When you have an economy that works for the middle class, you have a country that works for everyone. For ten years, Stephen Harper has ignored those who are doing most of the heavy-lifting; middle class Canadians have had to work longer and harder for an ever-shrinking piece of the pie, and less and less financial security. Families with kids have some of the most significant strain on their economic security.

We will support parents so they can provide their children with the best possible start and allow them to prepare for school and for life. A Liberal government will support this opportunity for all children.

As middle class incomes have stagnated for the last 30 years, the cost of raising children has risen far faster than the general rate of inflation. The middle class, and those working hard to join it, needs dedicated financial support, yet Stephen Harper and Thomas Mulcair have chosen instead to send child benefit cheques to millionaires.

Child care, particularly for children under the age of two, has become for many families an extremely costly burden. Although Liberals signed early learning and child care agreements with every province in 2005, Stephen Harper scrapped them all immediately upon his election – with no plan to help parents find early learning and child care for their children.

Due to this lack of federal leadership, Canada still has no coordinated national early childhood learning and child care policy. Working parents, amid all their other pressures, often struggle with waiting lists for the limited number of existing spaces. That wait can often last years. And once a space becomes available, the high price tag often associated with child care means stretching budgets. Parents are increasingly making difficult decisions on how to support their kids – whether choosing to leave the workforce, or making compromises on the level of care their kids are receiving.
For most Canadians, balancing work and family responsibilities is a daily challenge. Today, both parents work in nearly 7 out of 10 two-parent families – a figure that has more than doubled in the last 40 years. But government has yet to adapt to this new reality. We need government benefits that reflect the changing way we work and live, and that recognize Canadians juggle many constraints on their time – balancing work, commutes, and family responsibilities, including care for children or ageing loved ones.

Liberals understand that a multi-faceted approach is needed to support Canadian families. Our plan will put more money in the pockets of those who need it, provide better access to high-quality, affordable, child care spaces, and offer more flexibility for working parents. This plan complements other initiatives that will bring more security to Canadian families, including more affordable housing. The core elements of our plan include:

The Canada Child Benefit (CCB)

A Liberal government will create one bigger, fair, tax-free, automatic monthly child benefit to put more money back in the pockets of the Canadian families who need it most. As an income-tested benefit, the Canada Child Benefit gradually phases out to ensure that it is targeted to the middle class and those working hard to join it. All families with children that have annual household incomes below $150,000 will receive more in monthly child benefit payments than under Stephen Harper’s system. We will also provide more help to lower-income Canadians. Instead of sending government cheques to millionaires, a Liberal government will use that money to lift 315,000 Canadian children out of poverty.

Child care

Liberals believe that every Canadian child deserves the best possible start in life and that a comprehensive approach to learning must start early. We also know that high-quality, affordable child care options are critical to the economic security of families and, in particular, to the economic security of women. That is why we will work with provinces, territories, and Indigenous Peoples to create a new National Early Learning and Child Care Framework. This plan will be administered as part of our new social infrastructure investment of nearly $20 billion over the next ten years, and achieved in collaboration with, and in respect of, provincial jurisdiction. We recognize that child care needs vary across the country, and, in the absence of federal engagement, provinces and territories have moved forward with different models. This is why we will not impose pre-determined costs or models on other orders of government, but work collaboratively with each of them on funding agreements. Our framework will build on the progress that provinces and territories are making and allow them to move further in providing more affordable, accessible, inclusive, high-quality child care and early learning, which considers the diverse needs of all children in Canada. We will also work in partnership with other governments to develop a framework for such agreements based on research, evidence-based policy, and best practices in the delivery of early learning and child care. A new Liberal government will initiate this process through a ministerial meeting within 100 days of being elected.
Flexible Work

Liberals will create greater flexibility for parents who are providing care for their children. This includes:

- Making Employment Insurance Parental Benefits more flexible for family and work circumstances. This entails providing parents the option of taking their benefits in smaller blocks of time over an 18-month period, or taking a longer leave of up to 18 months, when combined with maternity benefits, at a lower benefit level.

- Amending the Canada Labour Code to give every federally regulated worker the legal right to make a formal request to their employer – without fear of reprisal – for more flexible working conditions, including flexible start and finish times, and the ability to work from home.

- Introducing a more flexible and accessible Employment Insurance Compassionate Care Benefit so that six months of benefits are available to those who are providing care to a seriously ill family member, including children, and so these benefits can be shared, and taken in blocks over a year-long period.