



# A Feminist Economic Recovery Plan for Canada:

MAKING THE ECONOMY WORK FOR EVERYONE



**YWCA**  
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## LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors from YWCA Canada and the Institute for Gender and the Economy at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management would like to express their gratitude and respect for the privilege to work and live on the traditional territory of Indigenous Nations. Specifically, our offices are located in Tkaronto. This area has been taken care of by the Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Huron-Wendat, and the Métis for millennia. We wish to acknowledge the current treaty holders, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. This territory is the subject of the Dish with One Spoon Wam-pum Belt Covenant.

Both YWCA Canada and the University of Toronto are legacy institutions that have benefited from colonial policy. As guests on this land, we reflected on the impact of colonization on our work while developing this report. Colonization has exacerbated the impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit peoples. The authors cannot talk about economic recovery and re-imagining an inclusive society without noting that Canada's economic prosperity is rooted in the appropriation and theft of Indigenous land and resources.<sup>1</sup> We cannot talk about protecting against COVID-19 if reserves do not have access to clean drinking water. Colonization continues to disrupt Indigenous livelihoods and increases vulnerability to COVID-19 due to structural poverty, overcrowded housing, poor sanitation and lack of equitable access to culturally safe health-care.

Poet Lee Maracle, OC and Senator Murray Sinclair have spoken of the resilience of Indigenous peoples thriving despite 15,000 years of floods, colonization, and genocide.<sup>2</sup> It is important to note the many documented instances where the Canadian government deliberately withheld medical treatment and contributed to flu and tuberculosis in residential schools, day schools and Indian hospitals.

In 2020, our objective is to support policies which enable the decolonization and Indigenizing of COVID-19 recovery efforts.

## ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR GENDER AND THE ECONOMY (GATE)

The Institute for Gender and the Economy (GATE) at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management promotes an understanding of gender inequalities and how they can be remedied—by people of all genders—in the world of business and, more broadly, in the economy.

At GATE, we are changing the conversation on gender equality by: using rigorous research to investigate the hidden mechanisms that propagate gender equality; funding, translating, and disseminating innovative, academic research; and engaging executives, policy makers, and students to create new solutions for achieving equality, advancing careers, and creating economic prosperity.

[www.gendereconomy.org](http://www.gendereconomy.org)

## ABOUT YWCA CANADA

YWCA Canada is a leading voice for women, girls, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse people.<sup>3</sup> For 150 years, we've been at the forefront of a movement: to fight gender-based violence, build affordable housing and advocate for workplace equity. We work to advance gender equity by responding to urgent needs in communities, through national advocacy and grassroots initiatives.

Local YWCAs invest over \$258 million annually to support over 330,000 individuals across the nation. Today, we engage young leaders, diverse communities, and corporate partners to achieve our vision of a safe and equitable Canada for all.

[www.ywcacanada.ca](http://www.ywcacanada.ca)

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## Foreword

The COVID-19 pandemic has had enormous impacts in Canada and around the world. Globally, hundreds of thousands of people have tragically lost their lives to the illness since the year began.<sup>4</sup> The pandemic has also had powerful economic consequences and securing the future of Canada's economy is now top of mind for Canadian residents—whether they have lost their job, shuttered their business or are serving as frontline workers in essential services.

2020 is the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the most comprehensive set of globally agreed-upon recommendations to advance gender equality.<sup>5</sup> What might have been the moment to reflect on how far we have come as an international community may become the year that the gains to advance gender equality over the last few decades unravel. Without attention to inequity in post-pandemic recovery, a potential decline in our achievements is a real threat, given the gendered economic, health and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic across all aspects of society.

A paradigm shift is afoot. A broader range of people across Canada are now seeing the importance of feminized and racialized labour for our health and well-being—where women, especially women of colour and recent immigrants, are leading the response to a major health crisis and preventing further economic and social fallout. However, there was much that was not working before COVID-19. It took a pandemic for the country to see what was already broken. We cannot ignore the historical context that has created the unstable foundation for the harms we are seeing play out in this current crisis.

In the past few decades, Canada has made major strides towards a more gender-inclusive workforce—with cis women, trans women, non-binary, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse people gaining greater access to employment and advancement. But systemic barriers still exist—and the first phase of the pandemic's economic downturn has shown that gender inequities are influencing who is bearing the brunt of the pandemic's effects.

What lies before us is an opportunity to reimagine our future—a future that disrupts the thinking about who counts in our economy. The pandemic has revealed who is truly essential and the degree to which the caring economy, both paid and unpaid, underpins our entire economic system.<sup>6</sup> After all, our Canadian public health care system materialized from the Great Depression and World Wars.<sup>7</sup> Advocates for human rights and social justice recognized as did the broader public that building a strong safety net protects us all.

As Canada rebuilds, we can realign the economy around equity for all Canadians. The proposals in our report—A Feminist Economic Recovery Plan for Canada: Making the Economy Work for Everyone—offer an intersectional perspective on how we can recover from this crisis and weather difficult times in the future, while ensuring the needs of all people in Canada are considered in the formation of policy.

YWCA Canada and the University of Toronto's Institute for Gender and the Economy (GATE) offer this joint assessment to highlight the important principles that all levels of government should consider as they develop and implement policies to spur post-pandemic recovery.

This perspective is grounded in our work as a provider of gender-responsive programs and services in the field for 150 years and as a leading research institute developing scholarly insights at the intersection of gender and the economy, respectively.

This plan has been shaped and strengthened by past generations of feminist thinking, research, leadership and organizing as well as contemporary organizations and social movements. We work in solidarity with and are indebted to the transformational work of our peers and supporters.

We have been enriched by pan-Canadian perspectives to inform our work, especially the timely work of YWCA Member Associations across the country and many others who have been putting forward their own visions of a feminist economic recovery tailored to their local context.

To truly create an economy that works for everyone, actions that resist, counteract and dismantle sexism, anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous colonial racism, anti-Semitism, bigotry, biphobia, colonialism, queerphobia, homophobia, Islamophobia, misogyny, patriarchy, transphobia, xenophobia, and hate and discrimination in all its forms will be essential.

As organizations that strive to be anti-racist, anti-oppressive, feminist and progressive, we cannot ignore and must explicitly name that the foundations of this nation and the resultant economy were built on the backs of Indigenous (First Nations, Métis and Inuit), Black, and racialized communities; newcomer, immigrant, refugee and non-status workers; LGBTQ+ communities; people with disabilities; women, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse people and many other communities that experience marginalization and discrimination.

The eight pillars put forward should not be considered as an exhaustive list but rather as a starting point for action. Several other organizations are putting forward their own plans and policies to build back better. We recognize that we cannot cover all possible areas of recovery planning in this plan. As such, we have not focused on some important recovery concerns such as the environment and international policy, among other topics. We acknowledge the vital work that is being done on these topics by other organizations, specifically Indigenous-led organizations, and have listed recommended further reading in Appendix 2.<sup>8</sup> Our contributions should be viewed as complementary, additive and mutually reinforcing to those many ongoing efforts within Canada and around the world.

However, we see these eight steps as non-negotiable if Canada hopes to generate future prosperity. An unwavering focus on creating a more inclusive economy is essential not only to aid the recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, but to ensure well-being for decades to come. Societies will be increasingly challenged by the cascading impacts of a phenomenon that will transform large economies in the world: population aging. Simply put, we need to build back better by tackling systemic inequalities. Inclusion must extend to both inputs and outcomes. Inclusion must be the metric when asking for contributions or distributing benefits to achieve societal goals.<sup>9</sup>

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## Introduction

# The Gendered Impacts of COVID-19

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to unfold, the devastating toll on lives and economic well-being is already starkly apparent. In Canada, the COVID-19 crisis has had disproportionate economic, health and social impacts on cis and trans women, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse people, particularly those who are low-income, people with disabilities, are members of the LGBTQ+ communities, belong to Indigenous, Black, or racialized communities or are newcomers, refugees, immigrants and migrants.

Nationally, as of July 2020, around 56% of the cases<sup>10</sup> and 54% of the deaths<sup>11</sup> from COVID-19 have been experienced by women. This is in part because women are on the frontlines of the pandemic. In Canada, 81% of the health care and social assistance workforce is made up of women.<sup>12</sup> Fifty-six percent of women workers are concentrated in occupations known as the 5Cs: caring, cashiering, catering, cleaning and clerical functions, many of which are deemed essential occupations.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, only 17% of men workers are employed in these jobs.<sup>14</sup> Such jobs for the large part cannot be done remotely; while higher-income workers in sectors such as finance or professional services are able to work from home more safely.<sup>15</sup>

The jobs that keep our society functioning tend to be done by women, yet women are rarely prioritized in discussions about health and safety or economic well-being. Given the current lack of disaggregated data, we do not know the racial makeup of the labour market in its full complexity. However, we clearly see there is an overrepresentation of Black, Indigenous and racialized women, including recent immigrants, in essential occupations. A 2010 survey of personal support workers in Ontario found that racialized workers made up 42% of the personal support worker labour force, double the rate of racialized communities in Ontario at 23%.<sup>16</sup>

At the same time as women are performing frontline work, the impending pandemic-fueled recession is impacting women the most, such that economist Armine Yalnizyan has referred to it as a 'she-cession,' the first in history.<sup>17</sup> Service sectors such as hospitality and retail have been greatly affected by the pandemic, and women are concentrated in these jobs.

In March 2020, 63% of job losses were experienced by women, and in May 2020, as the economy started to open up, jobs returned faster for men (2.4% increase) than for women (1.1% increase).<sup>18,19</sup> There is a data gap here as we do not know the distinct experiences of trans women and cis women within this statistic.

The pandemic has also called our attention to the historic devaluation of caregiving. Unpaid caregivers, who tend to be women, are bearing increased burdens due to school closures and shuttered care and recreational services. Before the pandemic, women already took on more of the household duties and care of children and elders than men.<sup>20</sup> This trend has continued into the pandemic, with women often bearing the triple duty of homeschooling, care responsibilities, and doing paid work.<sup>21</sup> The economy faces the possibility of an unnecessarily slow recovery if women who have lost their jobs, or have been forced to leave them due to caregiving duties, cannot return to paid work because of the lack of access to safe, affordable, and high-quality care.

There has also been a rise in gender-based violence, which the United Nations has referred to as the 'shadow pandemic', which has been in part exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>22</sup> While the federal government has earmarked \$50 million to funding shelters and sexual assault centers supporting survivors of domestic violence, it has not yet stemmed the tide of violence.<sup>23</sup> Canada's Minister for Women and Gender Equality, Maryam Monsef, has reported an increase of 20% to 30% in domestic violence rates across the country.<sup>24</sup> Police forces and service providers are also reporting an increase in domestic violence reports, some by as much as 62%.<sup>25,26</sup>

In this document, we will aim to provide intersectional data to deepen the gendered information we have access to. Where possible, we will aim to note gaps in data.<sup>27</sup> Taking an intersectional lens on these impacts is crucial: class, race, immigration status, and many other social identities play an important role in these gendered impacts of COVID-19. For instance, one commonality among women workers who are working on the frontlines and those who have lost their service jobs is that both groups tend to work in sectors with relatively lower wages and salaries.<sup>28</sup> Further, it is racialized women who are overrepresented in these roles.<sup>29,30</sup> Indigenous and Black communities in particular have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic due to the effects of systemic racism, such as employment inequity, high rates of poverty, and lack of access to basic needs such as housing and clean water.<sup>31,32</sup>

## The Need for a Feminist Economic Recovery Plan

Prior economic downturns have primarily impacted goods-producing industrial sectors which are male-dominated, resulting in ‘he-cessions,’ where men were more likely to be laid off. During those periods, women tended to serve as ‘stabilizers’ and took up work in the more resilient care economy when their partners lost jobs.<sup>33</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic triggered a new type of recession—one that impacts women workers more than men. We need a recovery plan to address the economic fallout that includes non-traditional interventions, prioritizes and invests in new and underutilized aspects of the economy and changes the way we measure the returns on public spending success. Although enacting austerity measures may be tempting given the deficits that have already accrued, this is a crucial moment for governments to undertake spending that will support populations that have been impacted the most by the COVID-19 pandemic. This, in turn, will stimulate the economy and improve society for the long term.

Civil society organizations such as charities and non-profits have had to do more with less. Government support is even more important considering these organizations have been dealing with increased demand for their services and programs, with limited resources.<sup>34</sup> This sector also primarily employs women, with over 70% of workers identifying as women.<sup>35</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic has slashed revenue for these organizations due to cancellation of fundraising events and has increased operating costs due to increased need and requirements for personal protective equipment.

By addressing the gendered impacts of COVID-19, we can build Canada’s economy back better. Many people long to ‘get back to normal,’ but the pandemic has made clear that the old ‘normal’ was not good for everyone. There are systemic barriers and structures that have made some groups more vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic than others, due to structural factors such as systemic racism, income inequality and inequitable distribution of power, wealth and resources. We need to transform what we deem ‘normal’ and chart a new path forward that prioritizes communities facing discrimination and inequity, such as cis and trans women, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse people.

A recent United Nations policy brief examining the gendered impacts of COVID-19 offered principles for advancing gender equality during these difficult times such as: (a) ensuring women’s equal participation in all COVID-19 response planning and decision making; (b) driving transformative change for equality by addressing the care economy, paid and unpaid; and (c) targeting women and girls to address the socio-economic impact of COVID-19.<sup>36</sup>

In the Canadian context, we build from these principles to develop eight pillars for a Feminist Economic Recovery Plan. These eight pillars provide a starting point for action and commitment. Following this section, we discuss each of these pillars along with specific policy recommendations, which are summarized in Appendix 1.

This document is intended to highlight important areas for policymakers at all levels of government as they consider COVID-19 recovery measures. These recommendations may apply to various government bodies and may require intergovernmental collaboration. We hope that they serve as inspirations for real change in the Canadian economy.

# 1. Intersectionality: Understanding Power

Federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments have speedily implemented policy measures to address the economic, health and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there has been limited gender-based analysis of these measures and little to no intersectional analysis, either in the design of the policies or in understanding their impacts.

In Canada, gender-based analysis is mandated for all federal budget measures. The analytical framework is called GBA+: gender-based analysis, with the '+' representing the various intersecting identities that should be considered. Although there were promising actions taken before the pandemic—such as appointing a gender-balanced cabinet and the passage of the Canadian Gender Budgeting Act—the lack of gender-based as well as intersectional analysis in shaping post-pandemic recovery policies thus far is deeply concerning.

Intersectionality, developed in 1989 by Black feminist and professor Kimberlé Crenshaw, is an analytic framework that describes how aspects of one's identity, such as race, gender, class and other factors intersect to compound marginalization and oppression or privilege.<sup>37</sup> It is necessary to design all of our post-pandemic recovery measures using this lens, and to understand how policies work for people across many different social locations, including but not limited to race, age, gender identity, gender expression, disability, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and immigration status.

One of the most significant actions the government can take now is to mandate the collection of disaggregated data on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic along these multiple dimensions of social identities.<sup>38</sup> This data would allow policymakers to assess whether post-pandemic economic recovery policies are having intended effects, or if they are widening inequities. They could also allow policymakers to pivot programs and policies to better reduce inequities. For instance, because Canada has not tracked COVID-19 statistics by race, its impacts on Indigenous, Black, and other marginalized communities cannot be fully ascertained. As scholar Akua Benjamin notes in her 2002 text, 'insidious silence, or shunning, the absence and negation of racialized groups have become normative practices [of racism] within institutions.'<sup>39</sup> Policy advocates and researchers have called for the development of disaggregated data for many decades, and this pandemic provides the policy window to finally realize this call to action.<sup>40</sup>

In the data that has been released thus far on COVID-19, there has not been a full recognition of the unique vulnerabilities and contexts experienced by Indigenous communities. Researcher Courtney Skye has elaborated that, "[The] lived realities of First Nations are not captured and represented fairly. Clearly, First Nations have less access to health care, reporting, transparency. It's frustration because you want to see people treated fairly, and considered equally."<sup>41</sup>

Better data collection and analysis will be essential not just for COVID-19 recovery but for longer-term adaptability to economic trends such as automation to which Black, Indigenous, and racialized women, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse people are more vulnerable. For example, 33.8% of Indigenous workers across Canada are working in sectors that face a higher risk of automation.<sup>42</sup>

Note that the collection of race-based data is fraught because of histories of exploitation and its use in advancing discriminatory policies in many countries around the world. Rightfully, many communities facing marginalization are wary because of historical harm done to them through surveillance. As such, it is crucial that data collection be done in an ethical and sensitive way. It is especially important to implement guidelines around who has access to and owns data. The First Nations Principles of OCAP (Ownership, Control, Access and Production) provide standards for how data collection and research can be done ethically.<sup>43</sup>

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## Policy Recommendations

1.1 Gather disaggregated, intersectional data at the federal, provincial and municipal level on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.2 Ensure truly intersectional gender analysis (GBA+) on all forthcoming pandemic policies not only for understanding differential impacts, but also for designing policies.

1.3 Develop a COVID-19 post-pandemic gender results framework dashboard and report annually on how the Government of Canada is advancing gender equity.

## 2. Addressing Root Causes of Systemic Racism

Current events have shown very clearly how the historic and ongoing processes and generational impacts of colonization and the transatlantic slave trade continue to produce economic, political and social inequality in Canada. Many different racialized communities have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, but it is important to focus on the needs of Indigenous and Black communities facing disproportionate impacts from COVID-19 due to historic and current systemic racism. To have an inclusive and healthy economy, all forms of anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism must be rooted out from all aspects of society, from the criminal justice system to education to health care. That means centering the voices and recommendations developed and driven by Indigenous and Black communities.

Anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism has long affected the economic opportunities of Indigenous and Black communities. This has resulted in outcomes such as lower employment rates, lower savings and reduced incomes on average.<sup>44,45</sup> For example, research estimated that occupational concentration in certain sectors and wage discrimination led to CAD \$1.5 billion in losses for Black workers in the Canadian workforce in 2006.<sup>46</sup> A study from Statistics Canada found that in 2014, 13% of Black Canadians compared to 6% of non-Black Canadians experienced discrimination over the course of a job search process or on the job.<sup>47</sup>

Indigenous and Black women and gender-diverse people face intersecting marginalization due to gender inequity: for instance, Indigenous women working full-time, all year round earn an average of 35% less than Indigenous men.<sup>48</sup> A discussion of an economy without this explicit acknowledgement would be incomplete and inaccurate. More than platitudes, concrete action must be taken to address the historical and ongoing instances of inequities and discrimination. As Dr. Cindy Blackstock and Isadore Day note, only \$305 million or less than one percent of the federal government's COVID-19 funding went to Indigenous communities.<sup>49</sup>

This amount is insufficient to address the scale of concerns highlighted. Systemic changes are needed and the policy recommendations below point towards meaningful actions that can be taken. Their implementation must be supported by targeted funding to Indigenous-led women's organizations to support gender-based programming and economic development.

Many are now calling systemic racism against Indigenous and Black communities a public health crisis that has laid the groundwork for COVID-19's devastating impact.<sup>50</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted these communities because of their over-representation in essential occupations in the care sector, a lack of culturally-responsive health care services, and systemically racist health care systems that devalue and deprioritize their needs.<sup>51</sup> Racism makes it likely that Indigenous and Black communities have limited access to protections such as adequate and safe housing, equitable working conditions, and paid sick leave, which are all social determinants of health. Because of these systemic factors, Indigenous communities may be more vulnerable to illness due to underlying health conditions such as the increased likelihood of diabetes.<sup>52</sup> Many Indigenous communities also do not have access to clean water, and live in overcrowded conditions.<sup>53</sup>

While race-based data on COVID-19 has yet to be released in Canada, recent analysis suggests that in Toronto, there is an association between coronavirus rates and neighbourhoods with large Black populations, indicating systemic racism experienced by Black communities is correlated with poorer health outcomes related to COVID-19.<sup>54</sup> Studies have also shown that Canada is underestimating the number of Indigenous people with COVID-19, as a result of lack of reliable data collection and patchwork public services for Indigenous communities.<sup>55</sup>

Indigenous and Black communities have been calling for policymakers to address these concerns, and to ensure health and wellbeing and address employment disparities.<sup>56</sup> This is of foremost importance in the post-pandemic recovery period.

As Mi'kmaq lawyer Dr. Pamela Palmater notes, "Canada's pandemic response must include a gendered lens that not only develops emergency measures for Indigenous peoples developed in partnership with Indigenous governments, but it must include a plan to address the specific vulnerabilities of Indigenous women and girls, done in partnership with Indigenous women."<sup>57</sup>

There have been many carefully studied recommendations developed by Black and Indigenous communities to address these systemic inequities. We echo the call for their implementation, as the need for them is only greater in the midst of the pandemic. We take guidance from the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Calls for Justice in the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Report, the Parliamentary Black Caucus<sup>58</sup>, the Black Health Alliance, and the City of Toronto's Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism, and urge the prioritization of recommendations relating to disaggregated data, decent work, economic security, ensuring access to health services, addressing police brutality, and representative leadership. We also emphasize the importance of Indigenous-led work on the environment and the ways in which environmental concerns intersect with employment, health, and many other types of inequity.<sup>59</sup>

The United Nations is currently marking the International Decade for People of African Descent, which spans from the years 2015 to 2024. While there has been some recognition in Canada of this significant milestone, substantial investments in change have not followed.<sup>60</sup> In the 2018 Budget, the Federal government made a commitment of \$19 million over 5 years for Black mental health programming services. Black communities are calling for more tangible actions and robust investments, such as making marked changes in the health care system and in the economy as a whole to better address the needs of Black communities.



**“As Mi’kmaq lawyer Dr. Pamela Palmater notes, ‘Canada’s pandemic response must include a gendered lens that not only develops emergency measures for Indigenous peoples developed in partnership with Indigenous governments, but it must include a plan to address the specific vulnerabilities of Indigenous women and girls, done in partnership with Indigenous women.’”**

## Policy Recommendations

2.1 Implement the Calls to Action in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission<sup>61</sup> and the Calls for Justice in the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry Report, especially:<sup>62</sup> (a) Ensure that Indigenous peoples and especially women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people, have equitable access to jobs, training, and education opportunities, and that they gain long-term sustainable benefits from economic development projects. Programs for employment must be available within all Indigenous communities, and (b) Provide adequate, stable, equitable, and ongoing funding for Indigenous-centered and community-based health and wellness services that are accessible and culturally appropriate, and meet the health and wellness needs of Indigenous communities, especially women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people.

2.2 Implement recommendations to remediate anti-Black racism such as those from (a) the City of Toronto's Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism,<sup>63</sup> (b) the 2020 Black Health Alliance Black Experiences in Health Care report<sup>64</sup>, and (c) the Parliamentary Black Caucus.<sup>65</sup>

### 3. Care Work is Essential Work



Supporting social infrastructure for the care economy is vital for an equitable economic recovery. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed how important care work is to society, yet childcare and eldercare services have not been adequately prioritized by governments. Strengthening public investments in care will facilitate women to return to the paid work they may have had to leave during the pandemic due to heavy caregiving burdens that men have been less likely to take on; add millions of jobs to the economy, particularly for women; support children's development; and provide significant returns to the economy. Without support for care services, a slowed economic recovery is inevitable.

Care work—both unpaid and paid—is extraordinarily gendered. Prior to the pandemic, women in Canada were already doing 1.5 more hours of unpaid domestic work per day, on average, less than men. In rural communities and lower-income countries, women spend about five times more hours on this than men. Globally, women's unpaid care work amounts to an estimated \$10.8 trillion USD.<sup>66</sup>

Since the pandemic has closed schools, daycare centres, and recreational programs, women continue to take on the majority of care work and domestic burdens. A recent study demonstrates that although 4 in 10 Canadians have reported an increase in hours spent on domestic work during the pandemic, women are more likely than men to report spending their largest share of time preparing meals and cleaning. Men reported spending the bulk of their time in paid work, leisure, and household management. Seventy-one percent of women also reported experiencing challenges such as anxiety, stress or depression due to an increase in house and care work, compared to 65% of men. It is notable that Indigenous and Black respondents were more likely than White respondents to report experiencing challenges due to these increased care burdens, including needing to give up looking for paid work.<sup>67</sup>

Considering that frontline and essential workers tend to be women, many women are facing the triple burden of extra care work at home, home schooling and risky paid work.<sup>68</sup> Some who face these triple burdens are finding that they have to leave paid work in order to handle care responsibilities. A Canadian poll found that racialized women were twice as likely as white women to stop working because of care responsibilities.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, women who are now unemployed due to job cuts in their sectors may not be able to return to paid work in the near future, as a result of caregiving duties. Unless the care economy is better supported, a generation of women may exit the labour force entirely, reducing household spending and deepening the recession.<sup>70</sup>

The underfunding of the care economy has also meant that paid care workers, such as domestic workers and personal support workers, are undervalued and in precarious circumstances, despite being essential to Canadians' survival and well-being. For example, as of May 2020, over 80% of COVID-19 deaths in Canada had occurred in elder care homes, in part due to a lack of proper funding and support.<sup>71</sup> Workers in these homes are underpaid and often work in several different homes or locations in order to make a livable wage, putting them and the people for whom they care for at higher risk of illness.<sup>72,73</sup>

We have seen this confluence of vulnerabilities and risk factors around working conditions for care workers in Quebec; where 60% of workers in long-term care homes only work part-time, a majority of them women.<sup>74</sup> In Montreal, one of the municipalities hardest hit by COVID-19, 20% of infections are experienced by the health care workers.<sup>75</sup> Workers tend to live in lower-income and more racialized communities in Montreal, areas which have also been disproportionately affected by COVID-19.<sup>76,77</sup>

**“Globally, women’s unpaid care work amounts to an estimated \$10.8 trillion USD.”**

We also see that risks are correlated to whether long-term care homes are for-profit or not. Data show that long-term care residents in for-profit homes are 60% more likely to contract COVID-19 as well as 45% more likely to die from the disease compared to someone living in a non-profit long-term care home.<sup>78</sup> The devaluation of care work also contributes to systemic elder abuse, as exposed by a recent Canadian military report.<sup>79</sup>

Importantly, such paid care work tends to be done by Black, racialized and immigrant women.<sup>80</sup> The pandemic has revealed the necessity of migrant workers to the care economy and to the economy more broadly, but these workers have largely been excluded from the pandemic response. Many migrant care workers face extreme vulnerability during this crisis, without access to healthcare or emergency benefits.<sup>81</sup> In Quebec, many essential workers in the care sector are disproportionately Black or racialized asylum seekers who are now working to stop the spread of COVID-19.<sup>82</sup>

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%. It would also reduce the number of families in poverty.<sup>83</sup> Other research has shown that investing in care services will result in direct returns for the government: for example, in 2008, each \$100 that was invested by the Quebec government in childcare returned \$104 to the provincial government and \$43 to the federal government.<sup>84</sup> An investment in care supports not only children and families, but also economic development overall.<sup>85</sup> The importance of investing in the social infrastructure of the care economy cannot be overstated.

**“The underfunding of the care economy has also meant that paid care workers, such as domestic workers and personal support workers, are undervalued and in precarious circumstances, despite being essential to Canadians’ survival and well-being.”**

## Policy Recommendations

3.1 Adopt the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) benchmark of allocating at least 1% of country GDP to early learning and childcare.

3.2 Create a National Child Care Secretariat to track financial allocations across the country and coordinate intergovernmental action, monitoring and evaluation.

3.3 Ensure that childcare is a key element of all economic recovery plans, including coordination between the reopening of schools and childcare centres with that of the broader economy.

3.4 Direct public funds of at least \$2.5 billion to existing regulated and licensed care services such as by providing increased wages for workers, investing in measures to keep workers safe and expanding the number of care spaces available, so that they can reopen and provide accessible, affordable and high quality care.

3.5 Consult organizations that support migrant worker caregivers in decision-making for pandemic recovery; and create an expedited path to permanent resident status for immigrant care workers so that they can access healthcare and worker protections on arrival.

3.6 Provide personal protective equipment to migrant workers, conduct rigorous inspections on their working conditions, and ensure they have access to income supports.

## 4. Investing in Good Jobs



The COVID-19 pandemic has uncovered the significant divide between people who have ‘good jobs’—those who have been able to maintain a secure income and remain healthy—and those who do not. An equitable recovery plan means prioritizing all people’s access to decent work and livable income.

Social identities such as gender, race, and class have mediated workers’ experiences during the pandemic. Because women workers are concentrated in low-paid jobs in retail and services industries, as well as in part-time or temporary work, they suffered disproportionately from job loss when the pandemic hit. Canadian women aged 25 to 54 experienced a decline in their employment rate that was twice that of men, and their employment is returning at a slower rate.<sup>86, 87</sup> It is not known when or how these sectors will recover. Further, 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.<sup>88</sup> During the pandemic, many of these workers faced the choice of either putting their health and their family’s health at risk, or losing their financial security.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, racialized communities had high rates of poverty and this has been amplified by the current crisis.<sup>89</sup> A recent Statistics Canada survey done to understand the economic impacts of COVID-19 on racialized residents of Canada found that racialized communities faced higher rates of job loss and hours reduction compared to White respondents.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, racialized communities reported higher rates of strong or moderate financial impact of COVID-19. The rate was particularly higher for Arabs, West Asians and Filipinos (42% or higher), compared to 23.2% for White respondents.

Before the pandemic, trans people faced extensive barriers to accessing employment safe from harassment. Among a survey of trans-identified Ontarians, 13% have been fired and 18% were turned down for a job because they were trans.<sup>91</sup>

This is despite the fact that 71% of trans people have at least some college or university education. Approximately 50% of trans people make \$15,000 per year or less.<sup>92</sup>

There have been some policies and practices developed to foster trans inclusive workplaces such as employee resource groups, platforms for matching trans employees with mentors, and protocols for assisting employees in transition. However, more needs to be done to truly realize a fully trans inclusive workplace.<sup>93</sup> With the COVID-19 pandemic, systemic barriers and negative outcomes against trans women in particular may deepen.

Other precarious workers have been highly impacted by the pandemic. Migrant workers such as those who provide vital work in agriculture or care sectors, often do not have permanent residency and thus do not have access to government benefits or to healthcare. They simultaneously face unsafe conditions such as crowded housing, wage theft, insufficient food, and a lack of health information.<sup>94, 95</sup> Gig economy workers, such as those working for rideshares and food delivery, are also unprotected. These workers have been hard hit by income loss, and many are ineligible for government benefits, depending on their earnings.<sup>96</sup> Other workers who have found challenges accessing income supports include multiple job holders, sex workers, temporary workers, migrant workers and people on social assistance.<sup>97</sup>

Furthermore, for several decades, there has been a recognition 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.<sup>98</sup> Many workers who have paid into the benefit may still struggle to meet the minimum threshold of hours required to be eligible for the program—420 hours to 700 hours, depending on the local unemployment rate.

Below, we outline policy recommendations that can start to address the large-scale intersectional gender inequities we see in the access to decent work and adequate working conditions. However, unless we interrogate the systems of oppression and discrimination that produce such inequitable economic conditions in the first place, we risk just addressing the symptoms instead of working on causes. That means taking measures to address ableism, patriarchy, homophobia, biphobia, queerphobia, White supremacy, systemic racism and all forms of structural discrimination and violence.

**“Canadian women aged 25 to 54 experienced a decline in their employment rate that was twice that of men, and their employment is returning at a slower rate.”**

## Policy Recommendations

4.1 Legislate at least 14 paid sick days and paid family leave for all workers, so that everyone—particularly those in frontline jobs—can protect their health and that of the rest of the population.

4.2 Pay for retraining and professional development across sectors for those who have experienced job loss through EI. For people who are not eligible for EI, create other pathways to financially support re-skilling and re-training, with greater incentives for workers in care-economy based sectors such as child care and elder care.

4.3 Lower the uniform national eligibility requirement of Employment Insurance to 360 hours and increase the benefit rate from 55% to 85% of earnings for low-income earners.

4.4 Legislate job protection for individuals with disabilities who are unable to fulfill job duties due to the risk of contracting COVID-19 as well as systemic barriers such as lack of access to accessible transportation.

## 5. Fighting the Shadow Pandemic

The pandemic has exacerbated instances of hate and violence for many communities. Freedom from hate and violence cannot be achieved without addressing systemic causes, which include colonization, patriarchy and racism in all its forms. A recovery plan must act to redress these issues in order to ensure the safety and rights of those who are most vulnerable. The psychological and physical impacts of hate and violence create trauma that lasts for generations, preventing an inclusive, healthy and thriving society and economy.<sup>99</sup> No economic recovery or reimagining can happen without tackling head on hate, discrimination and violence. Economic prosperity cannot thrive in a culture of hate.

Before the pandemic, hate and violence against cis and trans women, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse people was already a crisis.<sup>100</sup> During the pandemic, the crisis has become more pronounced. The United Nations is referring to the global rise in domestic violence as the ‘shadow pandemic.’<sup>101</sup> International data from countries such as China, France, Italy, Singapore, Spain and many others show increased reporting of domestic violence during COVID-19-related economic lockdowns, with increases ranging from 30% to 50% in some areas.<sup>102</sup> In Canada, service providers and police forces have also reported increases in domestic violence cases. A survey by Native Women’s Association of Canada found that one in five Indigenous women report they have been the subject of physical or psychological violence since the start of the pandemic in March.<sup>103</sup> Federal government officials are reporting a rise of 20% to 30% percent in domestic violence rates in regions across the country.<sup>104</sup>

The Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH) has reported that 20% of their shelters have seen an increase of service uptake.<sup>105</sup> However, capacity in shelters and housing services have not increased commensurately. Indeed, capacity is likely to have decreased due to physical distancing requirements.

During a pandemic, quarantine policies can produce traumatic situations, with many survivors having no choice but to self-isolate with an abusive partner. Abusers may increase their abusive behaviour during this time period. Behaviours may include further isolating survivors, monitoring their social media, withholding essential supplies such as hand sanitizers and masks, and threatening to kick them out of the home. Devastatingly, in Canada, there have been several murders of women at the hands of their men partners or family members during this pandemic and this femicide will continue unless concrete actions are taken to address gender-based violence in all its forms.<sup>106</sup>

In response, various countries have implemented initiatives to create pathways for reporting domestic violence and seeking assistance through discreet means, such as the creation of a hand signal to use in online videoconferencing<sup>107</sup> or safety services that can be engaged by visiting pharmacies. The Government of Canada has also provided \$50 million to support shelters and sexual assault centres supporting survivors of domestic violence, 20% of which went to Indigenous Services Canada to focus directly on the needs of the existing network of 46 emergency shelters on reserve and in Yukon.<sup>108</sup> Civil society groups have been calling for a National Action Plan to Address Gender-Based Violence in for years and now is the time to make it a reality.<sup>109</sup>

Hate and violence based on race have also accelerated during this crisis, particularly against East Asian and Chinese communities. This means that increasing support for anti-racism initiatives is necessary. The Vancouver Police Department reported an increase of 600% in hate crimes against Asian communities.<sup>110</sup> A recent survey of more than 500 Canadians of Chinese ethnicity demonstrated that 50% have been called names or insulted as a result of the pandemic, 43% have been threatened or intimidated, and 30% report being frequently exposed to racist messaging on social media.<sup>111</sup>

Other communities also endure hate crimes across the country. In 2018, data from Statistics Canada demonstrated that 16% of all hate crimes are against Black communities, when they represent only 3.5% of the population.<sup>112</sup> Notably, hate crimes against Indigenous and Muslim communities were more likely to be experienced by women when compared to hate crimes against other communities, so there is a marked gendered experience of anti-Indigenous racism and Islamophobia.<sup>113</sup> All hate, violence, and oppression against women, gender-diverse people, and Indigenous, Black, and racialized communities must be addressed in a COVID-19 recovery. Hate creates a culture of fear, anxiety and insecurity, leading many community members to withdraw from their regular activities including school, work, shopping, and exercise.<sup>114</sup>

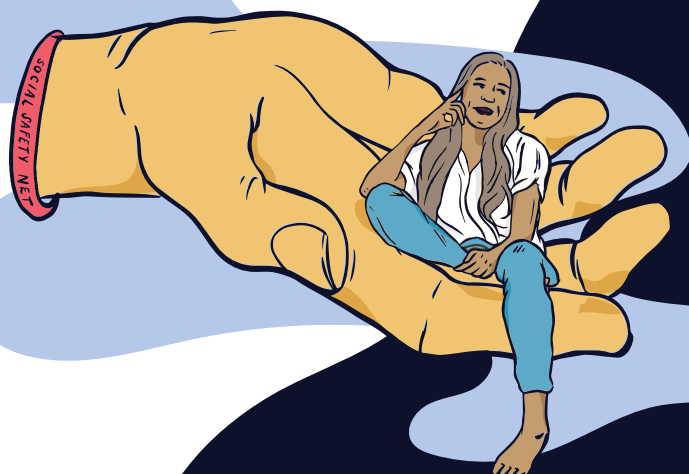
During this pandemic, several Black and Indigenous women have died during wellness checks by the police.<sup>115</sup> We cannot talk about the shadow pandemic without talking about the deaths of Chantel Moore<sup>116,117</sup> and Regis Korchinski-Paquet<sup>118</sup> and the insidious nature of anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism in Canada. In response, we have seen rallies across the country demanding change from Manitoba<sup>119</sup> to Nova Scotia<sup>120</sup> and beyond.<sup>121</sup> As noted in the Calls to Justice in the National Inquiry Report into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, we need systemic change within the policing structures of Canada, from the RCMP to local police forces.

The private sector has a role to play too. For example, Boston Pizza stopped its sponsorship of an Edmonton CFL team over their problematic team name.<sup>122</sup> Another example is how many companies have boycotted advertising on Facebook to protest hate speech.<sup>123</sup>

**“We cannot talk about the shadow pandemic without talking about the deaths of Chantel Moore, and Regis Korchinski-Paquet and the insidious nature of anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism in Canada.”**

## Policy Recommendations

5.1 Establish a National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence that addresses (a) violence against Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQIA people as recommended by the Inquiry Report into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls,<sup>124</sup> and, (b) all forms of racism and hate crimes.<sup>125 126</sup>



## 6. Bolstering Small Businesses



Many businesses, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), have been hard hit by lockdowns resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a crucial point considering that SMEs make up 99.8% of private businesses in Canada's economy.<sup>127</sup> Business owners from communities facing marginalization and discrimination—such as women, Black, Indigenous, and racialized people—must receive adequate support.

Women and other underrepresented groups may find it especially difficult to re-establish business during economic recovery. While only 16% of SMEs are owned by women, these businesses tend to be concentrated in retail and service sectors—sectors that have been most impacted by lockdowns.<sup>128</sup> A recent survey found that 88% of entrepreneurs from underrepresented groups (women, racialized people, people with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, immigrants, refugees, and LGBTQ2s+ people) have lost contracts, customers or clients during the pandemic.<sup>129</sup> In comparison, only 34% of all small businesses reported loss of contracts.

The survey also discovered that 53% of women entrepreneur respondents have experienced additional childcare burdens during the pandemic, compared to only 12% of men entrepreneurs. Women-led businesses are often in high-contact sectors, such as hair salons, which means they are likely to face a drop in revenue as we transition to a 'contactless' economy.<sup>130</sup>

These groups also continue to face the same barriers to starting and maintaining businesses that they did prior to the pandemic. For instance, women entrepreneurs in Canada receive just 4% of venture capital funding available, in part due to gender biases against women entrepreneurs and the types of businesses they start.<sup>131</sup> Barriers are exacerbated for women facing other marginalization, such as Black women.<sup>132</sup> Further, women make up 38% of self-employed entrepreneurs, who are often forgotten in discussions and policy solutions for small business.<sup>133</sup>

Despite these numerous barriers, data suggest that women-led businesses create more jobs than those owned by men, in part because they are situated in more labor-intensive sectors such as personal services, hospitality and retail.<sup>134, 135</sup> Other research by Statistics Canada shows that when women enter into majority men-owned enterprises as owners, revenue and numbers of employees increase.<sup>136</sup>

Crucial to Canada's economic recovery is ensuring that businesses remain viable as the economy begins to reopen. The government already undertook a nearly \$5-billion dollar investment to double the number of women-owned businesses by 2025, and in May 2020 committed \$15 million to women entrepreneurs in the Women Ecosystem Fund to assist with COVID-19 recovery.<sup>137</sup> Supporting women-owned businesses is not just a matter of financing, but also about creating demand for their products and services.

The continued commitment to support SMEs, with a focus on businesses belonging to those from marginalized communities will greatly contribute to equitable recovery across the country. This includes meaningfully consulting with Indigenous people as it relates to ensuring long-term sustainable benefits from economic development as noted in Call 92 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action.<sup>138</sup> One approach is to increase awareness of different business models such as co-operative enterprises which privilege voluntary and open membership; democratic member control and member economic participation. There is evidence that they are more resilient to economic downturns and assure jobs continue to stay in communities, even as generations of business founders retire.<sup>139</sup>

**“Women entrepreneurs in Canada receive just 4% of venture capital funding available, in part due to gender biases against women entrepreneurs and the types of businesses they start. Barriers are exacerbated for women facing other marginalization, such as Black women.”**

### Policy Recommendations

6.1 Offer targeted support to business owners from underrepresented groups—not only women but also racialized people, persons with disabilities, Indigenous people, and immigrants—in the form of emergency funding, as well as skills training and mentorship.

6.2 Create minimum set-asides in public procurement spending (e.g., 15%) towards businesses led by women, racialized people, and other equity-seeking groups.

6.3 Direct funding to businesses in women-majority sectors, as women-led businesses tend to be in hard hit sectors such as caregiving and social enterprises.

6.4 Demonstrate meaningful consultation with Indigenous communities as it relates to long-term sustainable benefits from economic development projects.

6.5 Increase awareness of co-operative business models and create tools to support businesses that want to convert to this model including empowering the Business Development Bank of Canada to support co-operative conversions.

## 7. Strengthening Infrastructure for Recovery

As we move from emergency response to recovery, it is important to think about how to build infrastructure back better.

First and foremost, there must be investment in mitigating social determinants of health. For example, public health measures assert the importance of physical distancing and staying at home as much as possible. However, that is contingent on having access to adequate, affordable and safe housing. It should be noted that Canadian legislation recognizes that housing is a human right.<sup>140</sup> Yet, in April 2020 alone, 46% of 3.4 million renting households held less than one month's income in savings,<sup>141</sup> and 500,000 homeowners were struggling with mortgage payments.<sup>142</sup>

One solution is to increase the supply of affordable housing. That is why the National Housing Strategy must be fully realized, ensuring the 33% carve out for gender-focused investments is completely deployed at accelerated timelines.<sup>143</sup> The affordable housing and homelessness crisis is experienced differently by women, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse people, therefore gender-transformative approaches will be essential.

At the same time, before affordable housing supply catches up to demand, measures such as rent cancellation can prevent a tsunami of evictions during and after the pandemic. In many jurisdictions, evictions have been disallowed during the public health emergency, but many families who cannot pay rent will still be accountable for unaffordable accumulated arrears as the economy re-opens.

Second, infrastructure investments to ensure universal access to clean water are a necessity. This is one crucial environmental aspect of recovery. Currently, Indigenous Services Canada reports that there are still 61 long-term drinking water advisories for public systems on Indigenous reserves, down from 105 long-term drinking water advisories in November 2015.<sup>144</sup> A lack of clean water prevents proper sanitation, a problem that became even more acute in the pandemic.<sup>145</sup> Investment must be made in particular for Indigenous communities and for people facing housing insecurity so that everyone has the opportunity to protect their health and hygiene.<sup>146</sup>

Third, we need to address the digital divide. Almost overnight, social distancing requirements in the pandemic meant that any sector that could conduct work remotely began to do so. But this shift also revealed the inequity in broadband access plaguing Canada, especially as experienced by low-income, Northern, remote and rural communities. Currently, Canada has committed to ensuring that 95% of Canadian homes and businesses will have access to internet speeds of at least 50/10 Mbps by 2026, and this would rise to 100% by 2030.<sup>147</sup> This goal will need to be prioritized in light of the COVID-19 era where physical distancing requirements have made it difficult to consistently work, go to school, connect with family and friends, shop or access public services without a strong internet connection.

Currently, 14% of Canadians do not have access to adequate high-speed internet; however, this lack of access is as high as 60% in some rural areas.<sup>148</sup> Due to such situations, communities have resorted to accessing the internet at schools, public libraries, and even fast-food restaurants. In the era of physical distancing, this access becomes impossible.

The massive remote work experiment has shown that accommodations for people with disabilities or Indigenous people who want to stay in their communities while working for large employers are possible. Companies seeking to increase the diversity of their workforce may be able to use remote work as an important tool, but this requires universal high-speed internet.

Addressing the digital divide will have many implications in safeguarding the gains made to advance gender equality. The job losses for women workers in sectors such as hospitality, retail, food services and tourism will most likely not return at the same rate as those in men-majority sectors. Features of the new 'contactless economy' will mean increased physical distancing, fewer customers and as a result, fewer workers. As women workers from these sectors re-skill, they will need access to educational and re-training programs digitally. The Internet is also vital for families, as schooling is now taking place in the home.

As we look towards our post-pandemic recovery, we cannot ignore the fundamental building blocks for a dignified life which include affordable housing, clean water, and access to broadband internet. By investing in essential infrastructure, supports and services, Canada will be more resilient for future crises as well.

**“Currently, Indigenous Services Canada reports that there are still 61 long-term drinking water advisories for public systems on Indigenous reserves, down from 105 long-term drinking water advisories in November 2015.”**



## Policy Recommendations

7.1 Urgently 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.

7.2 Urgently prioritize the upgrading and building of clean water infrastructure for communities under water advisories, with a target of zero boil water advisories by July 2021.

7.3 Address the digital divide in Canada with meaningful subsidies and commit to realizing 100% national broadband access, especially in rural, remote and Northern communities.

## 8. Diverse Voices in Decisions

**“Ten years ago, the federal response to H1N1 virus was to send body bags to some First Nations communities. At the end of the day, all Indigenous peoples will remain victims as long as we continue to be treated as second- or third-class citizens.”**

**- Dr. Cindy Blackstock and Isadore Day**



To ensure an equitable recovery, we need to shift whose knowledge is valued in the conversation. Cis and trans women, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse people must be included in all levels of decision-making.

We recommend ensuring a gender balance in national COVID-19 economic recovery task forces, and establishing a Gender Advisory Council, similar to the bodies established during the G7 Summits for Canada and France in 2018 and 2019, respectively.<sup>149</sup> Such a body should have diverse representation from Canadian civil society, ensuring perspectives from Indigenous, Black, and racialized communities, women with disabilities<sup>150</sup>, LGBTQ2S+ communities, newcomers, immigrants, refugees and other equity-seeking communities. This advisory council would be vital into providing input into what types of policies need to be implemented to advance a gender-inclusive Canada in the post-pandemic recovery.

It would also serve as an accountability partner to ensure there are clear gender-responsive intersectional targets that are being achieved. If not, the wrong actions will be taken leading to haphazard results. As Indigenous advocates Dr. Cindy Blackstock and Isadore Day recently opined, “Ten years ago, the federal response to H1N1 virus was to send body bags to some First Nations communities.

At the end of the day, all Indigenous peoples will remain victims as long as we continue to be treated as second- or third-class citizens.”<sup>151</sup> Not including diverse voices in decisions will continue to create sub-par conditions and lead to a lower quality of life for the communities most affected from this pandemic.

Civil society organizations, including academic research institutions that work to advance gender equity, intersectional feminism, and women’s rights, should also be centered in decision-making and consultation processes. These organizations often do much of the heavy lifting in providing gender-based analysis to policy makers. The pandemic threatens the very existence of such organizations, so investments must be made so that they can weather the storm and survive. If not, we risk the disappearance of a civil society sector that contributes to a thriving democracy and ensures the rights and needs of equity-seeking communities are not ignored during and after this crisis.

### Policy Recommendations

**8.1** Establish a Gender Advisory Council that provides guidance to the federal government on pandemic policies.

**8.2** Ensure gender balance and intersectional representation on Recovery Task Forces for every order of government.

**8.3** Invest in organizations that advance gender equity, intersectional feminism, and women’s rights in Canada through investments in core multi-year funding.

# Conclusion

This pandemic has revealed vulnerabilities in Canadian society and offers us an opportunity to build back better by putting inclusion and dignity at the core of economic recovery. It will not come easy and will require courage, commitment and a vision for a gender-transformative economy that builds a new status quo by realizing positive outcomes for all.

As we transition from emergency response to post-pandemic recovery, the following pillars can inform our thinking on what a path towards an inclusive economy could look like:

**1. Intersectionality:  
Understanding Power**

**2. Addressing Root  
Causes of Systemic  
Racism**

**3. Care Work is  
Essential Work**

**4. Investing in  
Good Jobs**

**5. Fighting the  
Shadow Pandemic**

**6. Bolstering  
Small Businesses**

**7. Strengthening  
Infrastructure for  
Recovery**

**8. Diverse Voices  
in Decisions**

# How Will We Pay for It?

The question often arises as to how best to pay for post-pandemic economic recovery measures.

Firstly, tax systems at every order of government in Canada have produced discriminatory after-tax outcomes that negatively affect women, low-income communities, and marginalized groups.<sup>152</sup> Low tax rates are the conventional wisdom advanced by several international monetary institutions to promote economic growth. As a result, Canada has one of the lowest rates of tax revenue as a share of Gross Domestic Product as compared to other OECD countries.<sup>153</sup> Research evidence estimates that Canada's tax revenues are 41.4% less than they could be if tax expenditures such as tax rates, tax deductions, tax benefits and tax refund programs had never been implemented.<sup>154</sup>

This focus on tax for growth affects women more harshly than men. Special tax benefits are worth more to men, whose incomes are, on average, significantly higher than women's incomes in every year reported. Therefore, women receive smaller dollar payoffs when they do qualify for special tax treatments that may appear to be gender neutral.<sup>155</sup> Men received 70.3% of \$52.3 billion in total personal income tax cuts made between 1997 and 2016 while women as a group received just 29.7% of that set of cuts.<sup>156</sup>

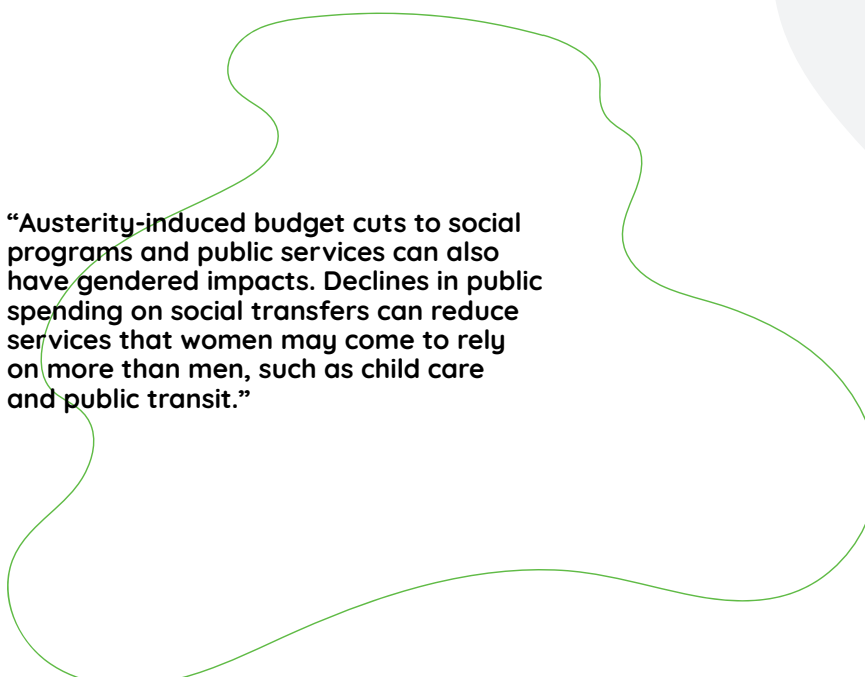
An analysis by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives found that tax expenditures are disproportionately distributed along gender lines, meaning not everyone benefits equally from tax deductions, credits, breaks and loopholes. Because women are more likely to be single parents, earn less income, live longer, and be caregivers to children and aged parents, there are differences in how they can benefit from tax credits. In Canada, men are more likely to benefit from tax expenditures such as pension income splitting and RRSPs.

In contrast, women benefit more from tax expenditures such as eligible dependent credit and childcare expense deductions. However, a study examining 45 different tax expenditures found only 8 (19%) provided more benefits to women than men, one was equally split and the remaining 36 provided more benefits to men than women.<sup>157</sup>

In addition, the heavy use of household-based and joint tax rules in Canada produces unfair tax outcomes for women. In 2018, the total tax and transfer expenditures that provide tax benefits to support women's unpaid work was a total of \$26.2 billion. The majority of these refunds went to men, with the exception of the Canada Child Benefit. At the same time, only \$1.3 billion was spent on childcare expense deduction for women—just 4.8% of total spending on women's unpaid and paid work in that year.<sup>158</sup>

Recovery must start with financing that Canadian governments can control. Restructuring domestic tax rates and tax paying units is one of the first steps that can be taken to restoring government revenue to sustainable levels. If Canada were to adopt the tax rates of the Netherlands, we could generate as much as \$4.8 billion more in revenue from the federal personal income tax. This would increase after-tax incomes for all but the richest 10%.<sup>159</sup>

Secondly, revisions of fiscal and monetary policies offer opportunities to address inequality in wages, employment and quality of life and invest in public services to support thriving communities for cis and trans women, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse people. We need gender-responsive unpaid supports for all adults across the country to fund sustainable after-tax incomes over the life course.



**“Austerity-induced budget cuts to social programs and public services can also have gendered impacts. Declines in public spending on social transfers can reduce services that women may come to rely on more than men, such as child care and public transit.”**

Monetary policies are not gender- or race-neutral, so they should be considered carefully before being deployed. For example, changes in the Bank of Canada's overnight interest rate must consider the differential impact this decision can have on cis and trans women, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse people. Reducing inflation at all costs can result in negative outcomes that are unevenly distributed. Research has shown that monetary policy focused on constraining inflation rates in the United States disproportionately increased unemployment rates for Black women and men, followed by White women.<sup>160</sup> This is partly explained by the fact that monetary-policy induced economic slowdowns can result in severe job losses. This may create intense competition for remaining jobs that play out along pre-existing social fault lines such as racial and gender inequities.

Austerity-induced budget cuts to social programs and public services can also have gendered impacts.<sup>161</sup> Declines in public spending on social transfers can reduce services that women may come to rely on more than men, such as child care and public transit. This could increase women's unpaid care work, taking away time from other activities, including paid work. Women typically comprise a larger proportion of frontline service providers in the care and social services, so budgetary cuts may result in job losses, hours reduction or lower wages in a key employment sector.<sup>162</sup>

Thirdly, as discussed in this plan, research has shown that investment in critical services and infrastructure will return significant economic benefits to society, such as through increased participation in the labour force and higher household spending. There is a long-term pay-off from investing in a healthy society, education, housing ownership and other aspects of social infrastructure.


Finally, because economic recovery from COVID-19 carries with it Canada's international commitments to pay its fair share in meeting the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, new taxes not yet fully enacted in Canada should be considered and implemented to pay for the future we need and leave no one behind.<sup>163</sup>

Grounding these new taxes in progressive tax systems is essential. These taxes should be augmented with annual net wealth taxes paid by those with high net wealth similar to policies being considered in other economies such as the United Kingdom and the United States. The International Monetary Fund has focused attention on 'solidarity surcharges' as a means of ensuring government revenues meet the COVID-19 related expenditures.<sup>164</sup> Such measures should be timed appropriately to deliver maximum impact and the OECD has provided some initial insights about what could be done to restore public finances for a strong economic recovery.<sup>165</sup>

Further, Canada and other high GDP nations should participate in redistributive aid because in the short term, it would accelerate recovery in low- and medium-income countries and would ultimately contribute to building a more durable economic and fiscal basis for meeting the next global crisis.

We will not be able to achieve a Feminist Economic Recovery Plan without adapting our current approach to public policy design. By using short-term fixes to accelerate long-term change, the root causes of inequities can be addressed. Pointing to the different impacts recovery policies could have on creating an inclusive society can open up the possibility for difficult conversations about structural change—why is it important, what needs to happen and what has prevented us from acting on it until now?

# How Will We Measure Success?



**“The traditional economic playbook for responding to this pandemic-induced recession will be insufficient.”**

As our proposed Feminist Economic Recovery Plan demonstrates, the traditional economic playbook for responding to this pandemic-induced recession will be insufficient. And, Canada will need new measures of success. In the past, economic recovery focused on moving the needle on traditional metrics such as improving the GDP, increasing the rate of economic growth and accelerating the number of jobs created.

Now, we must consider measures such as the reduction of gender-based violence; the access that Indigenous, Black, and other racialized communities have to employment and essential health and social services; the number of new affordable housing units created; and the number of decent, sustainable jobs that provide paid sick leave and a decent income. We must consider how to re-evaluate GDP measures to factor in the enormous economic contribution of care and all other forms of unpaid work that is currently performed predominately by women. As we have seen quite clearly during this pandemic, confidence in the economy is shaped by the health of the population. Data from Australia and the United States suggest that when consumers are cautious due to rising infection rates, economic recovery is weaker.<sup>166</sup>

By centering equity, justice and security, our Feminist Economic Recovery Plan provides a roadmap for post-pandemic recovery that can help us pull through this crisis and make us resilient for the next one.

## Appendix 1

# Summary of Policy Recommendations

## Intersectionality: Understanding Power

1.1 Gather disaggregated, intersectional data at the federal, provincial and municipal level on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.2 Ensure truly intersectional gender analysis (GBA+) on all forthcoming pandemic policies not only for understanding differential impacts, but also for designing policies

1.3 Develop a COVID-19 post-pandemic gender results framework dashboard and report annually on how the Government of Canada is advancing gender equity.

## Addressing Root Causes of Systemic Racism

2.1 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, especially: (a) Ensure that Indigenous peoples and especially women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people, have equitable access to jobs, training, and education opportunities, and that they gain long-term sustainable benefits from economic development projects. Programs for employment must be available within all Indigenous communities, and (b) Provide adequate, stable, equitable, and ongoing funding for Indigenous-centered and community-based health and wellness services that are accessible and culturally appropriate, and meet the health and wellness needs of Indigenous communities, especially women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people.

2.2 Implement recommendations to remediate anti-Black racism such as those from (a) the City of Toronto's Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism, (b) the 2020 Black Health Alliance Black Experiences in Health Care report, and (c) the Parliamentary Black Caucus.



## Care Work is Essential Work

3.1 Adopt the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) benchmark of allocating at least 1% of country GDP to early learning and childcare.

3.2 Create a National Child Care Secretariat to track financial allocations across the country and coordinate intergovernmental action, monitoring and evaluation.

3.3 Ensure that childcare is a key element of all economic recovery plans, including coordination between the reopening of schools and childcare centres with that of the broader economy.

3.4 Direct public funds of at least \$2.5 billion to existing regulated and licensed care services such as by providing increased wages for workers, investing in measures to keep workers safe and expanding the number of care spaces available, so that they can reopen and provide accessible, affordable and high quality care.

3.5 Consult organizations that support migrant worker caregivers in decision-making for pandemic recovery, and create an expedited path to permanent resident status for immigrant care workers so that they can access healthcare and worker protections on arrival. Provide personal protective equipment to migrant workers, conduct rigorous inspections on their working conditions, and ensure they have access to income supports.

3.6 Expand the collection of time use data to track time spent on all forms of unpaid work during the pandemic by gender, identities, racialization, Indigenous, rural vs urban, family composition, occupation, age, and education, including costs or time for child care, on an annual basis, on uniform terms for continuity over time.

## Investing in Good Jobs

4.1 Legislate at least 14 paid sick days and paid family leave for all workers, so that everyone—particularly those in frontline jobs—can protect their health and that of the rest of the population.

4.2 Pay for retraining and professional development across sectors for those who have experienced job loss through EI. For people who are not eligible for EI, create other pathways to financially support re-skilling and re-training, with greater incentives for workers in care-economy based sectors such as childcare and elder care.

4.3 Lower the uniform national eligibility requirement of Employment Insurance to 360 hours and increase the benefit rate from 55% to 85% of earnings for low-income earners.

4.4 Legislate job protection for individuals with disabilities who are unable to fulfill job duties due to the risk of contracting COVID-19 as well as systemic barriers such as lack of access to accessible transportation.

## Fighting the Shadow Pandemic

5.1 Establish a National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence that (a) addresses violence against Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people as recommended by the Inquiry Report into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and, (b) addresses all forms of racism and hate crimes.



### **Bolstering Small Businesses**

6.1 Offer targeted support to business owners from underrepresented groups—not only women but also racialized people, persons with disabilities, Indigenous people, and immigrants—in the form of emergency funding, as well as skills training and mentorship.

6.2 Create minimum set-asides in public procurement spending (e.g., 15%) towards businesses led by women, racialized people, and other equity-seeking groups

6.3 Direct funding to businesses in women-majority sectors, as women-led businesses tend to be in hard-hit sectors such as caregiving and social enterprises.

6.4 Demonstrate meaningful consultation with Indigenous communities as it relates to long-term sustainable benefits from economic development projects

6.5 Increase awareness of co-operative business models and create tools to support businesses that want to convert to this model including empowering the Business Development Bank of Canada to support co-operative conversions.

### **Strengthening Infrastructure for Recovery**

7.1 Urgently 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.

7.2 Urgently prioritize the upgrading and building of clean water infrastructure for communities under water advisories with a target of zero boil water advisories by July 2021.

7.3 Address the digital divide in Canada with meaningful subsidies and commit to realizing 100% national broadband access, especially in rural, remote and Northern communities.

### **Diverse Voices in Decisions**

8.1 Establish a Gender Advisory Council that provides guidance to the government on pandemic policies.

8.2 Ensure gender balance and intersectional representation on Recovery Task Forces for every order of government

8.3 Invest in organizations that advance gender equity, intersectional feminism, and women's rights in Canada through investments in core multi-year funding.

## Appendix 2

# Further Reading

We encourage readers to review other proposed feminist recovery plans and commentaries which both inspired us and are a useful complement to our recommendations. While we do not necessarily endorse any of these plans, we provide this list as a starting point for conversation about other feminist recovery plans.

Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights, Amnesty International Canada, Equality Fund, InterPares, Nobel Women's Initiative, & Oxfam Canada. (May 2020). A Feminist Agenda for Canada's Global Response to COVID-19. Retrieved from: <https://www.oxfam.ca/publication/feminist-action-agenda-canadas-global-response-to-covid-19>

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MacGregor, S., & Cohen, M. (2020, May 20). Retrieved from: It's time to talk about a feminist green new deal. OpenDemocracy. Retrieved from: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/oureconomy/its-time-to-talk-about-a-feminist-green-new-deal/>

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>(2015). Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Volume 4. Canada's Residential Schools: Missing Children and Unmarked Burials. Pp. 60-61. Retrieved from: [http://www.trc.ca/assets/pdf/Volume\\_4\\_Missing\\_Children\\_English\\_Web.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/assets/pdf/Volume_4_Missing_Children_English_Web.pdf)

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<sup>3</sup>Throughout this publication, we highlight the experiences of women, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse people. When we say women, we mean any person who identifies as a woman, inclusive of cis-woman and trans-women. We recognize the gendered impacts of many of the issues we are highlighting disproportionately affect gender-diverse people and call for more disaggregated data to fully understand the gendered experiences of people on a number of economic and social issues. Furthermore, we are committed to moving towards a truly intersectional analysis, grounded in the teachings of legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, that calls on us to examine how experiences across different dimensions of one's identity, including but not limited to sexual orientation, race, Indigeneity, disability, and immigration status, impact how we navigate systems, including economic ones. We direct readers to: Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," University of Chicago Legal Forum: Vol. 1989: Iss. 1, Article 8. This means explicitly naming the experiences of Black, Indigenous, racialized communities, people with disabilities, 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, newcomer, immigrant, refugee and migrant communities. However, we recognize there are severe data gaps. Where possible, we will provide intersectional data and aim to identify data gaps when we cannot. We take guidance from the glossary of terms developed by Egale Canada, as noted in their National Action Plan for LGBTQI2S Rights in Canada and direct readers to review here: <https://egale.ca/egale-in-action/nationalactionplan-2/>

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MAKING THE ECONOMY WORK FOR EVERYONE



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