

# NATIONAL MULTIPLE BIRTHS AWARENESS DAY

May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2005  
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Director of Research, MBC

Good afternoon, ladies, gentlemen and honoured guests.

The main objective of National Multiple Births Awareness Day is to recognize the unique challenges faced by multiple-birth individuals and their families.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today, to begin a public dialogue on our theme for advocacy this year, and in doing so, to celebrate with you the joy multiple birth children bring to our lives, as well as to mark a significant point in our organization's history.

By coming together at events such as this, the multiple-birth community can strengthen its common bond, AND build its capacity to influence the programs and policies that affect our daily lives.

This year's focus is on the maternity, parental and compassionate care leave provisions under the *Employment Insurance Program*, and the inadequacy in providing support to multiple-birth families.

Focusing on the current shortfalls of the *EI program* and raising awareness of the unique needs of multiple-birth individuals and families will improve our capacity, as Canadians, to understand each other, and to influence change.

Parents of multiples face extraordinary financial, physical and emotional stress when taking care for two, three or more babies at one time.

Compared to parents with a single baby, parents of multiples experience challenges because they may face: post-partum depression, pregnancy complications, loss of one or more infants, managing extended neonatal or extended care, and increased stress in marital relationships, to name just a few.

Multiple-birth children themselves may face certain challenges: coping with loss of co-multiple, living with special needs, and increased likelihood of identifying and dealing with developmental delays.

The multiple birth vs singleton experience is not the same; yet the provisions under current EI policy and programming do not address these differences. Specifically, MBC would recommend including:

- Incidences of preterm and low birth weight to the current eligibility criteria for compassionate care leave, as well as extending the provisions beyond six weeks.
- For maternity and parental leave, we would recommend extending the amount of leave for all incidences of multiple-births, up to at least one year per newborn, or an extension similar to precedents in these policies set in other countries, such as in Sweden, where an extra six months of leave per child is in effect.

The celebration of National Multiple Births Awareness Day is an opportunity to unite and express our views to the federal government on *EI*. We look forward to building, with you, on the advocacy work MBC has begun, and to explore other areas that deserve our attention in the year to come. We welcome your advice and support, and we encourage you to contact your MPs, and make your views heard. Canadians need, and will, find better ways to accommodate multiple-birth individuals and families!