoption Assistance Program,” Families Rising; “Official Consolidation of Labour Standards Act,” CSNu, chap. L-10, sec. 5 (2022).

⁴³ “Nunavut Adoption Assistance Program,” Families Rising, n.d., <https://wearefamiliesrising.org/adoption-assistance/nunavut-adoption-assistance-program/>; “Adoption in Nunavut,” Government of Nunavut, n.d., <https://www.gov.nu.ca/en/families-parenting-elders-and-youth/adoption>.

⁴⁴ “Official Consolidation of Labour Standards Act,” CSNu, chap. L-10, sec. 5 (2022), <https://www.nunavutlegislation.ca/en/consolidated-law/labour-standards-act-official-consolidation>.

Summary

Financial Benefits

Nearly all provinces and territories offer financial subsidies, with these subsidies almost entirely limited to public adoptions involving sibling groups or children with special needs. In most cases, subsidies are means-tested, and payments are equal or below the monthly foster-care maintenance amount. The exceptions are New Brunswick and Alberta, which offer one-time subsidies accessible by families adopting within and outside the public system. Ontario, which finalizes more adoptions annually than any other province, offers three types of subsidies supporting children's basic needs, but only for public adoptions.

Alberta, Manitoba, and Quebec provide tax credits similar to the federal Adoption Expense Tax Credit. These provincial credits can be claimed for up to \$18,210, \$10,000, and \$20,000, respectively. Participants in the Cardus roundtable and interviews noted that these credits are beneficial to families who use private adoption, as many expenses associated with public adoption are covered by provincial and territorial governments. The credits can be used only for expenses incurred during the adoption process and can be claimed only upon the finalization of the adoption. As a result, families may carry significant expenses over an extended period of time before being eligible to claim the credits. Families receive no benefit for expenses incurred in cases where the adoption is not finalized.

Service Support

Adoptive parents and their children frequently require ongoing post-adoption support. Services or compensation for services vary widely by jurisdiction but are limited to public adoptions in all provinces except Alberta. Eligibility in most jurisdictions is means-tested, and children must have an underlying health need or be part of a sibling group. Alberta provides specific dental, vision, and supplemental health benefits for both public, private, and international adoptions. Ontario offers similar benefits for public adoptions only but extends some provisions to young adults. British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Alberta offer a range of service benefits, such as respite, counselling, and occupational therapies. These benefits are provided based on need, determined by the authority of the respective Director of Child and Family Services. Other jurisdictions offer financial support for additional services in specific circumstances.

Roundtable participants and interviewees noted gaps between services included in government benefits and actual availability of or access to the services. An adoption specialist and social worker noted that families often struggle to access some services unless there is an open file with the provincial or territorial child services. For example, the family may not be able to access a service unless there is an incident or request for intervention to the provincial or territorial child services. Or, respite care may be included as a service, but there are not enough respite-care providers available for the families that need this benefit. One adoption specialist commented that few families would say they were well served by the system.

In some jurisdictions, children in the child-welfare system with complex needs face the reduction or loss of government support for services when they transition from foster care to a permanent

adoptive home. This can create a significant burden for adoptive families and can be a barrier to foster families adopting children already in their care.

Parental Leave

Forming healthy attachments between children and parents is critically important for child well-being and family relationships. Parental leave can assist with attachment by offering parents time away from waged work. All provinces and territories provide adoptive parents with some form of parental leave. Quebec is distinct in having a paid parental-leave program separate from the federal Employment Insurance program. Parents in other jurisdictions can access paid leave through the federal program, and all jurisdictions offer unpaid job-protected leave. The average length of unpaid leave that is offered is sixty to sixty-three weeks. Nova Scotia and Newfoundland boast the longest unpaid leaves, with seventy-seven and seventy-eight weeks, respectively. Nunavut provides the shortest unpaid leave, at thirty-seven weeks. In Saskatchewan, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland, adoptive parents may be eligible to combine multiple types of leave.

The above analysis shows that there are significant variations in provincial and territorial support based on type of adoption, and the needs of the child. These differences provide an opportunity for policymakers to observe and learn from other jurisdictions.

Observations from the roundtable and interviews provide some context for the provision of benefits. Many benefits are difficult for adopting families to access. These difficulties are well known to adoption specialists and families who interact with the system.

Governments provide important benefits to adoptive parents that reduce financial burden and provide aid. Provinces and territories should be encouraged to continue to work with adoption specialists and families to enhance these benefits.

Roundtable participants and interviewees were quick to point out that beyond governments, supportive communities composed of formal organizations and informal community relationships provide significant support to adoptive families. This social structure provides invaluable support, often in ways that government does not.



About Cardus Family

Cardus Family conducts, compiles, and disseminates research on family and marriage and their strengthening impact on civil society.

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Cardus is a non-partisan think tank dedicated to clarifying and strengthening, through research and dialogue, the ways in which society's institutions can work together for the common good.

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