



PO Box 10, Station C
368 Hamilton Avenue, 2nd Floor
St. John's NL A1C 5H5

FFAW | UNIFOR
Fish, Food & Allied Workers

Tel: 709.576.7276
Fax: 709.576.1962
Web: www.ffaw.nf.ca

KEITH SULLIVAN
President

DAVID DECKER
Secretary-Treasurer

Re: Budget 2016 Employment Insurance Measures

Dear Members,

The federal Liberal government's first budget was delivered on March 22, 2016. The measures announced in the budget are a step in the right direction and signal a clear change in direction from the previous government.

While the changes to Employment Insurance will help many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, we must continue to advocate for further improvements to the EI system to make it more accessible for FFAW-Unifor members and others who, through no fault of their own, depend on the system.

Eligibility Requirements

As of July 2016, the 910 hrs required by new entrants or re-entrants to qualify for EI benefits will cease and then be based on the same eligibility criteria as all other claimants in a particular region... Between 420 and 700 Hours depending on the Unemployment Rate in Their Region, (it is estimated this will allow an additional fifty thousand workers to Qualify for EI Benefits)

Waiting Period

Starting in January 1, 2017, the two week EI waiting period will be reduced to one week.

While the reduction of the waiting period is a good start, wait times for benefits should be eliminated entirely for workers who lose their job through no fault of their own. Wait times only serve to further penalize workers for circumstances beyond their control.

Additional 5 Weeks of Benefits

Starting in July 2016, an additional 5 weeks of regular benefits, up to a maximum of 50 weeks of benefits, will be available for all eligible EI claimants in 12 economic regions including Newfoundland and Labrador. The extension will be retroactive to January 4, 2015 and while it is available in Newfoundland and Labrador, it is not available to claimants living in the St. John's area.

This measure also provides for an additional 20 weeks of benefits retroactive to January 4, 2015 for Long Tenured Workers (those spending little time on EI) for a total maximum of 70 weeks of benefits.

The additional 5 weeks of benefits is not a costly initiative as most claimants are back to work before their regular benefits run out. FFAW-Unifor will advocate that the maximum of 50 weeks should be a permanent feature of the EI Program.

Working While on Claim Pilot Project

The Working While on Claim Pilot Project will be extended until August 2018. Under the project, claimants are able to keep fifty cents of their EI benefits on every dollar earned up to a maximum of 90% of the weekly insurable earnings used to calculate their EI benefit amount.

Accepting Lower Paying Jobs

The 2012 Budget changes that required some claimants (described as "Frequent Users") to accept lower paying jobs and to commute longer distances will be eliminated as part of Budget 2016.

Work Sharing Agreements

Budget 2016 also proposes to extend the maximum duration of work sharing agreements from the current 38 weeks to 76 weeks across Canada. This initiative is designed to help employers retain skilled workers during temporary downturns and allows employees to continue working and maintain their skills while supplementing their wages with EI benefits for days they are not at work.

Enhanced EI Services

In order for Service Canada to provide better service on a timely basis to claimants across the country, Budget 2016 proposes to provide \$19 million in 2016-17 to enhance services. The budget also proposes to invest \$73 million over the proposed two year period to enhance services at call centers, by increasing the number of Call Center Agents to assist claimants.

Labour Market Agreements

Budget 2016 proposes to spend an additional \$125 million in 2016-17 on Labour Market Agreements as well as an additional \$50 million over the same period for the Canada Job Fund Agreements.

This Budget provides in excess of \$85 million over a five year period starting in 2016-17 to develop a frame work to support Union-based apprenticeship training and investments in equipment

Compassionate Care Benefits

The budget commits to improve Compassionate Care Benefits and to make them more accessible, flexible and inclusive for those who provide care for seriously ill family members. The budget also provides more flexibility in Parental Leave Benefits. We are still awaiting more details on these initiatives, however during the election campaign Prime Minister Trudeau committed to increase Compassionate Care Benefits from the current 6 weeks to 6 months and to ensure it covered family members who were seriously ill, not just those who are terminally ill.

What Was Not in Budget 2016

Budget 2016 did not reverse cuts to the benefit rate, which is currently 55%. FFAW-Unifor will continue to advocate for at, minimum, a benefit rate of 60% and have it based on the claimants best 12 weeks of work.

Additionally, FFAW-Unifor will continue to lobby for longer duration of benefits for workers who end up on sickness benefits. Those workers currently only receive 15 weeks of benefits despite having years of employment.

Finally, benefits should be extended for those in approved training programs for the duration of the training program, not just for the duration of a current claim. Based on the current system, claimants end up on a training allowance that provides considerably less income.

In solidarity,



Keith Sullivan
FFAW-Unifor President



David Decker
FFAW-Unifor Secretary-Treasurer