



Labour Shortages, Working Conditions, and the Care Economy

Submission to The Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (HUMA).

Submitted by: Oxfam Canada on April 8, 2022

Summary

COVID-19 exposed how important care is for our society and our economy, while also demonstrating just how fragile the care sector is. Care work is crucial to our societies and to the economy. It includes looking after children, elderly people and those with physical and mental illnesses or disabilities, as well as domestic work such as cooking, cleaning, washing, family and community planning and coordination. We have all been in need of care at some point in our lives (or will be in the future) and without someone investing time in these daily jobs, communities and workplaces would grind to a halt.

Heavy and unequal care responsibilities remain one of the most significant barriers to gender equality across the world. Care work (paid and unpaid) allows all other work to happen – but despite that, care work often goes unrecognized and undervalued. In Canada, many care jobs in certain sectors (health, childcare, education, domestic work and others) are often low-paid, with poor job security and challenging working conditions. Care workers are mostly women, and many of them are racialized, immigrants or migrant workers. This Submission to HUMA will address these challenges with evidence driven recommendations, and we look forward to follow up and continued action on this pressing issue.

Key Recommendations

- Establish a federal integrated Care Commission, to examine paid and unpaid care work, with the aim of building a holistic care system in Canada that recognizes care as a human right. Work to build a comprehensive system to address the full spectrum of care needs, including child care, early childhood education, disability and long-term care, and elder care.
- Develop a broad and inclusive labour market strategy to achieve high-quality care jobs. This strategy should provide wage floors and benefit standards as well as education and licensing for workers, but also address care worker supply through progressive immigration measures such as pathways to permanent residency for migrant workers.
- Establish national standards for long-term care, including standards for fair pay, access to training and improved working conditions for long-term care workers. Improve access to and the quality of home-based and community-based healthcare and social supports for those in need (such as seniors and people with disabilities), upholding the principles of relational care, non-profit delivery, effective coordination across systems and transparency/ accountability.
- Work with the provinces and territories to uphold the labour rights of caregivers and domestic workers, including living wages, and ratify the International Labour Organization Convention 189 on the protection of domestic workers



Introduction

Over the past 24 months of the pandemic, Canada's care economy was really pushed to its limit, after decades of underspending left care sectors (health, childcare, education, domestic work and others) in a state of disorder, leaving caregivers overwhelmed, and more recipients in need of care. The repeated lockdowns had a profound impact on the heavy and unequal unpaid care responsibilities within households that mostly fall on women - not only in Canada, but across the world. Globally, even before the pandemic hit, 42% of women of working age said they were unable to do paid work because of their unpaid care and domestic work responsibilities – compared to just 6% of men.¹ Paid care work is often feminized, racialized labour concentrated in precarious sectors. Improving access to affordable and quality public care services for children, the elderly, and people living with disabilities has the potential to reduce and redistribute women's unpaid care work – and better support the needs of paid care workers if provided the necessary supports.

Some major policy decisions this year have demonstrated that governments have started to recognize how crucial care is for society to function. The federal government's historic \$30 billion investment in a universal early learning and child care system (ELCC) across Canada was a huge step forward, which child care advocates have been pushing for decades. Through federal negotiation with provinces and territories, clear plans are being laid out for how comprehensive non-profit driven child care systems can be built in the next five years, also taking into account human capital and workforce needs. These agreements set targets for increases in child care spaces and fees, while also ensuring better wages and training opportunities for the ELCC workforce.² This is the type of action we need across other care sectors that women are concentrated, such as health, education, social services, and those supporting at-home care work. There is a clear need to invest in women-majority care workforces through designated federal funding to the provinces and territories for the creation of high-quality jobs in the care economy that offer full-time work at better wages, improved working conditions, access to training, and robust employment protections.

While existing efforts around care often focus on women's unpaid domestic care responsibilities, it is also imperative to address some key issues often overlooked. This includes efforts to protect the rights and working conditions of care workers, tackling gender and racial stereotypes, and investing in infrastructure and social protection policies that promote and expand the care sector. Additionally, investing in the paid care sector has many benefits. It generates jobs, advances gender equality, and can be a key building block of a green economic transition given its low carbon impact.

Key Recommendations

- 1. Establish a federal integrated Care Commission, to examine paid and unpaid care work, with the aim of building a holistic care system in Canada that recognizes care as a human right.**

¹ M. Lawson, A. Parvez Butt, R. Harvey, et al. (2020). Time to Care. Retrieved 1 March 2022, from <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/time-care>

² ESDC. Federal Secretariat on Early Learning and Child Care. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/early-learning-child-care.htm>



Work to build a comprehensive system to address the full spectrum of care needs, including child care, early childhood education, disability and long-term care, and elder care.

To address labour shortages and working conditions in the care economy, the idea and practice of care needs to be treated as a critical social good and an essential human right. Care work is crucial to our societies and to the economy. It includes looking after children, elderly people and those with physical and mental illnesses or disabilities, as well as domestic work such as cooking, cleaning, washing, family and community planning and coordination. We have all been in need of care at some point in our lives (or will be in the future) and without someone investing time in these daily jobs communities and workplaces would grind to a halt.

Before COVID-19, women around the world were already doing three times as much unpaid care and domestic work as men and, according to UN Women, work longer hours than men when both unpaid care and paid market work are combined. It is clear the pandemic has exacerbated women's unpaid care work, with schools closed and limited care and recreational services available. The triple duty of homeschooling, child and elder care, and paid work is leaving women depleted. In a survey conducted by Oxfam Canada in June 2020, 71% of women in Canada reported feeling more anxious, depressed, isolated, overworked, and ill because of increased unpaid care work. Those who lost their jobs struggle to get back into the labour market due to care responsibilities.³

Although rarely accounted for in calculations of gross domestic product (GDP), unpaid care and domestic work has enormous economic value – and a Care Economy Commission would have an opportunity to address, reward, and redistribute this work. Oxfam research estimates that the monetary value of women's unpaid care work globally is estimated conservatively at around \$10.8 trillion annually, over three times the size of the world's tech industry. In Canada, a recent Statistics Canada study estimated the value of unpaid household work in Canada to be between \$516.9 billion and \$860.2 billion in 2019, representing between 25.2% and 37.2% of Canada's nominal gross domestic product.

The creation of a Care Commission has the opportunity to transform the care economy by leading meaningful policy discussion with all stakeholders to reimagine care and build a sustainable care economy anchored in decent work that ends the devaluation of care work. This Commission should set, monitor, and enforce national standards for quality care services based on evidence-based best practices covering staffing levels, training, service management and delivery, and protection of labour rights. From an accountability perspective, the Commission should report annually on the delivery and impact of care services in federal legislatures in collaboration with all stakeholders.

- 2. Develop a broad and inclusive labour market strategy to achieve high-quality care jobs. This strategy should provide wage floors and benefit standards as well as education and licensing for workers, but also address care worker supply through progressive immigration measures such as pathways to permanent residency for migrant workers.**

³ M. Lawson, A. Parvez Butt, R. Harvey, et al. (2020). Time to Care. Retrieved 1 March 2022, from <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/time-care>



Globally, women make up two-thirds of the paid care workforce.⁴ Recent studies have shown how investing in care sectors can lead to greater reductions in poverty and gender employment gaps, as well as driving better education and health outcomes than other forms of investment.⁵ The latest data from the ILO shows us that plugging existing, significant, gaps in care services could generate almost 300 million jobs globally and create a continuum of care that would help to alleviate poverty, encourage gender equality, and support quality care for children and the elderly.⁶

In Canada, care, both paid and unpaid, is a fundamental component of our basic infrastructure. Paid care in health and education alone is a key engine of the economy, generating at least 12% of GDP and 21% of jobs.⁷ Yet, it's among the lowest-paid sectors even compared to other female-dominated jobs requiring similar education and experience⁸. When compared to male professions with similar education and training requirements, the wage gap is even more staggering, and shows how our society's devaluation of labour related to educating and caring for young children is deeply gendered.⁹

Care work is predominantly done by women, particularly Black, newcomer/immigrant, migrant, and racialized women. In Canada, women make up over 90% of nurses, personal support workers, child care workers, disability services workers. On the frontline of the pandemic, women are working in low-wage, precarious care positions at high risk of infection—jobs where intersecting inequalities and gender-biased public policy have concentrated racialized, Black, migrant, and undocumented women. Women who are least likely to have the financial means to weather weeks or months of unemployment have taken the greatest hit in terms of job losses and reduced working hours, further setting back gender equality gains. Access to quality, affordable childcare is a huge step forward, but there is much more to be done to re-imagine an economy that is safe and empowering for women.

While women's employment rate has now increased back to pre-pandemic levels, but it is there are still major divides in the labour market. Care is skilled work that requires ongoing skills development, appropriate compensation, and adequate supports. Developing a care labour force strategy based on appropriate valuing of the skill, effort, responsibility, and working conditions and support for equitable, decent conditions is a strong policy solution that will work towards ending the devaluing of gendered and racialized work. This includes establishing robust labour force market information for care work like that provided for other sectors and scaling up education and training for care workers that recognizes the financial family and employment realities of workers in the sector.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) (2017). Investing in the Care Economy: Simulating employment effects by gender in countries in emerging economies.

⁶ Laura Addati, Umberto Cattaneo and Emanuela Pozzan (2022). Care at work: Investing in care leave and services for a more gender equal world of work. Geneva: International Labour Office, 2022

⁷ Pat Armstrong, Marjorie Griffin Cohen, Laurell Ritchie, Armine Yalnizyan, Leah Vosko. (2021). A new vision for the role of care in Canada. Retrieved April 2, 2022, from Rabble.

⁸ Atkinson Foundation (2022). Early Childhood Education Report. Retrieved 5 April 2022, from: <https://ecereport.ca/en/resources/charts-graphs/workforce-report/ece-salaries-compared-other-female/>

⁹ E. Akbari, K. McGuiag (2022). What Ontario parents really need to know about the new early learning and child care agreement. Retrieved 8 April 2022, from: <https://theconversation.com/what-ontario-parents-really-need-to-know-about-the-new-early-learning-and-child-care-agreement-180239>



- 3. Establish national standards for long-term care, including standards for fair pay, access to training and improved working conditions for long-term care workers. Improve access to and the quality of home-based and community-based healthcare and social supports for those in need (such as seniors and people with disabilities), upholding the principles of relational care, non-profit delivery, effective coordination across systems and transparency/ accountability.**

There are still major gaps in the accessibility, affordability, and quality in care to those who need it the most, including the elderly and people living with disabilities. The conditions in long-term care (LTC) homes in Canada was particularly dire, with 20,000 people reported dying in residential care since March 2020 due to COVID related conditions.¹⁰ COVID-19 also exposed the poor wages, job security and working conditions of care workers – especially care workers and personal support workers employed in Long Term Care homes.

Guaranteeing access to safe, high-quality care in long-term care (LTC) homes has not been addressed with the urgency needed. Encouragingly, the federal government announced close to \$3 billion for seniors and LTC care improvements in Budget 2021 to be rolled out in 2022-23 and spent over five years to help ensure provinces and territories provide a high standard of care in LTC homes.¹¹ In addition, provincial LTC taskforces have been established, and there are early movements to establish national standards for LTC to promote quality care.¹² It is unclear if any of the provincial taskforce recommendations have been taken up, given the lack of timelines and public information about LTC reforms and change. However, further measures to address the major gaps in LTC workforce conditions (low wages, high turnover rates, and burnout) have not been substantially addressed in federal legislation and has been absent in Budget 2022. Extensive research shows that primarily for-profit and privatized systems of LTC deliver inferior care across a variety of measures, and advocates have argued creating accessible and high-quality supports for vulnerable seniors and people with disabilities begins with getting profit out of care.¹³ To ensure the best care, protection for LTC workers needs to be prioritized. This includes requiring proper staffing and health and safety protections for workers; and permanently raising wages and benefits for long-term care workers to match the value of the work.

Major steps need to be taken to reform the LTC system, which includes shifting towards a model that meets the need for elderly populations and people with disabilities who prefer access to long-term care services outside of institutions. There are long wait times for admission to LTC institutions, and many who receive care at home report having unmet needs. As a result, family and friends often have to fill

¹⁰N. Loreto. Deaths in Residential Care in Canada by facility. Retrieved 2 March 2022, from

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1M_RzojK0vwF9nAozl7aoyLpPU8EA1JEqO6rq0g1iebU/edit#gid=0

¹¹J. Silver. (2021, April 19). Budget promises more than \$3B for seniors and long-term-care improvements. iPolitics. Retrieved 1 March 2022, from <https://ipolitics.ca/2021/04/19/budgetpromises-more-than-3b-for-seniors-and-long-term-care-improvements/>

¹² Canadian Standards Association and Health Standards Association. (2022, February 11). CSA Group and HSO Release New National Long-Term Care Standards for Public Review. Retrieved 1 March 2022, from <https://www.csagroup.org/news/csa-group-and-hso-release-new-national-long-term-carestandards-for-public-review/> 15 C. Taylor. (2020). Submission to O

¹³ C. Taylor. (2020). Submission to Ontario's Long-Term Care COVID-19 Commission. Retrieved 1 March 2022, from <https://theonn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/ONN-Submission-toLong-Term-Care-Commission-Nov-4-2020.pdf>

the gaps, and many wear themselves out trying to balance caregiving tasks with work and other family responsibilities. In a recent IRPP study¹⁴, research demonstrates that the challenge facing Canada's policy-makers is to not only adequately meet the growing needs for LTC services, but also to ensure that those services are delivered where people want to receive them, most often at home. Of course, governments have to improve the quality and safety of care in LTC homes for those who require institutional care. However, to avoid unnecessary or unwanted admissions to those institutions, they must also increase funding for formal home care and improve supports for informal caregivers.

4. Work with the provinces and territories to uphold the labour rights of caregivers and domestic workers, including living wages, and ratify the International Labour Organization Convention 189 on the protection of domestic workers

Protecting the rights of care workers is a key issue to be addressed in building a care economy, even more so given the impacts of COVID-19. There are approximately 25,000 migrant care workers in Canada today, almost all of whom live in employer homes.¹⁵ During the pandemic, migrant care workers, the overwhelming majority of whom are racialized women, were cut off from social and personal support networks, unable to even send remittances home to families abroad in need. Additionally, close to 1 in 3 care workers lost their job, either temporarily or permanently, because of COVID-19. Even if workers were not living in an employer-provided home, few income supports were available to ensure their basic needs were met. One in three migrant care workers that lost work reported ongoing problems in obtaining emergency income support, such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit and Employment Insurance.¹⁶ Budget 2022 recognizes the major gap that Temporary Foreign Workers (TFW) face by taking jobs in precarious sectors that Canadians are unavailable or unwilling to take, including agriculture and fish and other food processing – and also care giving roles. However, most of the funding allocated in Budget 2022 addresses the regulatory barriers employers in these industries face and fails to recognize the right to decent work and access to citizenship and social protection for the workers. It is critical to establish immigration pathways for care workers, granting permanent residence status to all migrant care workers who are currently in Canada (including migrant care workers who have become undocumented) and those arriving in Canada in the future. Migrant workers form a critical segment of the care sector and must be included in discussions that advance a sustainable care economy. Considering domestic workers are at highest risk of exploitation, the government should work with the provinces and territories to ratify the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 189 on the protection of domestic workers. The Convention protects the rights of domestic workers by ensuring decent work conditions, such as rest time, minimum wage, protective measures against violence, and choice with regard to housing and leave time.

¹⁴ IRPP. (2021). Assessing Cash-for-Care Benefits to Support Aging at Home in Canada. Retrieved March 30 2022, from:

<https://irpp.org/research-studies/assessing-cash-for-care-benefits-to-support-aging-at-home-in-canada/>

¹⁵ Migrant Rights Network. (2020). *Behind Closed Doors: Exposing Migrant Care Worker Exploitation During COVID-19*. Retrieved January 15 2021, from <https://migrantrights.ca/behindcloseddoors/>.

¹⁶ Ibid