Caring for each other is an essential part of what it means to be Canadian. Nearly every Canadian family is confronted at some point with the important responsibility of caregiving. In fact, according to Statistics Canada, over eight million Canadians provided help or care to a relative or friend with a chronic health problem in 2012.

While Canada’s Employment Insurance system can provide up to six months of compassionate care benefits to caregivers, it is only available if the person receiving care is at risk of dying within that same period.

Too many of those providing care for loved ones do not qualify for benefits, nor do they have job security while they are providing care. Worse still, some qualify, but understandably do not want to abandon hope by asking a doctor to provide a certificate confirming the risk of losing their loved one.

The result is that people are too often forced to leave their jobs and drain their personal savings to provide essential care. This is not only unfair, but it hurts our economy and our middle class.

That is why – in addition to cutting taxes for the middle class and creating a larger Canada Child Benefit – a Liberal government will introduce a more flexible and accessible Employment Insurance Compassionate Care Benefit.

A LIBERAL GOVERNMENT WILL INTRODUCE A MORE FLEXIBLE AND ACCESSIBLE EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE COMPASSIONATE CARE BENEFIT

Employment Insurance Compassionate Care Benefit, available to any Canadian who provides care to a seriously ill family member.

Though applicants will still be expected to submit a medical certificate in order to qualify, the benefit will have more inclusive eligibility requirements. Canadians who are caring for a seriously ill adult family member who needs significant care over and above what can be provided during evenings and weekends, or a seriously ill child who cannot attend school for an extended period of time, will no longer be excluded from the benefit.

The current criteria are rigid, so we will build more flexibility into the program by allowing the six month benefit to be claimed in blocks of time over a year-long period, and by allowing family members to share the six months.

This better compassionate care benefit is an investment of $190 million per year, and will not require an increase to Employment Insurance premiums.