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Six changes to consider this tax-filing season

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Canadians rushing to file their taxes before the looming April 30 deadline should stop to check the changes the Canada Revenue Agency has made since last season. Whether you're a parent, a student, a commuter or a caregiver, these changes may have an impact on your taxes.

Fertility-related expenses

Those who need medical intervention to conceive a child may now be eligible to claim certain expenses, even if they do not have a medical condition. Prior to the change to the Medical Expenses Tax credit in 2017, individuals had to prove medically that they had difficulty conceiving a child in order to get tax relief. The CRA has now expanded eligibility for this tax credit.

"It's becoming far more common, people are having their kids older and they're using these technologies that weren't available to everybody 20 years ago," said H&R Block senior tax professional Valorie Elgar.

What's more, those who have fertility-related expenses for any of the 10 previous calendar years and have not claimed them can request a change to previous income tax and benefit returns to include these eligible expenses.

Children's fitness and arts programs

As of January 1, 2017, parents will no longer be able to claim eligible fees paid to enrol a child in an arts or fitness program. Previously, filers could claim the fees for fitness and arts programs — up to $500 and $250, respectively, in 2016 — for a child of the taxpayer, spouse or common law partner.

Textbooks

The federal education and textbook credit has been eliminated as of January 1, 2017.

"You can carry forward the unused amounts, but you can no longer accumulate," said Lana Paton, managing partner of PwC Canada's Tax Services.

Ottawa has previously said it eliminated the education and textbook tax credits because they were not targeted based on income.

Students can still claim the credit for tuition fees, however, as that credit has not been impacted. As well, students may now be able to claim the tuition amount for fees paid to a post-secondary educational institution for occupational skills courses, even if they are not at the post-secondary level.

Public transit

The public transit tax credit, which allows the cost of transit passes to be deducted, was eliminated as of July 1. Taxpayers will still be able to claim credit for any transit passes purchased from January 1 to June 30 on their 2017 tax return, said Elgar. Monthly or weekly passes used for four weeks in a row can qualify, she added.

"You really have to be using it on a regular basis," she said, noting it would need to be used for 21 days in a 30 day period.

Disability tax credit

The federal government has added nurse practitioners to the list of medical professionals who can now certify an application form for the disability tax credit. With an estimated 4,500 nurse practitioners across the country, the change is expected to give Canadians with disabilities more options when applying for the tax credit.

Caregivers

The Canada caregiver credit is replacing three previous credits — the caregiver credit, the family caregiver credit and the credit for infirm dependants age 18 or older — which were based on the taxpayer's situation and type of dependent. The maximum claim amount for the new credit has increased to $6,883.

Claims for the Canada caregiver credit are very similar to its predecessors' except for one key change. Canadians who support a parent or grandparent who is 65 years of age or older, and living with them, can no longer make a claim. Now, the parent or grandparent in question must be infirm in order to claim the credit.

"That's a significant change… There's a lot of multigenerational families living together, and if the parent was 65 or older, whether they were infirm or not you could claim a credit for them if you were supporting them," said Elgar.

While it is key to be aware of the new changes made by the CRA, it equally important for Canadians to look at changes in their own life, and what that means for their taxes, she added.

"What typically causes people's tax situation to change is their life circumstances," Elgar said. "They got married, they had a child, they separated… People need to really be looking at more the way their life has changed, and how that's going to affect their taxes."