



**Submissions to the Canadian Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic Consultation**

West Coast LEAF is a BC-based legal advocacy organization. Our mandate is to use the law to create an equal and just society for all women and people who experience gender-based discrimination. In collaboration with community, we use litigation, law reform, and public legal education to make change.

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## Submissions to the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology on the Canadian Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic Consultation

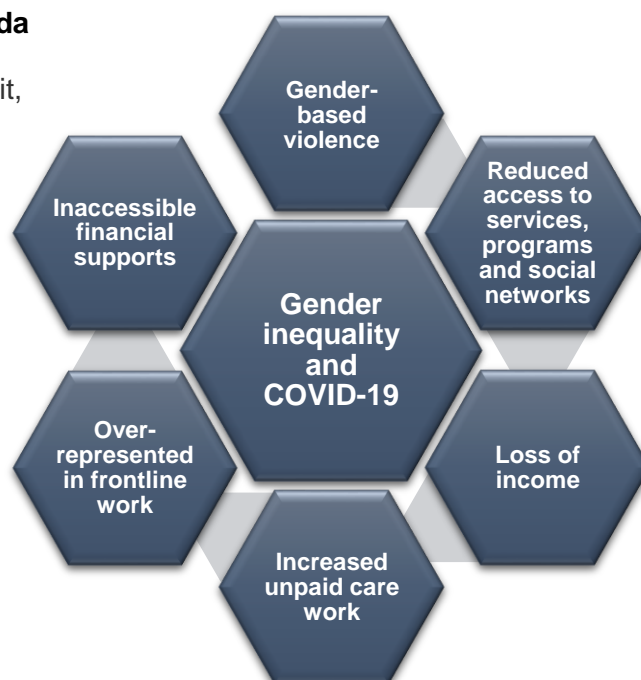
### Introduction

West Coast LEAF welcomes the government's efforts to quickly mobilize financial and service supports through programs like the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), Emergency Community Support Fund (ECSF) and increased funding for sexual assault programs and emergency shelters. The federal government's approach of expanding public spending to support people through this crisis is not only economically sound,<sup>1</sup> it is also necessary to guard against a further deepening of social and economic inequality in the post-pandemic period. The need for support does not simply disappear where governments won't meet it; instead, individuals – especially those among us most marginalized by structural inequality – will bear the heavy burden of the crisis, at vastly higher interest rates<sup>2</sup> and devastating personal cost<sup>3</sup>.

In these submissions we highlight the correlation between the COVID-19 pandemic and rising gender inequality in Canada. We then provide four concrete actions the government can urgently take to combat rising gender inequality and ensure an intersectional feminist recovery. Finally, we identify our support for the Just Recovery for All principles and encourage the federal government to urgently implement these principles in their COVID-19 recovery.

### COVID-19 and rising gender inequality in Canada

The COVID-19 pandemic, like many crises before it, has exacerbated existing gender inequalities. Women and gender non-conforming people<sup>4</sup> bear the brunt of the economic and social burdens of the pandemic, while also leading the frontline health and service response. The correlation between the COVID-19 pandemic and gender injustice takes multiple forms including:



<sup>1</sup> Hemingway, A “Flatten the myth: Don’t fear government debt after COVID-19” Policy Note CCPA (May 11, 2020) <<https://www.policynote.ca/flatten-the-myth/>>.

<sup>2</sup> Hemingway, A “Flatten the myth: Don’t fear government debt after COVID-19” Policy Note CCPA (May 11, 2020) <<https://www.policynote.ca/flatten-the-myth/>>.

<sup>3</sup> Taylor, J “COVID-19: Needs and Risk Assessment of Sex Workers in Metro Vancouver” Aboriginal Front Door Society et al. (March 2020) <<https://wish-vancouver.net/content/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-Needs-and-Risk-Assessment-of-Sex-Workers-in-Metro-Vancouver.pdf>>.

<sup>4</sup> We use the phrase “gender non-conforming” in these submissions as an umbrella term to refer to gender identities and/or gender expressions that differ from cultural or societal expectations based on assigned sex.

- **Women and gender non-conforming people have disproportionately lost income during the pandemic.** Women and gender non-conforming people are over-represented in sectors most impacted by the pandemic including hospitality, retail, and service sectors<sup>5</sup> as well as in low-wage, part-time, and informal employment. They have not only been the ones most likely to lose their sources of income during the pandemic, they are also the ones least likely to benefit from emergency financial supports because eligibility criteria for government programs do not factor in these workers' lived experiences and particular needs.<sup>6</sup>
- **Women's care responsibilities have drastically increased.** Because of socially constructed norms, women in Canada regularly perform, on average, three times as much unpaid care work as men.<sup>7</sup> Women's unpaid care work has drastically increased during the pandemic because of school closures and higher rates of illnesses among family and community members. Research shows that additional family responsibilities undermine women's participation and advancement in the labour market, increase the economic burden on women-led single-parent households, and undermine women's mental and physical health.<sup>8</sup> While it is early to assess the magnitude of the impact that the pandemic will have on women's participation in the labour market, the May 2020 Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey found that, among parents, women saw increased loss of hours of work and lower rates of increases in employment than men.<sup>9</sup>
- **The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated gender-based violence.** Data collected by the federal ministry of women and gender equality suggests that rates of gender-based violence have increased by approximately 20 – 30%.<sup>10</sup> These increased rates of violence can be attributed to added economic stressors, the imposition of quarantine and self-isolation measures, higher rates of harassment against frontline workers, and increased risks associated with changing relationship and housing structures.
- **Life-saving programs have been scaled back, become overburdened or less accessible.** In crises, sexual and reproductive health as well as gender affirming care is often sidelined as measures are put in place to respond to the spread of the pandemic.<sup>11</sup> For instance, some anti-violence programs have reported having to temporarily close or

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<sup>5</sup> iPolitics, "Youth, women, precarious workers bear brunt of COVID-19 job losses, Statistics Canada finds" (Apr 9, 2020) <<https://ipolitics.ca/2020/04/09/youth-women-precarious-workers-bear-brunt-of-covid-19-job-losses-statistics-canada-finds/>>.

<sup>6</sup> Yalnizyan, A. et al, "Canada Emergency Response Benefit Eligibility Issues and Solutions as of April 3, 2020" Atkinson (April 3, 2020) <[https://atkinsonfoundation.ca/site/uploads/2020/04/Canada-Emergency-Response-Benefit\\_Yalnizyan\\_40720.pdf](https://atkinsonfoundation.ca/site/uploads/2020/04/Canada-Emergency-Response-Benefit_Yalnizyan_40720.pdf)>;

<sup>7</sup> Statistics Canada "Time use: Total work burden, unpaid work, and leisure" (July 30, 2018) <<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-503-x/2015001/article/54931-eng.htm>>.

<sup>8</sup> Statistics Canada "Time use: Total work burden, unpaid work, and leisure" (July 30, 2018) <<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-503-x/2015001/article/54931-eng.htm>>.

<sup>9</sup> Statistics Canada "Labour Force Survey, May 2020" (June 5<sup>th</sup> 2020) <<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200605/dq200605a-eng.htm>>.

<sup>10</sup> CBC News "Minister says COVID-19 is empowering domestic violence abusers as rates rise in parts of Canada" (April 27, 2020) <<https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/domestic-violence-rates-rising-due-to-covid19-1.5545851>>.

<sup>11</sup> Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights "Joint statement on essential abortion care during COVID-19" (March 20, 2020) <<https://www.actioncanadashr.org/news/2020-03-20-joint-statement-essential-abortion-care-during-covid-19>>.

reduce capacity in order to ensure they can serve clients safely.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, some anti-violence programs have reported increased demand of 30 – 300%<sup>13</sup>, while others have reported a decline in the use of services likely related to a variety of pandemic-related factors including: the inability to call for help when isolating with an abuser; concerns about COVID-19 transmission; the lack of accessible and affordable programs in remote communities; and perceptions about the availability of programs.<sup>14</sup> Life-saving services and programs are disproportionately inaccessible to cis women, transgender and gender non-conforming people in general, and particularly so where significant, additional barriers to access exist, including through their membership in the following communities: Black, Indigenous or people of colour, status as an immigrant, refugee or undocumented person, work in the sex trade, ability/disability status, experience of homelessness and residence in remote parts of the country.<sup>15</sup>

- ***Women, particularly racialized and migrant women, make up the under-resourced, overburdened frontline.*** More than half of all women workers are employed in the ‘5C’ occupations deemed essential during the COVID-19 pandemic: care, catering, cashiering, cleaning and clerical.<sup>16</sup> Women also make up 90% of nurses and personal support workers.<sup>17</sup> These workers and their families are at heightened risk of exposure to COVID-19, their work is drastically undervalued in part because of gendered valuation of work, and they have been working in challenging conditions. In one survey of health care workers, almost half of respondents said they needed more mental health supports, additional medical staff in health care facilities, and more protection equipment.<sup>18</sup>

#### **Four urgent actions to mitigate rising gender inequality from the COVID-19 pandemic**

- 1. Permanently reform income support and employment insurance programs to ensure the most marginalized workers can benefit.**

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government moved quickly to strengthen and expand income supports for workers who lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic. The CERB program increased the amount of monthly support and expanded eligibility criteria, allowing for

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<sup>12</sup> National Observer “A spike in domestic violence happening in Toronto due to COVID-19 experts say” (April 28, 2020) <<https://www.nationalobserver.com/2020/04/28/news/spike-domestic-violence-happening-toronto-due-covid-19-experts-say>>.

<sup>13</sup> Global News “Calls to Vancouver domestic-violence crisis line spike 300% amid COVID-19 pandemic” (May 7, 2020) <<https://globalnews.ca/news/6789403/domestic-violence-coronavirus/>>; National Observer “A spike in domestic violence happening in Toronto due to COVID-19 experts say” (April 28, 2020) <<https://www.nationalobserver.com/2020/04/28/news/spike-domestic-violence-happening-toronto-due-covid-19-experts-say>>.

<sup>14</sup> National Observer “A spike in domestic violence happening in Toronto due to COVID-19 experts say” (April 28, 2020) <<https://www.nationalobserver.com/2020/04/28/news/spike-domestic-violence-happening-toronto-due-covid-19-experts-say>>.

<sup>15</sup> Canadian Association of Midwives and the National Aboriginal Council of Midwives “Reproductive Justice during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Call to Action from Midwives” (May 12, 2020) <[https://canadianmidwives.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/ReproductiveJusticeCallActionCOVID19\\_VF\\_ENG\\_20200512.pdf](https://canadianmidwives.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/ReproductiveJusticeCallActionCOVID19_VF_ENG_20200512.pdf)>.

<sup>16</sup> Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives “COVID-19 crisis response must address gender faultlines” (March 20, 2020) <<http://behindthenumbers.ca/2020/03/20/covid-19-crisis-response-must-address-gender-faultlines/>>.

<sup>17</sup> Unifor “Pandemic highlights pay gap for frontline, mostly women, workers” (April 2, 2020) <<https://www.unifor.org/en/whats-new/news/pandemic-highlights-pay-gap-frontline-mostly-women-workers>>.

<sup>18</sup> The Star “Canadian health workers on COVID-19 front line say they need mental health support, poll indicates” (April 16, 2020) <<https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2020/04/16/canadian-health-workers-on-covid-19-front-line-say-they-need-mental-health-support-poll-indicates.html>>.

far more families to benefit from income supports and bringing people on income supports closer to the cost of living mark. We view this as a significant step toward an intersectional feminist recovery and urge the government to permanently reform income support frameworks to reflect the real lived experience of Canadian workers instead of an outdated idea of standardized employment.

The changes that were introduced to income support programs were essential given that half of unemployed Canadians do not benefit from Employment Insurance and the rates of provincial social assistance programs remain at a fraction of the poverty line.<sup>19</sup> The vast majority of these workers are low-wage and part-time workers; most are also Indigenous, racialized and immigrant women and gender non-conforming people who often hold multiple jobs yet struggle to make ends meet. This lived experience challenges the central misconception built into current employment insurance: that government supports remove people's incentive to work.<sup>20</sup> These workers are most likely to continue to fare worst off in the coming years – with early data indicating that women are benefiting from the recovery at half the rate of men across Canada<sup>21</sup> – and are precisely the ones who must be prioritized in the government's COVID-19 pandemic response.

One way the government can begin to translate the learnings from this pandemic into long-term resiliency is by developing a strategy to transition the supports provided through the CERB program into a permanent income support framework that reflects the increased rates and expanded eligibility criteria developed through the CERB program.

## **2. Engage front-line organizations in the development of low-barrier emergency income supports for marginalized workers including sex trade and migrant workers.**

In addition to making the improved protections afforded under the CERB program part of the permanent fabric of income supports, the government must also ensure that these supports are made universal and are accessible to those most impacted by the pandemic. We have learned through this crisis that social frameworks that leave people behind undermine public health measures. For example, workers who could not qualify for employment insurance or take sick leave have been forced to continue to work throughout the pandemic often having to defy quarantine and self-isolation measures and place themselves, their families and the broader community at heightened risk. As noted earlier, the vast majority of the workers who do not qualify for CERB or employment insurance are Indigenous, racialized and migrant women, transgender and gender non-conforming people, sex trade workers, and people experiencing homeless and other elements of poverty.<sup>22</sup>

The CERB program, while an improved income support program, continues to leave many without the financial support they need to brave the pandemic. Workers who lost work before March 15, 2020 and those who earned less than \$5000 in the previous calendar year still do not qualify for

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<sup>19</sup> Stanford, J “The COVID-19 Pandemic must change work for good” *Centre for Future Work* (June 2020) p 37 <[file:///C:/Users/ebendo/Work%20Folders/Desktop/10Ways\\_work\\_must\\_change.pdf](file:///C:/Users/ebendo/Work%20Folders/Desktop/10Ways_work_must_change.pdf)>.

<sup>20</sup> Stanford, J “The COVID-19 Pandemic must change work for good” *Centre for Future Work* (June 2020) p 29 <[file:///C:/Users/ebendo/Work%20Folders/Desktop/10Ways\\_work\\_must\\_change.pdf](file:///C:/Users/ebendo/Work%20Folders/Desktop/10Ways_work_must_change.pdf)>.

<sup>21</sup> Statistics Canada “Labour Force Survey, May 2020” (June 5<sup>th</sup> 2020) <<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200605/dq200605a-eng.htm>>.

<sup>22</sup> Yalnizyan, A. et al, “Canada Emergency Response Benefit Eligibility Issues and Solutions as of April 3, 2020” *Atkinson* (April 3, 2020) <[https://atkinsonfoundation.ca/site/uploads/2020/04/Canada-Emergency-Response-Benefit\\_Yalnizyan\\_40720.pdf](https://atkinsonfoundation.ca/site/uploads/2020/04/Canada-Emergency-Response-Benefit_Yalnizyan_40720.pdf)>.

CERB benefits.<sup>23</sup> This criteria is arbitrary and undermines one of the ultimate goal of income supports: to make sure everyone can follow health care directives. If we are to ensure everyone has the financial support they need to keep themselves, their families and the broader community safe, then we must recognize that many people were struggling to make ends meet before the pandemic hit. There is no sound policy reason for providing financial support to those who lost their job during the pandemic while withholding support for those that have long been experiencing economic insecurity.

The program also does not support many workers in the informal labour and criminalized labour sectors include sex trade workers and many undocumented workers who may fear accessing benefits despite the governments' recent directive waiving the requirement for proof of a valid work permit to receive CERB.<sup>24</sup> These workers need low-barrier emergency supports and have largely not benefitted from the government's COVID-19 response. The impact the lack of financial support and loss of income is having on the health and safety of workers is significant.

On May 22, 2020, West Coast LEAF joined with 19 women's rights and equality seeking organizations to highlight the barriers sex trade workers face in accessing supports and call on the government to provide low-barrier emergency supports for these workers.<sup>25</sup> Rather than meeting this demand, the government directed organizations supporting sex trade workers to apply for the \$350 million ECSF. This is an entirely inadequate response to the demand made by sex trade workers and those that support them. Not only can the ECSF not be used to provide income support, many of the front-line organizations that support sex trade workers do not themselves meet the eligibility criteria for this program.

The government must make sure supports work for everyone *especially* those most marginalized on the basis of intersecting grounds. We call on the government to urgently engage front-line organizations in all their diversity and in particular organizations supporting sex trade workers, migrant workers, disabled workers, people experiencing homelessness and people using substances to assess the most effective and expeditious way to provide low-barrier emergency income supports to informal and criminalized sector workers.

### **3. Bolster funding for programs and services that are essential for women and gender-diverse people and provide additional funding for remote programs and dedicated funding for specialized programs for Indigenous women and transgender and gender non-binary people.**

Early into the pandemic experts identified the likelihood that the crisis would result in increased incidences of gender-based violence. We were heartened to see that the federal government took the calls of anti-violence experts seriously and quickly moved to increase funding for women's shelters, emergency shelters on reserve, and sexual assault centres. The \$50 million in funding is a significant first step in supporting these life-saving services as demand for anti-violence programs and emergency shelters increases across the country. However, while a significant first

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<sup>23</sup> Government of Canada "Applying for CERB with CRA Who can Apply" (June 8, 2020) <<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/ei/cerb-application/questions.html>>.

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<sup>25</sup> Amnesty International, "Canada must protect the rights of sex workers during COVID-19 by ensuring access to emergency income supports" (June 4, 2020) <<https://www.amnesty.ca/news/canada-must-protect-rights-sex-workers-during-covid-19-ensuring-access-emergency-income>>.



step, this amount is limited and unlikely to come anywhere close to meeting the needs of survivors of sexual assault.

Anti-violence programs and emergency shelters have long been underfunded. In the wake of the #MeToo movement, many of these programs saw drastic increases in demand. We have heard from anti-violence programs across BC that waitlists for accessing support can range from 18 months to two years. We estimate that the cost of meeting pre-COVID-19 demand in BC alone for community-based emergency sexual assault programs is approximately \$50 – 70 million annually. This figure excludes the cost of providing domestic violence programs and emergency shelters.

The pandemic has posed new challenges for the anti-violence sector. Programs have lost funding as a result of the pandemic, yet many are seeing increased demand in the range of 30-300%. Some programs, particularly those serving remote communities, have had to adapt their services including their ability to provide in-person services and outreach to comply with health directives.<sup>26</sup> We understand that other programs have had to redirect funds to travel, personal protection equipment, and other supplies including purchasing cell phones and cell phone plans for survivors.

Across Canada, gender-based violence is its own crisis: approximately 40% of women report having experienced at least one sexual assault since the age of 15.<sup>27</sup> We know that crises tend to roll back even the small steps societies haven taken toward achieving a more gender just world. The federal government must drastically increase supports for front-line anti-violence organizations. We estimate that the amount needed to respond to the crisis of gender-based violence across Canada is somewhere in the ballpark of \$700 million.

Trauma-informed and culturally safe community-based emergency support services are essential for mitigating the long-term harms experienced by survivors which can include post traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, and even suicidal ideations.<sup>28</sup> In fact, research overwhelmingly shows that survivors experience better post-assault outcomes if they access trauma-informed and culturally safe care immediately following the assault.<sup>29</sup> Given that the current pain and suffering-related costs to Canadian society are estimated to reach approximately \$2 billion annually, funding these essential services is also likely bring significant long-term economic benefits.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to making this funding available, the federal government must also ensure that part of this funding is dedicated to Indigenous-led programs, transgender and gender non-binary-led

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<sup>26</sup> National Observer “A spike in domestic violence happening in Toronto due to COVID-19 experts say” (April 28, 2020) <<https://www.nationalobserver.com/2020/04/28/news/spike-domestic-violence-happening-toronto-due-covid-19-experts-say>>.

<sup>27</sup> Adam Cotter & Laura Savage, “Gender-based violence and unwanted sexual behaviour in Canada, 2018: Initial findings from the Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces” (5 December 2019), Juristat, at 23 <<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2019001/article/00017-eng.htm>>.

<sup>28</sup> Sit, Victoria and Lana Stermac. 2017. “Improving Formal Support After Sexual Assault: Recommendations from Survivors Living in Poverty in Canada.” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. 1- 21.

<sup>29</sup> Ullman, Sarah et al. 2007. “Structural Models of the Relations of Assault Severity, Social Support, Avoidance Coping, Self-Blame, and PTSD Among Sexual Assault Survivors.” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 31(1): 23-37.

<sup>30</sup> McInturff, K “The gap in the gender gap: violence against women in Canada” Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (July 2013) at 7 <[https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2013/07/Gap\\_in\\_Gender\\_Gap\\_VAW.pdf](https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2013/07/Gap_in_Gender_Gap_VAW.pdf)>.

programs, and programs aimed at supporting sex trade workers. Across Canada, Indigenous women are 12 times more likely to experience violence<sup>31</sup> and 50% of transgender people report having experienced physical or sexual violence in an intimate relationship<sup>32</sup>. Yet it is precisely these survivors that are least likely to access the criminal justice system and mainstream health care system, find many community-based anti-violence programs similarly unwelcoming and unsafe, and face barriers in accessing supportive housing.<sup>33</sup> Indigenous, transgender, gender non-binary, and survivors in the sex trade need peer-led programs that are created through meaningful engagement with lived-experience experts and specific to these communities. We urge the government to make funding available for these programs across Canada.

**4. Expand on promised investments for childcare by providing annual financial contributions to the provinces for a low-fee universal childcare framework and pass legislation that sets out the criteria and conditions the provinces must meet to qualify for full cash contributions.**

If the rates of unemployment and job recovery continue as is, we may be on track to see a devastating exodus of women from the paid workforce. The disproportionate rates of income loss experienced by women are directly correlated to the gendered division of unpaid labour. As women's unpaid care responsibilities increase exponentially due to school closures and caring for family members who become ill, the need to invest in high-quality, affordable, and accessible childcare has never been greater.

The availability of high-quality, affordable, and accessible childcare will directly impact women's ability to benefit from the economic recovery. In reviewing the impact of Quebec's introduction of low-fee universal childcare, the economist Pierre Fortin found that the availability of affordable childcare directly supports women's increased participation in the paid workforce.<sup>34</sup> In 2015, Fortin produced the following submissions for the Standing Committee on the Status of Women:

A unanimous finding of the research literature is that the low-fee universal childcare system that Quebec started 20 years ago has had a spectacular impact on childcare utilization and the labour force participation of mothers of young children. With more continuity in their careers, Quebec mothers see their employment income increase more and faster not only when their children are very young, but also later when they have entered school. The low-fee universal system operates as an effective insurance policy against the financial and developmental risks that come with separation from husbands or partners, whose probability of occurrence has increased sharply in recent decades.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, "Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls", Volume 1a at p 7 <[https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Final\\_Report\\_Vol\\_1a-1.pdf](https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Final_Report_Vol_1a-1.pdf)>.

<sup>32</sup> Trans PULSE Canada, "Health and healthcare access for trans and non-binary people in Canada" (10 March 2020) at 5 <<https://transpulsecanada.ca/research-type/reports>>.

<sup>33</sup> Prochuk, A "BC Gender Equality Report Card 2019/2020" West Coast LEAF (May 2020) <<http://www.westcoastleaf.org/our-publications/report-card-2019-2020/>>.

<sup>34</sup> Fortin, P "What Have Been the Effects of Quebec's Universal Childcare System on Women's Economic Security? Brief Submitted to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women (FEWO) of the House of Commons, Ottawa" (March 2017) <<https://www.ourcommons.ca/content/Committee/421/FEWO/Brief/BR8806290/br-external/FortinPierre-e.pdf>>.

<sup>35</sup> Fortin, P "What Have Been the Effects of Quebec's Universal Childcare System on Women's Economic Security? Brief Submitted to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women (FEWO) of the House of Commons, Ottawa"



Fortin's research has shown that investments in childcare are also likely to support economic recovery with one report finding that "in 2008 universal access to low-fee childcare in Quebec induced [...] an increase of 3.8% in women's employment [and resulted in an increase in Quebec's domestic income (GDP) of] about 1.7% (\$5 billions).<sup>36</sup> During that year, for every \$100 dollars the Quebec government spent on childcare it generated a return of \$104 for itself and \$43 for the federal government. Accordingly, investing in childcare is sound intersectional feminist economic policy.

While childcare remains within provincial jurisdiction, provinces cannot shoulder the cost of childcare alone. In 2018, the BC government committed to move the province toward universal childcare by 2028 and, as per the most recent budget cycle, BC has largely been on track to meet this goal. However, even before the pandemic hit, a lot more remained to be done to ensure BC families would be receiving access to affordable, accessible and high-quality childcare. The Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC estimated that the building of a quality affordable childcare system required an increase of an additional \$200 million annually in operating funds.<sup>37</sup> It is anticipated that these figures are likely to increase drastically as childcare providers move to meet public health advisories. Even for BC, a province that has committed substantial funding to build a universal childcare system, it is unclear what share of the current childcare spaces will be lost and how far the current figures allotted to childcare services will stretch to meet demand.

The federal government has a role to play in ensuring that low-fee universal childcare is uniformly available across Canada. Childcare is an essential service, like health care and post-secondary education – both areas of provincial jurisdiction that receive annual federal contributions – and should be treated as such. We urge the federal government to set the standard for the type of childcare that is available across the country by providing annual financial contributions to the provinces to fund low-fee universal childcare and passing federal childcare legislation, akin to the *Canada Health Act*, that sets out the criteria and conditions the provinces must meet to qualify for full cash contributions.

### **Looking Forward: A Just Recovery for All**

As corporate interests begin to wield their lobbying power and push for austerity measures and market deregulation,<sup>38</sup> we urge you to stay the course. The programs that have been put in place to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic must not be scaled back. They are long-overdue, essential programs that are keeping many families from severe economic insecurity and our society from augmented rates of social inequity. These are the very investments that lay the foundation for enhanced resiliency and sustainability going forward and that will support us in weathering whatever storms lay ahead, together. The federal government must expand investments in our social safety net with the aim of ensuring equity and inclusion across all response efforts.

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(March 2017) at 2 <<https://www.ourcommons.ca/content/Committee/421/FEWO/Brief/BR8806290/br-external/FortinPierre-e.pdf>>.

<sup>36</sup> Fortin, P et al. "Impact of Quebec's Universal Low-Fee Childcare Program of Female Labour Force Participation, Domestic Income, and Government Budget" (2008) at 1 <[https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/atkinson/UserFiles/File/News/Fortin-Godbout-St\\_Cerny\\_eng.pdf](https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/atkinson/UserFiles/File/News/Fortin-Godbout-St_Cerny_eng.pdf)>.

<sup>37</sup> Coalition of Child Care Advocates "Third Year of Good News for Child Care" (February 18, 2020) <[http://www.ecebc.ca/resources/pdf/10aDay\\_2020\\_Media\\_Release\\_Feb\\_18\\_2020.pdf](http://www.ecebc.ca/resources/pdf/10aDay_2020_Media_Release_Feb_18_2020.pdf)>.

<sup>38</sup> Environmental Defence "Secret memo reveals oil industry plan to exploit COVID crisis, endanger Canadians" (April 2020) <<https://environmentaldefence.ca/2020/04/17/secret-memo-reveals-oil-industry-plan-exploit-covid-crisis-endanger-canadians/>>

In May 2020, a group of organizations from across Canada identified six principles for a just recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>39</sup>. West Coast LEAF is one of 400 organizations who have signed on to the six principles for a Just Recovery for All. The six principles are:

1. ***Put people's health and wellbeing first without exceptions*** – Principle 1 requires government to invest in health services and social services and ensure that services are public, culturally safe, and accessible to all without discrimination.
2. ***Strengthen the social safety net and provide relief directly to people*** – Principle 2 requires government to focus recovery efforts on people who are most oppressed by existing systems and to ensure that supports meet the immediate and long-term needs of all people.
3. ***Prioritize the needs of workers and communities*** – Principle 3 requires government to ensure recovery efforts prioritise worker rights including safety, fair labour standards, and the right to unionize. It also calls for economic recovery packages to be provided in a manner consistent with Indigenous sovereignty and climate justice, while rejecting subsidies for the wealthy.
4. ***Build resilience to prevent future crises*** – Principle 4 calls on government to build resiliency within communities by investing in economic recovery plans that reduce inequity, protect the planet, and create decent jobs.
5. ***Build solidarity and equity across communities, generations, and borders*** – Principle 5 calls on the government to implement recovery plans that honour and expand human rights, including the rights of Indigenous peoples, and advance gender equity.
6. ***Uphold Indigenous Rights and work in partnership with Indigenous peoples*** – Principle 6 calls on the government to recognize Indigenous sovereignty and uphold Indigenous Rights and include the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples, in line with the standard of free, prior, and informed consent.

We encourage the government to fully endorse and implement these principles in its COVID-19 response.

## Conclusion

If we have learned anything from this pandemic it is that we are stronger when we invest in community and individual health and well-being. We encourage the government to expand on its initial respond to COVID-19 by making income supports universally accessible and permanent and increasing investment in community-based sexual assault programs and universal childcare.

As we look toward an economic recovery, we encourage the government to reject austerity measures and, instead, fully implement the following community-identified principles for a Just Recovery for All: put people's health and wellbeing first without exceptions; strengthen the social safety net and provide relief directly to people; prioritize the needs of workers and communities; build resilience to prevent future crises; build solidarity and equity across communities, generations, and borders; and uphold Indigenous Rights and work in partnership with Indigenous peoples.

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<sup>39</sup> Just Recovery <<https://justrecoveryforall.ca/#principles>>.