

The Imperative to Invest in Gender Equity to Ensure Canada's Competitiveness

Pre-Budget Submission to the House Standing Committee on Finance

Federal Budget 2019

YWCA Canada

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About YWCA Canada

YWCA Canada is the country's oldest and largest women's multi-service organization, with 32 Member Associations across the country serving women and girls in nine provinces and two territories. We work in over 300 communities and support over 330,000 women and girls.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Early Learning and Child Care

- **Recommendation #1** – The [Government of Canada](#) build on its [Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework](#) by increasing its investment to at least 1% of its GDP so that it meets the [OECD benchmark](#) on public spending for early childhood education and care as well as embed [universality](#) as a key principle.
- **Recommendation #2** – The Government of Canada adopt and implement the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action](#) on developing culturally appropriate childhood education programs for Aboriginal families and that is done in partnership with Indigenous communities to inform the development of the [Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework](#).

Equality in the Workforce

- **Recommendation #1** – The Government of Canada adopt all of the recommendations in the recently published report by the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, [‘Women’s Economic Security: Securing the Future of Canada’s Economy.’](#)
- **Recommendation #2** – The Government of Canada poverty-proof the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) by ensuring the CCB is indexed to inflation annually.
- **Recommendation #3** – The Government of Canada ensures that the CCB reaches such a level so as to reduce Canada’s child poverty rate by 50% by 2020, according to the Low Income Measure After Tax derived from Taxfiler data.
- **Recommendation #4** – The Government of Canada dedicates funding to implement a strategy to ensure uptake of the CCB in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities.
- **Recommendation #5** – The Government of Canada invests \$80 million dollars per year to the new Pay Equity Commission towards enforcement, education and research to close the gender pay gap, through an intersectional lens that pays attention to the multiple barriers that diverse equity-seeking groups face such as women with disabilities, LGBTQ women and non-binary individuals, newcomer women, racialized women and Indigenous women.
- **Recommendation #6** – The Government of Canada provides additional financial resources to hire 50 dedicated pay equity enforcement officers.

Gender-Based Violence and Harassment

- **Recommendation #1** – The Government of Canada, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, immediately introduce legislation to modify the *Canada Labour Code* to implement paid leave for victims of intimate partner violence, similar to what has recently been passed as [legislation in New Zealand](#).
- **Recommendation #2** – The Ministry of Status of Women be provided with the funding and resources to develop and implement a National Action Plan on Violence against Women and Girls as envisioned in the [‘A Blueprint for Canada’s National Action Plan on Violence Against Women and Girls’](#) report.
- **Recommendation #3** – The Government of Canada provide increased funding of [\\$50 million as well as grant an extension of 2 additional years to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women](#) to ensure the [National Inquiry](#) can adequately engage those affected as well as collect the comprehensive and in-depth evidence necessary to fulfill its mandate.
- **Recommendation #4** – The Government of Canada increase funding for legal aid services for asylum seekers to \$15 million dollars per year from 2019 to 2021, with specific funding earmarked to develop and implement an outreach strategy to ensure women who are asylum seekers are able to access the services.

Homelessness

- **Recommendation #1** – The Government of Canada adopt all the recommendations found in Section 7.2 of the [Final report of the Advisory Committee on Homelessness on the Homelessness Partnering Strategy](#), which focused on the unique needs and considerations for women experiencing homelessness.
- **Recommendation #2** – The Government of Canada implement a [National Definition of Homelessness](#) to ensure there is a clear and inclusive term that broadly defines the diverse ways that distinct communities experience homelessness, including Indigenous communities, women who may be living in and experiencing violence, as well as women experiencing hidden homelessness who may not use services such as emergency housing shelters.

Investing in Gender Equity to Promote Canada's Competitiveness

Background and Rationale

As YWCA Canada approaches its 150th anniversary, we have seen how the movement for gender equality has improved women's economic security and has also shaped their ability to fully participate in society. For example, women's labour market participation has [doubled](#) over the last 60 years from 24% in 1953 to approximately 47.3% in 2016. However, women still face barriers to [employment](#) and [equal pay](#), lack access to key resources like [housing](#) and [childcare](#), and experience [gender-based violence and harassment in the workplace](#) and [beyond](#). When we use an intersectional lens, evidence demonstrates that there are further barriers to [decent work](#) for women with intersecting identities such as [women with disabilities](#), [Indigenous women](#), [newcomer women](#), [racialized women](#) and [members of the LGBTQ community](#).

We applaud the Government of Canada on its 2018 Federal Budget, '[Equality + Growth: A Strong Middle Class](#)'. With each successive budget, we have seen an increased emphasis on policies and investments to advance gender equality for women and girls across the country. We have also seen the emergence of an intersectional analysis that recognizes that women have multiple intersecting identities that can exacerbate inequities and produce cumulative disadvantage. We call on the government to continue to strengthen its intersectional Gender-Based Analysis+ of the Federal Budget.

YWCA Canada and its federation of member associations is the largest national provider of shelter to women, serving 25, 000 women, children and teen girls, including 6, 000 fleeing domestic violence each year. We are also the largest provider of literacy, life skills, employment and counselling programs in the country and the second largest provider of childcare services. As the country's oldest and largest women's multi-service organization, YWCA Canada and its member associations have considerable expertise to contribute to discussions on how best to support and provide services for women and girls, as well as in the areas of housing, shelter, childcare and employment services, that must be leveraged.

Barriers to economic security and labour market participation for women is a result of numerous factors such as gender-based discrimination, patriarchal attitudes, as well as historical and systemic barriers. To ensure our country is competitive on the world stage, we encourage investments, initiatives and policies to promote gender equity. Not only will they produce equitable economic and social outcomes for women and girls across the country, they will also position our nation for economic success.

Early Learning and Child Care

Ensuring that Canadian families have affordable, accessible and high-quality child care is critical to addressing the gender wage gap, fostering economic growth and promoting healthy early childhood development. This was echoed in the [latest review of Canada](#) by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) which identified early childhood development as a key catalyst for a more inclusive society, especially for women. Internationally, when [compared to](#) many [OECD and G7 countries](#), Canada invests less, has less coverage, has [lower rates of participation](#) and poorer quality when it comes to early learning and childcare.

In Canada, [Quebec's childcare program](#) provides a prime [example](#) of how access to high-quality affordable childcare can impact [women's economic potential](#). Access to childcare holds the key to unlocking Canada's economic competitiveness by increasing our total workforce. It's critical that the 2019 Federal Budget be used to leverage this opportunity.

Equality in the Workforce

Women make up more than 50% of the Canadian population and it is imperative that their full and equal participation is maximized to create a more equitable society for all. We commend the Federal Government of Canada in its push towards inclusive prosperity to ensure all people benefit from our shared economic growth. Our recommendations centre on the Canada Child Benefit program and pay equity, because these are two issues, if addressed in an effective manner, have the potential to transform women's economic potential. Our colleagues at the [Equal Pay Coalition](#) and [Campaign 2000 to End Child and Family Poverty](#) have produced rigorous analysis and evidence to support the need for our recommended policy changes.

In addition, we recommend that there be financial and human resources invested to develop and implement a strategy to ensure that marginalized equity-seeking groups such as low-income Canadians and Indigenous communities are able to take part in the Canada Child Benefit. As [reports](#) indicate, certain groups are unable to access financial entitlements because of administrative barriers such as eligibility requirements and benefit reviews, that prove to be difficult to meet.

Gender-based Violence and Harassment

In order for Canada to be truly competitive on the world stage, it must invest in ensuring that women and girls feel safe and are free from violence. We were pleased to see the Government of Canada working towards this goal with the announcement of its ['It's Time: Canada's Strategy to Prevent and Address Gender-Based Violence'](#) initiative. The Government of Canada has built a

strong foundation with this strategy and we encourage that the government continue to take a leadership role by developing a National Action Plan to Address Violence Against Women and Girls. A coalition of organizations and advocates working in the violence against women sector, including YWCA Canada, have come together and developed a [blueprint](#) as a starting point.

It is critical to address the needs of women who may be vulnerable due to their identities such as Indigenous women and women with precarious immigration status. Over 1800 survivors have registered for the [National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women](#) and it is critical we provide the resources and necessary time to ensure the commissioners can carry forth a process that is trusted and principled. We also included a call to invest in legal aid services for asylum seekers, with a focus on women, to ensure that when they are in vulnerable situations, such as navigating the complexities of the immigration system, they have the necessary supports.

Homelessness

YWCA Canada is the nation's largest provider of housing and shelter services for women, assisting 6000 women, children and teen girls fleeing domestic violence. As an organization that works with women experiencing housing challenges, we were pleased to see a focus on addressing women's homelessness in the final report by the Advisory Committee on Homelessness. We echo the recommendations in Section 7.2 and call for their full adoption and implementation. We would also add that there needs to be an adoption and implementation of a national Canadian Definition of Homelessness to ensure that there is consistency in monitoring, evaluation and reporting. The definition by the [Homeless Hub](#) is an important step forward and should be used as a model.

Conclusion

With the 2019 Federal Budget, the Government of Canada has the opportunity to foster the economic conditions necessary to enable inclusive prosperity for all. Investing in gender equity is not only the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do to ensure Canada's competitiveness and continued economic leadership on the world stage. Leadership on these issues means that we take bold and courageous steps to close the gender wage gap, address the crisis of hidden homelessness, ensure Canadian families have access to affordable, high-quality child care and work towards a country where women and girls are able to pursue their lives free from violence.

Ultimately, we need to level the playing field so women and girls truly have equal access to opportunities and equitable outcomes to realize their full potential and participate in all aspects of our society. We look forward to collaborating with the Government of Canada to advance gender equity and work collectively towards a more just and equitable future for all across the country.