



Top five social policy stories of 2014

By IMFC Staff



Canada saw some big changes to social policy in 2014. The courts and legislatures issued directives that will shift our social landscape for years to come. Here are five key social issues that will continue to unfold in the year ahead.

1. Family tax announcements

The federal government announced that starting with the 2014 tax year, family income splitting will be allowed. Although the tax savings have been capped at \$2000, the introduction of income splitting marks a step in the right direction. Now, a higher earning spouse will be able to transfer some of their earnings to a lower earning spouse, lowering their tax bill. This means that families making similar incomes will be taxed equally, regardless of how they choose to balance paid work.

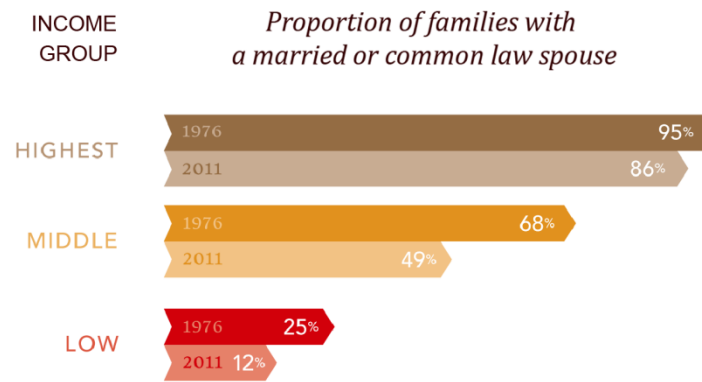
In our June report, [Busting Income Splitting Myths](#), we addressed criticisms of the tax policy. Then, on October 21st, the IMFC [testified before the Finance Committee](#) in support of income splitting.

[Other family benefits](#) were also announced, including an expansion of the Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB). Parents of older children will begin receiving a monthly benefit, while parents of young children will see their monthly benefit increase. The Child Care Expense Deduction was also increased by \$1000.

Canadians can be glad because *all* of these family supports are more flexible and family-friendly than the creation of a one-size-fits-all daycare system.

2. Evidence of a Marriage Gap in Canada

In February, the IMFC released the seminal study [The Marriage Gap Between Rich and Poor Canadians](#). Based on Statistics Canada data, our analysis shows that income in Canada, to an astonishing degree, is linked to marriage. Wealthier Canadians are more likely to be coupled, while lower income Canadians are more likely to be unattached.



Previous research demonstrates that marriage can protect against poverty while allowing couples to pool income and manage domestic work. The question is whether the financial benefits of marriage have become inaccessible to those with lower incomes.

One positive finding in the report is that the marriage share among some income and age groups has stabilized recently if not increased. This has occurred in groups that previously shunned marriage.

Canadians care about poverty, inequality and the future of the middle class. The role of marriage and family stability in achieving economic wellbeing needs to be part of the discussion. The IMFC will continue to examine these issues in 2015.

3. Euthanasia promoted

Attempts to legalize assisted suicide happened on three fronts: in Parliament, at the Supreme Court and in the Quebec legislature. Quebec’s attempt was successful while the other two are still in progress. This is troubling because far from being a personal choice, [euthanasia](#) impacts the vulnerable who do not freely choose it, and it also damages families.

The province of [Quebec](#) legalized assisted suicide and euthanasia in June. The bill compels doctors and hospitals in Quebec to carry out the act or refer patients to be euthanized elsewhere. The legislation comes into force in late 2015, though a lawsuit has been filed challenging the constitutionality of the bill.

We currently await a decision by the [Supreme Court of Canada](#) that could legalize assisted suicide nationwide. The Carter Case was heard by the Supreme Court in October. It argued that those who are not physically able to commit suicide themselves have a right to be helped by their doctors.

In [Parliament](#), an MP introduced a private member’s bill in March to legalize assisted suicide and euthanasia across the country. The broad guidelines would apply to anyone over eighteen afflicted with self-defined unbearable suffering who believes treatment would not offer sufficient relief. A similar bill was later introduced in the Senate.

It is unlikely that Parliament will vote on these bills before the next federal election, but we can expect the Supreme Court decision on the Carter Case sometime this year.

4. Early learning proven ineffective, costly

Ontario completed the rollout of full-day kindergarten in September, making it available province-wide. Some schools were ill prepared, reporting classes ballooning to forty students per two adults, with some children as young as three years old.

Full-day kindergarten is politically motivated but has been a costly and pragmatic failure. Even the government-commissioned [studies showed lackluster results](#). Yet, there are those who envision full-day kindergarten as the first step in establishing daycare in public schools.

Policy makers across Canada continue to push for the expansion of institutional care despite evidence that it is not beneficial for very young kids.

[Canadian experts](#) on early childhood development are roundly ignored in political circles. National polling, including [a poll](#) by the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada, shows that parents prefer other options over universal daycare. Still, many advocates cite Quebec's provincial daycare plan as a model to emulate, even as [Quebec attempts to fix the unaffordable program](#).



Dr. Neufeld on child development
Are children better socialized in daycare?

5. New prostitution law

Canada's new [prostitution law](#) came into force on December 6th, just under a year after the [Supreme Court of Canada struck down the previous provisions](#). The *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act* restricts the purchase but not the sale of sex in Canada. It also places restrictions on advertising and where sex can be sold.

Prostitution is inherently dangerous and exploits people who are often coerced into the trade. This activity has been linked to human trafficking and violence. The new law is inspired by the Nordic Model that aims to restrict the purchase of sex without criminalizing those victimized in the trade. The new act remains controversial, especially among those who advocate for legalization.

The debate will continue in 2015 as the province of Ontario opposes the federal government's Act. Ontario's premier has directed the province's Attorney General to review the constitutionality of the new law.

Looking ahead

The IMFC will follow these issues as they develop in 2015. As social policy continues to shift, we will contribute research and commentary to inform the debate. Our hope is that Canadian families will be able to thrive in the years ahead.

Permission granted to reprint in full with attribution to the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada