

## PUBLIC POLICY AND

# Health



### Work-Family Balance and Health: Can Québec Draw Inspiration from Government Policies Implemented in Other Jurisdictions? A Summary

#### Context

This paper is a summary of a scientific advisory written by Nathalie St-Amour and Mélanie Bourque of the Université du Québec en Outaouais (UQO), under the scientific coordination of Johanne Laverdure of the Institut national de santé publique du Québec (INSPQ).<sup>1</sup> In 2005 the INSPQ published a review of the literature on work-family balance (WFB) and its associations with the health of Québec families.<sup>2</sup> After more than a dozen years of sustained effort in addressing WFB on the part of the Québec government, it seemed productive to do an in-depth analysis of policies on WFB implemented in other jurisdictions. The Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux of Québec therefore mandated the INSPQ to produce an up-to-date advisory on this topic. The advisory was submitted to the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux in the context of article 54 of the [Loi sur la santé publique](#).



This summary was produced by the INSPQ's Équipe politiques publiques and is intended to facilitate knowledge translation to a broad audience.

#### Don't miss

Highlights	p. 2
Conceptual framework	p. 2
Some statistics on WFB in Québec	p. 4
WFB and the health of working parents	p. 5
Public policy that fosters WFB	p. 7
Family policy	p. 8
Work-related policies	p. 9
Pathways of action	p. 10

<sup>1</sup> Readers who would like more details or a complete bibliography can access the full report in French on the following web page:

[http://www.inspq.qc.ca/pdf/publications/1718\\_ConcilTravFamSante\\_QcPeutInspirPolGouvAutresPa ys.pdf](http://www.inspq.qc.ca/pdf/publications/1718_ConcilTravFamSante_QcPeutInspirPolGouvAutresPa ys.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> St-Amour, N. et al. (2005). *La difficulté de concilier travail-famille: ses impacts sur la santé physique et mentale des familles québécoises*, INSPQ.

## Highlights

- The issue of work-family balance (WFB) has not been given much attention in terms of its impact on health. Therefore the purpose of this advisory is to examine WFB policies likely to foster the health of working mothers and fathers. The conceptual framework is innovative in that the analysis incorporates the impact of WFB difficulties on health, the role of the neighbourhood, working conditions and public policy in the work-family-health equation.
- The statistical portrait of WFB in Québec reveals how the sizeable increase in the proportion of women in the labour market, particularly mothers, has contributed to the emergence of WFB as an issue, similar to what has occurred in many jurisdictions around the world. According to the Québec data, time conflicts seem to be a significant contributing factor in the stress experienced by working parents.
- Current research on WFB confirms the results of a literature review on the topic conducted by the INSPQ in 2005. WFB problems directly affect the quality of life and the health of working parents. Though certain working conditions can exacerbate WFB problems and their impact on health, in contrast, others can alleviate them. Examples are the support of an immediate superior, certain control over one's work, or a proactive workplace that can implement organizational practices that foster work-family balance.
- The key issue addressed by this advisory is the role of the state in WFB. A comparative analysis of various government programs in family policy and labour legislation in Québec and eight other jurisdictions shows that Québec is well-positioned in terms of measures included in its family policy. However, while maintaining and consolidating its achievements, Québec should focus efforts on adapting the labour market to the reality of working parents, particularly in allowing more time for family, or at least greater flexibility in managing their time.

In light of the comparison with what is being done elsewhere, action paths emerge in terms of public policy likely to improve WFB and the health of working parents in Québec. In terms of public policy measures that would support families, these action paths are the following:

- Consolidate the public daycare system
- Increase the flexibility of the *Régime québécois d'assurance parentale (RQAP)* (Québec Parental Insurance Program)

And with regards to legislation covering labour standards, the following action paths should be pursued:

- Increase the number of annual vacation days and days off to fulfill family responsibilities
- Increase flexibility with regards to time (such as flex-time) and location of work
- Strengthen workplace support for WFB.

## Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework used here is based on research addressing on the one hand associations between WFB and the health of working parents and on the other the influence of lifestyle and public policy on the balance of work-family-health. Figure 1 illustrates this conceptual framework and how certain characteristics of the family situation, lifestyle and working conditions can lead to various types of conflict affecting the ability of parents to balance work and family life. A *time conflict* refers to the inability of a person to respond to the multiple demands of his/her life due to an overloaded schedule. A *stress conflict* refers to the demands associated with a role such as working which can hinder a person from adequately accomplishing the tasks associated with another role such as that of parent. Lastly, a *behavioural conflict* is produced when a person is no longer in a position to adapt his/her behaviours to the various roles he/she plays. The capacity for work-family balance on the part of parents will in turn have an impact on their physical and mental health. But WFB does not always or only act as a mediating variable between working conditions and the health of working people. As we can see in Figure 1, working conditions can directly influence health, and WFB can have an effect in the workplace. Public policy has the potential to reduce work-family conflict among working parents, increase their capacity for WFB, and thus improve their health by acting on working conditions and lifestyle habits and through other government measures that support families, including those related to employment.

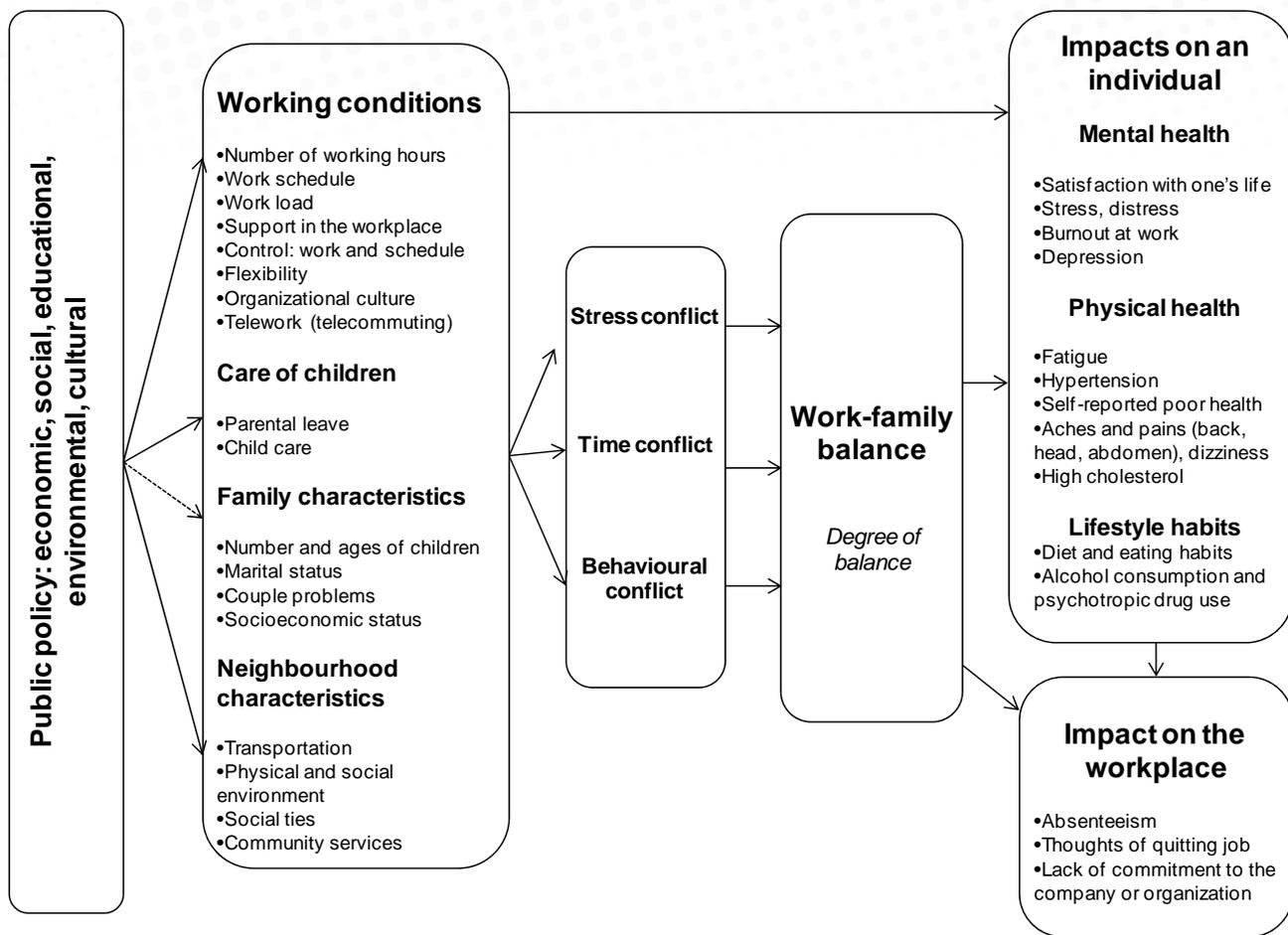


FIGURE 1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF WORK-FAMILY BALANCE, HEALTH AND PUBLIC POLICY

## Some statistics on WFB in Québec

### Parents' participation in the labour market

Among the lifestyle transformations that have occurred in recent decades, the dramatic increase in the proportion of women active in the labour market, particularly that of mothers, has contributed to the emergence of the issue of WFB in so-called post-industrial countries. Heads of family<sup>3</sup> who work comprise the majority and now the “two-income family” model is replacing that of “man the provider.” In addition to challenging the traditional division of tasks in the family, this new model has had significant consequences for parents trying to balance their family life with their job. WFB no longer only revolves around the complementarity of roles in the couple, but also around the division of time between work and the family on the part of both parents. Moreover, single-parenthood, the absence of support from a spouse/partner, and an often

difficult financial situation, can aggravate work-family conflict.

Between 1976 and 2008 in Québec, the employment rate of women 25 to 44 years of age with a child under 12 went from 30% to 77.8%. In 1976, the employment rate of Ontario mothers (49.1 %) was much higher than that of Québec, but was slightly lower than of Québec in 2008 (77.3 %).<sup>4</sup>The impressive increase in Québec was likely due to government policy on daycare, the implementation of free full-time kindergarten for five-year-olds, and the higher educational level of women in recent years.

### Division of work-family time and perceived time conflict

Given the increasing number of hours both parents devote to their jobs, the pressure they feel has also increased, resulting in a notable rise in absenteeism in the workplace.

<sup>3</sup> In this article, the term “family” mainly refers to two types – the nuclear family and the single-parent family with one or more children.

<sup>4</sup> Employment rate: Number of people 15 years of age and over who have a paid job expressed as a percentage of the population of working age (15 years of age and over) (ISQ: April, 2009).

The actual number of hours worked by parents illustrates the challenge WFB represents for them. Parents work 3.7 fewer hours per week than adults without children. The difference in real hours worked by mothers compared to women without children is 5.8 hours a week. A marked gender-related difference observed in 2007 in the number of hours absent per year to fulfill family obligations, namely 80.6 hours for women versus 19.5 hours for men. Women still spend more time than men doing household chores, even though men have increased the number of hours they spend doing these. Time-related stress felt by parents who work full-time has an impact on their lives. Many worry that they do not spend enough time with their family or friends, and therefore reduce the number of hours they sleep. Many feel dissatisfied with not having accomplished much during the day, and concerned that they were not able to do what they had planned. Again, it is the mothers who are more likely to feel this stress.

The number of hours spent working is not the only factor that has an impact on work-family balance. The work schedule also plays an important role. For parents of babies and toddlers and school-age children, a normal workday schedule is the one that best facilitates WFB. However, the percentage of working 25-44 year-olds who have a normal workday is decreasing. A flexible work schedule (flex-time) is often suggested as a solution for striking a healthy work-family balance, but surprisingly such an arrangement is also decreasing among both women and men. Choosing to work part-time, also considered a promising option to achieve a better balance, saw an increase in both sexes between 1997 and 2008, but is still more prevalent among women. However, part-time work generally means a decrease in wages and benefits. Women, particularly single mothers, are over-represented in this type of employment, and are therefore more financially insecure.

#### Parents' use of WFB measures

In 2005, 49% of Québec employers said they had implemented measures addressing WFB, yet no more than 40% of employees said they had taken advantage of these. It is noteworthy that a very low proportion of people said working from home was a reason to achieve better WFB, though more women than men cited this as the main purpose for doing so.

## WFB and the health of working parents

### Effects of WFB problems

In 2005 the INSPQ published a review of the scientific literature showing that WFB has had a real impact on parents, couples, families, the workplace and even the costs of health care. Associations have been shown between WFB problems among parents and a lower level of satisfaction with their lives in general, their job and family life. Alarming results were revealed on the impact of poor work-family balance on *mental health*, such as anxiety, depression and mood disorders, and on *physical health*, such as hypertension, cardiovascular problems, gastrointestinal problems, allergies, migraine headaches, and psychosomatic symptoms.

The update of recent research this advisory provides confirms the impact of WFB difficulties on parents' health. *Mental health* problems include dissatisfaction with their lives, psychological distress, depression and burnout at work. Single mothers, who experience more work-family imbalance, are also more likely to report psychological distress. Single parent status can even become an obstacle to employment. A higher proportion of single mothers have a part-time job and are more likely to receive welfare. WFB problems can also have a long-term impact on parents who cannot find balance. In addition, couple-relationship difficulties and other sources of tension can have an impact on parents' WFB and in turn their health.

In terms of *physical health*, an association has been observed between WFB difficulties experienced by parents and various types of health problems such as hypertension, obesity, psychosomatic and physical symptoms including headaches, back pain, fatigue, dizziness, orthopedic issues and even workplace accidents. Work-family imbalance can also impede good *lifestyle habits* such as preparing healthy meals. For many parents, lack of time is indeed the main obstacle to a healthy diet, even more so for single-parent and low-income families. Families with a heavy workload are also less likely to eat meals together and are more sedentary. These problems are also associated with higher alcohol consumption and drug use.

## Impact of working conditions

Working conditions are at the heart of the WFB issue, playing an important role in increasing or easing the difficulties parents face, directly or indirectly. Stress at work has been significantly associated with work-family conflict, and is its most important predictor. It affects family life and the couple's relationship, and the degree of satisfaction vis-à-vis family life, which in turn generates additional stress that can lead to health problems.

Long working hours, overtime, and an atypical work schedule can render WFB more difficult, rotating or shift work even more so. Work overload has an impact on parents who work full-time and is associated with emotional distress, blood pressure problems and a lower sense of well-being. Irregular working hours and shift work hamper a healthy lifestyle and can engender health problems such as insomnia and fatigue. Among mothers, shift work, especially at night, affects the ability of both parents to strike a good WFB. Indeed, shift workers are more likely to reduce their sleep time in order to spend more time with their family. They also tend to be more stressed and are more likely to report symptoms of depression. Lack of control over one's work schedule has been identified as a variable that influences parents' satisfaction with their lives and in turn their health. Parents with less flexibility and autonomy at work report higher levels of anxiety and stress and say they are less happy than those with greater flexibility. People with an atypical work schedule have more problematic family dynamics and their children are more likely to experience social and emotional problems. Indeed, it is not just a schedule problem, but also a problem of stress at work, the emotional load of which is transposed into the home. This phenomenon of "emotional interference" results in a lower quantity and quality of time spent with the family – working parents feel incapable of participating in family activities.

## Impacts of WFB in the workplace

For several years now employers have developed practices designed to foster work-family balance. These have been defined as "deliberate changes in policies, programs or organizational culture with the goal of reducing work-life conflicts resulting in employees being more effective at work and in their other roles." Another emerging perspective is that of "facilitation," by which the workplace experience perceived by employees as having a positive impact on their family life also has a positive impact on their health and performance at work while reducing absenteeism.

Support in the workplace, particularly from an immediate superior and co-workers/colleagues, contributes to facilitating WFB. Furthermore, having more control over one's work, if there is a reasonable workload, can also result in reducing conflict related to WFB. Employees who feel they benefit from some flexibility on the part of their employer, particularly in terms of their work schedule, have less stress and perceive themselves as being healthier and less likely to experience burnout. Flexible organizational policies therefore benefit employers, even financially, since employees are more satisfied with their job, more committed to their employer, less absent and less likely to quit their job. Having easy access to time off to take care of children also has a beneficial effect on WFB. An organizational culture perceived by employees as being open and favourable to WFB can have as much importance as the implementation of WFB measures as such.

## Impact of WFB policies

Few studies have been conducted on the impact WFB policies on the health of working parents. However an association has been observed between the duration of maternity leave and mothers' mental health. Women who can take maternity leave for a longer period of time present fewer symptoms of depression and other mental health problems. In addition, even though few studies have yet to demonstrate this, public policy that fosters WFB, such as parental leave and wider availability of daycare services, contribute to improving the health of families in the jurisdictions where they are implemented. It is therefore possible to act on WFB and improve the well-being of families by improving their living and working conditions.

## Public policy that fosters WFB

Government policies can contribute to reducing parents' stress related to WFB. But how can we put Québec government policies into perspective and how can we draw from what is being done elsewhere to improve WFB measures already in place and foster the health of working parents? The process we employed for this advisory was to examine public policy in various jurisdictions and compare it to that of Québec. The U.K., Australia, New Zealand and Germany were selected because of recent changes they have implemented in the labour market, parental leave and WFB. France, Sweden and Denmark were chosen because they are well-known for their approach to WFB issues. Canada as a whole was

obviously included, but not the U.S., where very few public policies address WFB.

There are two major means through which government can affect WFB – family policy, traditionally associated with WFB, and workplace (or labour) legislation, used only very recently for this purpose. Governments have chosen a variety of approaches. Some have opted for a parental leave policy that includes a progressive return to work.

Others have passed laws that give employees the right to ask for more flexibility at work, whether it involves their schedule or location of work. In some cases, these measures are available to all employees, in other cases only the parents of young children can make use of them. Certain governments have applied a mixed approach and implemented measures as part of both family policy and workplace legislation.

**TABLE 1** TYPOLOGY OF FAMILY POLICIES

Overview	General philosophy	Benefits / Tax credits	Parental leave	Child care
<b>Low support for WFB:</b> Australia United Kingdom (U.K.) New Zealand Provinces of Canada other than Québec	Encourage parental responsibility in raising children  Little government intervention	Comparatively lower benefits (payments) and tax credits	Parental leave with low remuneration	Child care left to the marketplace  Families must find their own solutions  Frequent use of family / relatives
<b>General support:</b> France	Encourages values associated with the traditional family ( <i>father as provider, mother as housewife</i> )	More generous benefits	Short parental leave with little remuneration  Parental leave to raise children is a priority ( <i>if lengthy, it disconnects women from the labour force and makes re-entry more difficult</i> )	Public network for early childhood services not very developed
<b>Support for two-income families:</b> Sweden Norway Québec Rest of Canada (federal parental leave)	Foster both parents being in the labour force	Relatively low benefits	Generous parental leave, relatively short (approx. a year)	Child care (daycare) network – ideally easily accessible, educational and affordable

## FAMILY POLICY

The analysis comparing Québec with other jurisdictions was based on a typology developed in a study of family policies in 20 OECD countries. Table 1 presents an overview of the results of this analysis, grouping jurisdictions by three types of government action in order to compare support for families through benefits and tax credits, parental leave and child care services. As the table shows, jurisdictions with *Low support for families* are characterized by minimal support – financial support that is very low or average, and a low level of development of parental leave and child care services. Jurisdictions with *General support* for families provide high levels of benefit payments and tax credits, but few parental leave programs and public child care services. They invest in leave to raise children that follows parental leave.

Jurisdictions that provide *Support for two-income families* foster the participation of both parents in the labour force, give relatively low amounts of family benefit payments or tax credits, but offer parental leave with generous income compensation and low-cost child care services.

### Financial support for families

Family benefit payments are not necessarily WFB measures per se. However, they have an influence on family income, standard of living, and in turn health status. With the additional income from family benefits, working parents can better manage the financial stress associated with raising children, and therefore improve their WFB. Québec offers financial support in the form of a tax credit with payments throughout the year calculated according to various factors in addition to that offered by the federal government. But Québec differs from other Canadian

provinces particularly because of its significant investment in child care and parental leave.

### Child care services

Child care facilitates the participation of mothers in the labour force, fosters child development and supports parents in their quest for a better work-family balance. Indeed, parents who have easy access to affordable daycare and who feel confident in leaving their children there are more engaged in their workplace, more productive, and report being happier. In jurisdictions with a family policy that provides a low level of support, benefit payments do not compensate for the child care costs families incur. In France, the only country that provides general support, there is a wide variety of child care services, the costs of which vary by location of residence. The federal government of Canada directly subsidizes parents for child care through the Universal Child Care Benefit. Taxable monthly payments are given to parents for each child six years of age and under.

Québec has chosen a policy that supports a two-income family model, includes a well-recognized network of public daycare services, and a reimbursable tax credit for use of child care services in the private sector. Indeed, the Québec government has implemented an integrated network of educational, low-cost childcare centres for children of pre-school age. At the time it was created, this model included the transition from part-time to full-time kindergarten for 5-year-old children. In certain disadvantaged neighbourhoods, half-time kindergarten was made available for 4-year-old children. In our analysis, we examined the integrated network comprising daycare services for children 5 years of age and under, looking more closely at three types, namely CPEs (Centres de la petite enfance, “childcare centres”), private daycares, and home-based daycares.<sup>5</sup> As seen in this category in other jurisdictions, child care in Québec is provided at a reduced cost. To access subsidized daycare, parents must register on a waiting list in one of the regional access offices. When a space is offered to them, they must pay a modest amount, which is not calculated according to the parents’ income and size of the family, as it is in Germany. Since demand for such daycare services is very high, it currently exceeds the

capacity of the network. It is therefore an option that is difficult to access for many families. For these families, there are non-subsidized daycares which are higher in cost, but still qualify for a tax credit.

### Parental leave

The duration and flexibility of parental leave can lower parents’ stress associated with time balance. Two current approaches merit attention. The first, both traditional and widely held, addresses parental leave in the same manner as maternity leave that was developed for mothers, namely, from a health perspective. An emerging approach, a departure from the former, promotes parental leave that is less focused on gender and includes fathers, as well as increasing flexibility in the way in which leave is taken. Leave can take many forms – maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave, leave to raise children. All of these allow parents to suspend their work contracts or arrangements to take care of their children. If the duration is long, however, leave to raise children can detach parents from the labour market and result in financial insecurity. The part-time version of this type of leave may be more productive in that the parent can keep his/her job.

In jurisdictions with low WFB support for families, parental leave is at a low level of development and accessibility is related to the number of hours worked. Parents who do not qualify for benefits can therefore be inclined to make an early return to the labour force, which can have a negative impact on their health. Canada has a double-income component to its family policy, but is less generous than other countries in terms of the amount of the payments and offers little flexibility. Québec is the only province in Canada to administer its own parental leave program — the *Régime québécois d’assurance parentale* (Québec Parental Insurance Plan) — and is also the only one to offer paid leave of three to five weeks for the father. Compared to other jurisdictions in the same category, leave in Québec is accessible and quite generous. Whether maternity, paternity or parental leave, it offers parents two options – fewer weeks with a higher benefit, or a longer period of time with a lower benefit. However, it lacks the flexibility which parents look for in terms of the duration of the leave, which could go beyond the child’s first year of life.

<sup>5</sup> Centres de la petite enfance (CPEs – “childcare centres”) are publicly funded, non-profit institutions managed by a board of directors. Private daycares are for-profit organizations, some of which are subsidized by the government. Home-based daycares are services provided in a private residence, which may be recognized by a Bureau coordonnateur de la garde en milieu familial (“Coordinating Office for Home-Based Daycares”); if the latter is the case, they can provide low-cost, daycare spaces.

## WORK-RELATED POLICIES

The policies in our comparative analysis were defined by various countries and jurisdictions as measures addressing WFB, even if they sometimes have other goals. They are divided into two categories. One comprises those that are compulsory and are included in labour standards, and the other those that encourage employers to establish WFB measures but are incentive-oriented and not compulsory.

### Legislation on labour standards

#### *The work week*

Though the legal duration of a work week is relatively equivalent among jurisdictions, namely between 37 and 40 hours, little legislation addresses overtime. In Québec, overtime hours are calculated from the time an employee works more than 40 hours in a week. Remuneration must be increased by 50% (i.e. “time and a half”), but the law on labour standards does not limit the number of overtime hours.

#### *Vacation and statutory holidays*

On this important aspect of WFB, Québec is at the rear of the pack compared to the other jurisdictions examined. Québec employees have two weeks of vacation annually, which does not match the reality of children’s vacation time (Christmas, summer).

#### *Leave for parenting or other family reasons*

As seen previously, parents are absent from work more often than other working people due to family reasons. Yet the various countries studied provide little support in this regard. The Canadian government offers compassionate leave when a family member is gravely ill. Employees can take up to six months to care for their sick family member, but are paid for only six weeks, and their remuneration is reduced by 40% or more. In Québec, employees can take up to 10 days leave for family or parenting reasons. These days off can be taken non-consecutively, and divided up following an agreement with the employer, but are unpaid. Employees can then make use of compassionate leave offered by the federal government.

#### *Flexibility with regards to work*

With the exception of Canada, the Commonwealth countries in our analysis have recently amended their labour standards to render the workplace more flexible for all employees and for those who must care for a family member. Parents have the right to request rearranging their working conditions, such as type, schedule, or location, to better adapt to the reality of their family life.

Employers can accept or refuse such a request, but are obliged to consider it, and in some cases must respond in writing indicating the reason for a refusal, if applicable. France has addressed this issue by expanding the scope of collective bargaining because of the limits of an individual-based approach. Mindful of equity for all employees, certain employers, however, refuse to consider the requests of parents who would not like to work evenings, nights and weekends for family reasons.

## GOVERNMENT INCENTIVES

To accompany legislation, the government can also play an information and sensitization role in various types of workplace – companies, government organizations, community groups – to encourage them to implement good WFB practices (e.g. rearranging work schedule/location, job sharing, support from the immediate superior, parental leave, child care in the workplace, etc.). Information is generally communicated via websites or guides for employers interested in developing an organizational culture that includes measures to foster WFB. A number of countries also offer financial support and/or organizational support (counselling and expert advice) and give awards to those who stand out in this regard. Some jurisdictions report annually on the development of WFB practices. Others create working groups in the workplace to foster information-sharing on WFB best practices and even conduct scientific studies to support such practices and promote debate on the topic.

Québec has developed an incentive approach that translates into financial measures, support mechanisms and recognition of WFB in the workplace. The Ministère de la Famille et des Aînés (Ministry of the Family and Seniors) has established a financial support program for employers to encourage the development of WFB practices, and certifies those who would like recognition for their efforts in this regard. To obtain certification, employers must fulfill certain compulsory criteria, such as a commitment on the part of management and the implementation of a WFB committee, as well as specific criteria beyond usual ones such as managing WFB, adaptability of work methods, time/location arrangements of work, leave and days off, services offered in the workplace, etc. Employers specifically interested in flexible work arrangements and fewer working hours can access information and obtain support from Emploi Québec. For a number of years now, the Québec government has been giving out an annual award to employers who have developed a proactive WFB strategy. It has also implemented a financial support program for community-based WFB projects. In an accompaniment role, it has

also created synergy around the issue of WFB and fosters communication among the various actors in a variety of forums. However, the measures in Québec are not matched by legislation, through which for example, employees could demand flexibility in their work arrangements.

## Pathways of action

Compared to what is being done elsewhere in the world, Québec is in a favourable position in matters of family policy, particularly with regards to the *Régime québécois d'assurance parentale* (Québec Parental Insurance Plan) and early childhood services. The network of daycares that has been implemented constitutes a major advance that should be maintained and improved by expanding the number of spaces available so that all children can have timely access. With paternity leave, the government also encourages better sharing of parenting tasks between men and women, in addition to the fact that it is accessible to the self-employed and offers some flexibility. In the future, these gains should be consolidated. Even more focus should be placed on adapting the world of work to the reality of parents, by allowing them more time for family, or at least the capacity to better manage it.

From this perspective, action paths to consolidate the public network of daycare services and increase the flexibility of parental leave should be considered. Examining legislation and labour standards with the goal of reducing time conflicts experienced by working parents is also needed in order to foster WFB and improve the health of families.

**In public policy that supports families, it is recommended to:**

- Consolidate the public network of daycare services  
Emphasis should be placed on two-income family measures, and the importance of low-cost universal daycare should be reiterated. The government should continue to expand the number of spaces in CPEs and ensure that quality child care services are available.
- Increase the flexibility of the *Régime québécois d'assurance parentale* (RQAP) (Québec Parental Insurance Plan)  
It would be beneficial for both parents and employers to extend parental leave over a longer period, giving parents the option of returning to work on a part-time basis. This would have the advantage of reducing acute time-related stress experienced by parents when their children are very young. It would also result in

employers being able to count on human resources that are sometimes difficult to replace. Such flexibility could also apply to paternity leave.

**In legislation on labour standards, it is recommended to:**

- Increase the number of annual vacation days and days off for family responsibilities  
The issue of remuneration, at least partial, should also be addressed, since lower-income employees do not take time off for family responsibilities because of their financial situation. Further studies are needed on the financial impact on families of such a measure, which could be significant in the context of social inequalities in health.
- Increase flexibility in arranging work time and location of work  
It is important to have legislation that gives working people more flexibility in terms of schedule (i.e. flex-time) and the location where they work. An option could be the model seen in certain Commonwealth countries where employers are obligated to consider employees' requests to change their work arrangements. In general, such a measure has little impact on an employer, because the same amount of work is done and only how it is arranged is different. The cost remains to be evaluated, although some research suggests that it could be financially advantageous for employers.

**With regards to WFB support in the workplace, it is recommended to:**

- Strengthen WFB support in the workplace  
A para-governmental advisory organization mandated with research and knowledge translation could be implemented to document WFB best practices. It would foster networking among various stakeholders, such as employer's groups, unions, experts and government authorities. This would give direction to employers and familiarize them with existing programs. Workplace practices could be improved by training government experts to work with employers interested in developing a WFB culture and implementing concrete measures addressing work arrangements. Since such measures may not be uniformly applicable in all workplaces, legislation could be enacted prescribing the creation of a WFB committee in the workplace, thereby contributing to the development of an organizational culture that fosters WFB and develops solutions that fulfill the needs of both employees and employers.

For bibliographic references, see the full scientific advisory in French on the following web page:  
<http://www.inspq.qc.ca/Default.aspx?pageid=263&pub=1807>

**ADVISORY WRITTEN BY**

Nathalie St-Amour  
Université du Québec en Outaouais  
Mélanie Bourque  
Université du Québec en Outaouais

**TRANSLATED BY**

James Lawler

**SCIENTIFIC COORDINATION**

Johanne Laverdure  
Direction du développement des individus et des communautés

**SUMMARY WRITTEN BY**

Marie-Claire Laurendeau  
Vice-présidence aux affaires scientifiques

*Institut national  
de santé publique*

Québec 

*This document can be downloaded from the Institut national de santé publique du Québec website at <http://www.inspq.qc.ca>.*

*Reproductions for the purpose of private study or research are permitted under section 29 of the Copyright Act. Any other use requires authorization from the Government of Québec, which holds the exclusive intellectual property rights of this document. Authorization may be obtained by submitting a request to the central clearinghouse, Service de la gestion des droits d'auteur des Publications du Québec; the form can be obtained from the following website: <http://www.droitauteur.gouv.qc.ca/autorisation.php>, or by sending an email to [droit.auteur@cspq.gouv.qc.ca](mailto:droit.auteur@cspq.gouv.qc.ca).*

*Data in this document can be cited on condition that the source is credited.*

The translation of this publication was made possible with funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada.

LEGAL DEPOSIT – 2<sup>nd</sup> QUARTER 2014  
BIBLIOTHÈQUE ET ARCHIVES NATIONALES DU QUÉBEC  
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA  
ISBN : 978-2-550-69299-7 (FRENCH PDF)  
ISSN: 1919-174X (PDF)  
ISBN: 978-2-550-70400-3 (PDF)

© Gouvernement du Québec (2014)

Publication N<sup>o</sup>: 1807