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Benefits Bulletin

Benefit News to Keep You in the Know and the Now

Preparing for 2018

Various governments across Canada have announced legislation changes that are to come into effect January 1, 2018 that will impact your business. Let's take a look at what to expect in 2018.

Employment Insurance Plan (EI)

Region: Canada

The changes will provide increased flexibility for those taking maternity or parental leave (option of 12 or 18 month leave). Refer to our September Benefits Bulletin for more details and action that you may need to take.

A caregiving leave providing up to 15 weeks of benefits has been introduced to allow workers to care for a wider range of loved ones experiencing critical medical conditions without having to also worry about their job.

The EI rates will increase to \$1.66 per \$100 of insurable earnings (\$1.30 in Quebec) and the insurable earnings maximum will increase to \$51,700.

OHIP+

Region: Ontario

The Ontario government has indicated that it will provide drug coverage for all Ontario residents up to their 25th birthday. This new plan is called OHIP+.

There is no application process. The parent or individual simply needs to present their

Health Card to the pharmacy. The pharmacy will bill OHIP.

The plan is expected to cover approximately 4,400 drugs but if a drug is not covered by the province in full or in part, it may be eligible under the group plan. Plan members just need to present their drug card and the pharmacy will coordinate the benefits on their behalf.

Group plan administrators will still need to enroll dependent children and maintain their student status as necessary because OHIP+ does not cover all drugs nor does it provide full health care coverage or dental care.

The impact of this change to group plans is not expected to be significant.

Fair & Family Friendly Workplaces Act

Region: Alberta

This Act will update workplace laws and align with the revised Federal EI program.

Highlights include:

- Workers will be eligible for protected leaves after 90 days instead of 52 weeks
- Compassionate care leave will be extended from 8 to 27 weeks and includes new notification rules
- Workers will no longer have to work 30 days in the preceding 12 months before holiday pay is due

- Vacation pay is 4% (or 2 weeks) for the first 5 years of employment. Thereafter, it must be at least 6%
- Layoffs will be limited to 60 days within a 120-day period (i.e. no indefinite layoffs)
- Extension of the notification period for mass termination
- Maternity/Parental leave will align with the EI plan and workers on leave can be terminated only if the business is closed or suspended
- New unpaid, job protected leaves (Personal & Family Responsibility, Long-Term Illness & Injury, Bereavement, Domestic Violence, Citizenship Ceremony, Critical Illness of a Child, Death or disappearance of a Child)

Fair Workplaces Act

Region: Ontario

The Fair Workplaces Act has met with a lot of resistance by employers and has been in the news quite a bit. At the time of writing, the Ontario government has not changed their plans to proceed with this Act starting January 1st. Some highlights of the act are:

- Increase to minimum wage to \$14/hour and further to \$15/hour January 1, 2019
- Vacation entitlement increase from 2 to 3 weeks after 5 years of service
- Personal emergency leave already in place for employers with more than 50 workers will apply to employers with less than 50 workers. Employees will be eligible for 10 days per year with at least two of them being paid days. A sick note requirement will be prohibited
- Equal pay between full- and part-time workers
- New notice requirements for scheduling changes and minimum pay requirements if required notice is not provided
- New rules surrounding union certification including allowing a union access to certain employee lists providing they can show that they already have 20% support

- Prohibit the misclassification of employees as independent contractors so as to deny them protection under the Employment Standards Act
- New job-protected leaves for up to 104 weeks for the death of a child and crime-related disappearance
- Family medical leave increased from 8 weeks in a 26-week period to 27 weeks in a 52-week period

MSP Premium Rates

Region: British Columbia

Premiums for the provincial Medical Services Plan (MSP) will be reduced by 50% for households with annual incomes up to \$120,000 with a view to eliminate them altogether in four years. The exemption limit will increase by \$2,000 to \$26,000 for a single person or \$35,000 for a family of four.

On the Horizon: Legalization of Cannabis

Region: Canada

Effective Date: April 1, 2018 (anticipated)

Currently, medical marijuana obtained by prescription through a licensed Health Canada outlet can only be claimed under a Health Care Spending Account or Cost Plus plan.

In order for a drug to be considered eligible under a traditional drug plan, the drug must have a Drug Identification Number (DIN) assigned by Health Canada. As a DIN has not yet been issued for medical marijuana, it is not eligible.

We continue to follow developments in this arena and will provide updates as to how this will impact your benefit plan going forward.