

A Feminist Recovery for Canada: Making the Economy Work for Everyone



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Submission for 2021 Pre-Budget Consultations – YWCA Canada

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LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Fully implement the [Calls to Action in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#) and the [Calls for Justice in the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry Report](#).

Recommendation 2: Implement the [recommendations](#) of the [Parliamentary Black Caucus](#).

Recommendation 3: Adopt the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) benchmark of allocating at least 1% of the country's GDP to early learning and childcare and immediately invest at least \$2.5 billion into child care sector recovery.

Recommendation 4: Provide permanent resident status on arrival to migrant care workers and their families.

Recommendation 5: Legislate at least 14 paid sick days for all and paid family leave for all workers.

Recommendation 6: Lower the uniform national eligibility requirement of Employment Insurance to 360 hours and increase the benefit rate from 55% to 85% for all workers.

Recommendation 7: Provide at least \$150 million to charities and non-profits that deliver employment services and skills training for women and gender diverse people to support workers in sectors experiencing job losses.

Recommendation 8: Establish a National Action Plan on Addressing Gender-Based Violence and invest at least \$500 million dollars per year.

Recommendation 9: Fully realize the National Housing Strategy to build 125,000 units of affordable housing, completely deploy the 33% carve-out for gender-focused investments and ensure chronic homelessness drops by 50% by 2027.

Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis shed new light on and exacerbated several existing crises affecting residents in Canada. It also highlighted the gaps in our social safety net and cracks in our economy. It is evident that cis and trans women, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse people in Canada are not only shouldering the bulk of the economic impacts of COVID-19, but also the health and social ones:

- As of July 2020, [56% of Canada's COVID-19 cases](#) and [54% of the deaths](#) from COVID-19 were women;
- Women dominated employment in three of the five industries devastated by COVID-19 in March and April (retail, hospitality, tourism), with Canada seeing [the lowest level of women's participation](#) in the labour force in the past 30 years;
- Women are also at the forefront of pandemic response - they occupy 70% of jobs in the health care sector, jobs face-to-face with the virus; and,
- The charitable sector, of which over 80% of its workers are women, has been devastated financially. According to [a recent survey of YWCA Member Associations](#), 86.4% of organizations experienced loss of funding and half had to take measures to temporarily reduce employment.

These impacts are further compounded for people who are also low-income, experience ableism, are members of the LGTBQ+ communities, belong to Indigenous, Black, or racialized communities, and/or are newcomers, refugees, immigrants, and migrants.

While the urge to reduce public services and government spending may be strong during economic downturns, now is the time to make bold investments in communities hardest hit by the pandemic. This government has the unprecedented opportunity to not only restart, but reshape Canada's economy into one that is inclusive, equitable, and works for everyone.

Such a transformation can only be achieved by addressing the gendered impacts of COVID-19 and by ensuring everyone can meet their basic needs and lead healthy, dignified, and secure lives. The following six pillars should be at the core of Canada's economic recovery: 1) Address Systemic Racism, 2) Strengthen the Care Economy, 3) Invest in Decent Work for All, 4) Combat the Shadow Pandemic, and 5) Fund Essential Infrastructure.

This submission is also informed by YWCA Canada's and University of Toronto's Institute for Gender and the Economy (GATE) report '[A Feminist Economic Recovery Plan for Canada: Making the Economy Work for Everyone](#)'.

ADDRESS SYSTEMIC RACISM

As we address the impacts of one public health crisis, COVID-19, it is imperative that we also address another, much older public health crisis in Canada: anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism. It is important to recognize that racist violence is also gender-based violence, and the violence experienced by Black and Indigenous women and gender-diverse people require specific and targeted policy interventions. In addition, while not discussed at length in our submission, there must be a recognition that systemic racism produces many insidious and broad inequities such as the racialization of poverty.

[Regis Korschinski-Pacquet](#) and [Chantel Moore](#) died during police wellness checks in May and June 2020 - these deaths brought the reality of police brutality in Canada into the spotlight. In 2018, the Ontario Human Rights Commission found that Black people in Toronto are [20 times more likely to be shot by police](#) than their white counterparts. The [National Inquiry into MMIWG](#) stated in their final report: "Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people are also overpoliced and over-incarcerated as potential offenders, yet under-protected as victims of crime."

The federal government must not turn away from Canada's foundation of systemic racism. We urgently need comprehensive, well-funded, and coordinated interventions from all levels of government to root out all forms of anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism in Canada, from the criminal justice system to education to health care. Such action requires implementing the demands of Black and Indigenous communities.

YWCA Canada recommends the government take urgent action on the following:

- **Recommendation 1:** Fully implement the [Calls to Action in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report](#), and the Calls for Justice in the [Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry Report](#).
- **Recommendation 2:** Implement the [recommendations of the Parliamentary Black Caucus](#).

STRENGTHEN THE CARE ECONOMY

Canada's care economy is chronically underfunded and undervalued - leaving paid care workers in precarious conditions, despite Canada's unwavering reliance on care workers, which only intensified during the current public health crisis.

Paid care work tends to be done by Black, racialized and immigrant women - many of these workers are also on temporary work visas. Despite the essential and high risk role migrant care workers play in our society, these workers have largely been excluded from the pandemic response. They continue to be low-paid and cannot [access healthcare or emergency benefits](#).

Child care is also a decisive factor in women's participation in the labour market - in a Canada-wide research project on women's access to the labour market, YWCA Canada found that [77% of participants named child care as the top barrier](#) to paid employment. COVID-19 accelerated the child care crisis in several ways: school and child care centre reopenings are uncertain and underfunded, buildings have decreased capacity due to additional safety measures, and lower income families might not be able to afford child care costs due to the financial impacts of the pandemic. Without access to viable child care options, women are [more likely than men to 'fall out' of the labour market](#) with caregiving duties as a critical factor in their decision.

Increased investment in the care economy will create enormous economic and social benefits. In the United Kingdom, researchers predict that [spending 1.9% of GDP in care](#) would generate 2 million sustainable jobs, raise the employment rate by 5% and reduce the gender employment gap by 4%. Research within Canada also points to direct returns of investing in care: for example, in 2008 alone, [each \\$100 invested by the Quebec government](#) in daycare returned \$104 to the provincial government and \$43 to the federal government. Beyond the economic benefits of a well-funded care system, the health, development and wellbeing of everyone in Canada is worth investing in.

Therefore, YWCA Canada recommends to strengthen our care economy:

- **Recommendation 3:** Adopt the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) benchmark of allocating at least 1% of the country's GDP to early learning and childcare and immediately invest at least \$2.5 billion into child care sector recovery.
- **Recommendation 4:** Give permanent resident status on arrival to migrant care workers and their families.

INVEST IN DECENT WORK FOR ALL

COVID-19 exposed the urgent need for workers to access paid sick leave and unemployment benefits. However, Black, racialized and immigrant women are [disproportionately represented](#) as personal support workers, cleaners, and in other essential but low-paid occupations that do not provide paid sick leave or family leave. Other workers are also unable to access social assistance measures, such as [migrant farmworkers](#), gig economy workers (rideshare and food delivery), multiple job holders, [sex workers](#), and [people on social assistance](#). During the pandemic, many face the choice of either putting their own and their family's health at risk, or losing their financial security.

Additionally, for several decades, advocates recognized that the current Employment Insurance (EI) program is difficult to access for temporary and part-time workers, who are disproportionately women. An analysis by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives found that there was a [growing gender gap in EI coverage](#), with 40% of unemployed men eligible for EI compared to 32% of unemployed women. The ability to stay home if sick while meeting basic needs should be available to all residents of Canada - paid sick leave and EI are necessary public health interventions.

To work toward safe, decent, and dignified work for all, YWCA Canada recommends the following actions:

- **Recommendation 5:** Legislate at least 14 paid sick days and paid family leave for all workers so that everyone—particularly those in frontline, vulnerable jobs—can protect their health and that of the rest of the population.
- **Recommendation 6:** Lower the uniform national eligibility requirement of Employment Insurance to 360 hours and increase the benefit rate from 55% to 85% for all workers.
- **Recommendation 7:** Provide at least \$150 million to charities and non-profits that deliver employment services and skills training for women and gender diverse people to support job transition for workers in sectors impacted by job losses such as food services, retail, and hospitality.

COMBAT THE SHADOW PANDEMIC

The [psychological and physical impacts](#) of violence creates trauma that spans generations. Beyond the harm disproportionately caused to women, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse people, gender-based violence is detrimental to our economy: a [2012 federal study](#) estimated that the combined cost of domestic and sexual violence to Canada's GDP is \$8.4 billion per year. Canada must address violence head on, at the forefront of recovery efforts, so everyone can prosper.

Although gender-based violence has [long been a major crisis](#), the pandemic was a '[perfect storm for violence](#)' amid physical distancing measures, job loss, general fears and anxiety, and isolation. The United Nations is referring to the global rise in domestic violence as the '[shadow pandemic](#)'. Canada is no exception: federal government officials are reporting a [20 to 30 percent rise of domestic violence incidents](#) across the country. Devastatingly, in Canada, there have been at least nine [murders of women](#) at the hands of their male partners or family members during this pandemic.

It is necessary now to employ a coordinated, holistic, and multi-jurisdictional approach: A National Action Plan (NAP) on Gender-Based Violence. This recommendation echoes the [United Nations call on all member states to enact a NAP by 2015](#).

Therefore, YWCA Canada recommends the following:

- **Recommendation 8:** Establish a National Action Plan on Addressing Gender-Based Violence and invest at least [\\$500 million towards this plan per year](#).

FUND ESSENTIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Public health measures assert the importance of physical distancing. However, distancing requires access to adequate, affordable and safe housing. The widespread layoffs and reduction in hours for Canadian workers due to the pandemic [pushed millions of families into precarious housing situations](#) and were/are unable to make rent or mortgage payments. Canadian legislation recognizes that [housing is a human right](#), yet approximately [235,000 Canadians experience homelessness](#) in a year. One solution to Canada's housing crisis is to [increase the supply](#) of affordable housing.

Therefore, to ensure people have access to safe and affordable housing, YWCA Canada recommends that the government:

- **Recommendation 9:** Fully realize the National Housing Strategy to build 125,000 units of affordable housing, completely deploy the 33% carve-out for gender-focused investments and ensure chronic homelessness drops by 50% by 2027.

ⁱ Illustration by Blanche Studio: <https://www.blanchestudio.design/work>