



CCR Backgrounder - CIC Consultations on the Parent and Grandparent Program

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) is holding online consultations until May 25th to review and redesign the sponsorship system for parents and grandparents. Along with the online questionnaire it was announced that “Minister Jason Kenney will host a series of multi-city in-person meetings with stakeholders”. These meetings are invite-only.

These consultations are part of the government’s [Action Plan for Faster Family Reunification](#), announced in November 2011, which consists of three principal changes:

- To reduce the applications backlog, the government is increasing by over 60 percent the number of sponsored parents and grandparents admitted to Canada in 2012, from nearly 15,500 in 2010 to 25,000 in 2012. At the same time a two-year ban on new applications for sponsored parents and grandparents was put in place, in November 2011.
- The 10-year, multiple-entry “Parent and Grandparent Supervisa” was introduced. The supervisa is only accessible for those who can afford to buy one year’s worth of Canadian medical insurance (even if they only plan to visit Canada for weeks or months).
- Following consultations, the Parent and Grandparent Program will be redesigned in order to “avoid future large backlogs and be sensitive to fiscal constraints”.

The online consultations are open to stakeholders and the public and are being carried out via a questionnaire. Respondents are asked to indicate whether or not they agree with the different proposals that are clearly directed towards decreasing numbers of applicants and accepted parents and grandparents. Options given include restrictions on applications and eligibility and increased financial requirements. The proposals present a certain bias: the starting point is an assumption that parents and grandparents are a burden on Canadian society and that their numbers should be decreased. The only venue for expression of alternate opinions or proposals is in the comments box below each section.

The CCR encourages people to respond to the questionnaire, and to use the comments boxes to give opinions beyond the simplistic poll of the discouraging proposals being made to shrink the Parent and Grandparent Program. We have prepared a backgrounder for you to take into account when responding.

Context: Family Reunification as a Canadian Value

Family reunification is one of the primary guiding principles of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (IRPA), and welcoming parents and grandparents of permanent residents and citizens is a positive reflection of Canadian values. As a country that acknowledges and prioritizes family values, family reunification should be an integral part of our immigration program. We recognize that all families are valuable, regardless of their background and we understand the importance of extended family.

CIC is proposing to make Canada's system more restrictive, which would be a step backwards in our family-friendly immigration program. Parents and grandparents contribute to Canadian society in significant ways, and depicting them as a burden is misleading and unfair. Family reunification should be a priority for Canada, and the Parent and Grandparent Program (PGP) plays an important role in reuniting families.

In recent years Canada has been increasing the percentage of economic immigrants and decreasing Family Class and refugee/humanitarian admissions. The proportion of overall immigration taken up by economic immigration has increased significantly in recent years – from 55% in 2005 to 66% in 2010. Over the same period, Family Class has shrunk from 28% to 21.5% and Refugees from 14% to 9%. Over a longer period, Family Class has decreased even more dramatically, from 43.9% of all immigration in 1993, to 21.5% in 2010. This downward trend is worrisome, and there needs to be real discussion and consultation with Canadians about what they want Canada's immigration program to look like.

The CCR believes that Canada should rebalance immigration levels in order to establish greater equality between the three pillars, reprioritizing and dedicating more resources to the processing of family reunification and humanitarian considerations.

CCR resources on family reunification and rebalancing immigration levels

To see the CCR's 2011 recent resolution on the importance of re-prioritizing family reunification in the Canadian immigration program, visit:

<http://ccrweb.ca/en/res/increased-commitment-family-reunification>

To see CCR priorities in immigration levels planning, submitted to CIC for last years consultations, visit: <http://ccrweb.ca/en/levels-2011>

Questionnaire Categories

Managing the number of people who can apply

CIC is proposing that the number of applications accepted under the PGP needs to be managed (i.e. limited) because there is a backlog. Possible solutions can be to limit applicants or to allocate more resources to processing. CIC is taking the approach that to address the backlog the number of applicants must be reduced. The CCR supports reprioritizing family reunification and thus putting more resources toward processing these applications.

A Modernized Parent and Grandparent Immigration Program: Should we try to ease the economic impact of parents and grandparents?

It is acknowledged in the CIC backgrounder, as well as in considerable research conducted over the years, that parents and grandparents contribute to the Canadian economy and society in many ways. Many parents who come to Canada enter the workforce, while grandparents often allow their children and grandchildren to increase their workforce participation by taking active roles in child-rearing and housekeeping. Money earned in Canada is more often spent in Canada, rather than being sent to family members abroad. Family reunification also has positive impacts on the mental health, well-being, and integration outcomes of new Canadians. While the costs of elderly grandparents to the health care and social support systems have been quantified and are

thus judged to be a burden, these costs haven't been measured against all the positive outcomes of their presence in Canada. It is misleading to characterize these integral family members as a burden, when they bring positive economic and social benefits and so many Canadians want to be reunited and are willing to sponsor them.

Lifetime Sponsorship

Currently, sponsors of parents and grandparents under the PGP are required to take financial responsibility for their sponsored family member(s) for ten years. CIC proposes that this could be changed to a lifetime sponsorship. If someone has been in Canada for ten years, they have become a permanent resident, if not a citizen. Lifetime sponsorship would mean Canada would be denying care to some of its residents and citizens based on their age or origins. Requiring lifetime sponsorship will lead to two classes of Canadians: those for whom the Canadian government is willing to pay for services in exchange for their participation in society and paying of taxes, and those for whom the government outsources those costs to their younger family members.

This proposal also begs the question of what will happen if the sponsor dies before their parent or grandparent; will the surviving relative be deported, even if they are a permanent resident or a citizen? And if after 20 years the sponsor hits on hard financial times – will the relative be deported? It is not clear that this proposal is either fair or practical.

Fees

CIC suggests that fees such as the \$40,000 per person charged by Australia to some sponsored parents could be implemented in Canada. If this came about, it would mean that only the very wealthy would have access to the PGP. Family reunification is a cornerstone of Canada's immigration policy and a stated objective of IRPA. It should be implemented equitably and not only for the wealthy. This proposal goes completely against Canadian values of fairness and equality, and would introduce an element of discrimination based on income to our immigration program.

Changes to Minimum Necessary Income

CIC proposes that either the Minimum Necessary Income (MNI) threshold for sponsors of parents and grandparents be increased, or that the length of time the sponsor must meet the MNI should be increased, or both. Increasing the MNI of sponsors would further restrict the number of people able to sponsor their family members, privileging the wealthy at the expense of middle-income people who meet the current MNI requirements. Increasing the length of time the sponsor must meet the minimum MNI would pose problems for people who, after ten years, face unforeseen financial difficulties, again bringing up the question of what would happen to the sponsored person in such situations, who by that time might already be a citizen or a permanent resident. This proposal would make family reunification more difficult, and make access to it more exclusive.

Should we redefine the eligibility of family members who accompany parents and grandparents?

Redefining eligibility by imposing stricter criteria is proposed by CIC in order to limit numbers of applications in this category. However, if the Family Class of immigration were expanded to rebalance the levels of immigration across the different categories, such limiting of applications would be unnecessary.

Focus on parents rather than siblings of sponsors

Being reunited with siblings is just as important to many new Canadians as being reunited with parents and grandparents. Sponsored siblings will be able to contribute to Canadian society in many positive ways, as well as improving the settlement outcomes of their sponsoring family members. If CIC were to re-prioritize family reunification, siblings wouldn't be excluded from sponsorship.

Balance of Family Test

CIC is proposing that at least half of the children of any parent or grandparent applying to be sponsored must reside in Canada for them to be eligible for sponsorship under the PGP. This approach seems arbitrary and would have a negative impact on many Canadians trying to reunite with their family members. For example, if parents living in their home country have eight children, three of whom are in Canada, three in the U.S., and two in the home country, they would not be eligible for sponsorship to Canada. Is it fair to prohibit Canadian residents and citizens from sponsoring their parents and grandparents simply because some of their siblings chose to live in countries other than Canada?

Should we emphasize a commitment to Canada on the part of sponsors?

Citizenship as a requirement to sponsor

It is surprising that CIC is proposing that citizenship should be a requirement to sponsor family members, since 85% of newcomers to Canada become citizens anyway, so such a measure would only affect a small group of people. However, it could affect this small group negatively. Some examples of the 15% of newcomers who don't become citizens as soon as they are eligible are:

- those who haven't applied for citizenship because their country of origin does not allow dual citizenship
- refugees who, due to trauma, have difficulty achieving the language proficiency levels required for citizenship

For many in the minority group of permanent residents who don't seek citizenship, it is not a lack of commitment to Canada that prevents them from applying.

This proposal would mean that citizenship would become a tool for exclusion from sponsorship. Is it right that the small group of people who remain permanent residents would be barred from reunification with their family members?

Focus on Special Needs and Exceptional Cases

In this proposal CIC suggests that entry could be limited to those who meet exceptional criteria and who require compassionate consideration. This proposal is shocking because the criteria would make almost everyone ineligible, and would essentially eliminate the PGP, but for certain humanitarian and compassionate cases. This approach would make the cases where families are reunited into an exception, rather than a rule, and thus goes against the commitments and objectives defined in IRPA.