

Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the Upcoming Federal Budget

By: CFUW (Canadian Federation of University Women)

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Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Increase funding to the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) to ensure targets are met and the economy can prosper.

Recommendation 2: Allocate funding to facilitate women's participation in new federal infrastructure projects

Recommendation 3: Commit to sustained funding for Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE) and increase the permanent funding for its funding programs: Women's Program, Gender-based Violence Program, Equality for Sex, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression Program.

Recommendation 4: Increase funding and action on the epidemic of gender-based violence

ABOUT CFUW

Founded in 1919, [CFUW](#) is a self-funded, non-partisan organization of over 6,700 women and 90 Clubs across Canada that works to improve the status of women by promoting human rights, public education, social justice, and peace in Canada and abroad. CFUW Clubs grant over \$1 million a year in scholarships and awards and work actively in their communities to advance our mission of achieving equality and social justice through continuous learning and empowerment. CFUW holds special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council and is the largest affiliate of Graduate Women International.

INTRODUCTION

The federal government of Canada has identified priority areas that it believes will strengthen Canada in the face of economic and security threats. These priority areas can only thrive when the full force of Canada's population is backing them. Accordingly, the 2026 federal budget should facilitate women's entry, participation, and retention in Canada's economy – particularly in sectors identified by the government as essential to getting Canada ahead. Canada has a responsibility to eradicate the systemic issues that prevent women from fully and equally participating in the economy.

Recommendation 1: Increase funding to the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) to ensure targets are met and the economy can prosper.

CURRENT STATUS

CFUW welcomes the commitment in Budget 2025 to protect affordable childcare for the 900,000 children who have access.¹ However, as Morna Ballantyne, Executive Director of Child Care Now, notes, "[holding] child care transfer payments to provinces and territories at previously announced levels means hundreds of thousands of families will be denied access to ... the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care [ELCC] program." Budget 2026 should increase the funding levels for childcare transfer payments to provinces and territories. Beyond improving access to childcare for families, additional investment in the ELCC will enable childcare providers to operate more effectively. Front-line childcare organizations note that childcare providers are facing increased operational costs and an exodus of qualified early childhood educators who are leaving the sector in search of better-paying work.² Limited capacity at childcare centres due to inadequate funding (including non-competitive wages for early childhood educators) prevents mothers from returning to the workforce, effectively acting as a hidden tax on female labour participation.

Furthermore, the Department of Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) was found to be at risk of failing to meet its target to increase the availability of regulated early learning and

¹ Child Care Now, "Media Advisory: Mark Carney's Economic Plan Must Expand Child Care System," press release, November 4, 2025, <https://childcarenow.ca/2025/11/04/media-advisory-mark-carneys-economic-plan-must-expand-child-care-system/>.

² Ibid

childcare spaces.³ In addition, the department has not collected the information required to assess whether the childcare spaces are equitably accessible to diverse or vulnerable families.⁴ Specific funding should be allocated towards data collection to improve equitable access. In addition, funding should be allocated to conduct analyses and publish reports on the impact of the ELCC on gender equality, the closing of the gender wage gap, the equitable division of care work, women's labour market participation, Canada's economy, and communities.

GENDER EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

Increased funding to Canada's ELCC strategy is key to reducing gender inequality in Canada. The uneven distribution of domestic labour, childcare responsibilities, and care work places a heavy burden on women in Canada, particularly on their earning ability and careers. The same is true for one-parent families. Women were overrepresented among one-parent families with young children in 2021⁵ and mothers in one-parent families face labour market gaps and are at higher risk for poverty and food insecurity.⁶

Domestically, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Employment Equity Act, and the Pay Equity Act establish obligations to prevent discrimination and proactively address systemic barriers to women's full participation in the workforce. Internationally, Canada is bound by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and has committed to the Sustainable Development Goals, which call for equal access to employment and economic resources. Canada has a responsibility to take active steps to eliminate structural barriers and ensure equal participation by women in the economy.

The inability to access ELCC stands as a major barrier to economic prosperity and gender equality.⁷ The example of the province of Quebec demonstrates that the introduction of affordable childcare considerably increases the labour force participation of young mothers with children, and ESDC expects to see similar results with ELCC.⁸

ECONOMIC IMPACT

In addition to closing the gender inequality gap, investments in childcare will ensure Canada's economy prospers. The Audit Report by the Office of the Auditor General on the Canada-Wide Early

³ Office of the Auditor General of Canada, *Report 5—Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care System*, 2025, Office of the Auditor General of Canada,

<https://www.canada.ca/en/auditor-general/our-work/audit-reports/canada-wide-early-learning-and-child-care-system.html>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ www.statcan.gc.ca/o1/en/plus/7523-despite-progress-one-parent-families-headed-mothers-continue-face-labour-market

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/esdc-edsc/documents/programs/early-learning-child-care/reports/national-progress-2021-2022/5458-National-Progress-Report-ELCC-2021-2022-EN.pdf>

⁸ Ibid.

Learning and Child Care (ELCC) system (2025) cited research showing that for “every dollar invested in early childhood education, the broader economy receives between \$1.50 to \$2.80 in return.”⁹

Recommendation 2: Allocate funding to facilitate women’s participation in new federal infrastructure projects

CURRENT STATUS

An ESDC (2025) news release notes that the construction industry would need to recruit 351,800 new workers by 2033, largely to replace the expected retirements of 263,400 workers.¹⁰ Canada can address this anticipated labour shortage by eliminating the barriers that keep women out of these positions. Women in Canada are significantly underrepresented in trades, with men accounting for 92.7% of those employed in trades, transport and equipment operators, and related occupations except management, while women accounted for 7.3%.¹¹

Accordingly, the 2026 federal budget should reflect the need to facilitate women’s entry, participation, and retention in Canada’s economy, including significantly increasing women’s participation in high-demand, high-paying fields such as skilled trades, engineering, construction, energy, and defence.

GENDER EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

The Apprenticeship Incentive Grant for Women (AIW-G) program, funded through Employment and Social Development Canada, demonstrated that targeted action works. This program provided Employment Insurance benefits for apprentices. The evaluation report for this program found that the program’s introduction accelerated the number and proportion of women registering in male-dominated Red Seal Trades.¹² This grant program helped women overcome financial barriers, such as paying for tools and living expenses, but persistent financial and non-financial barriers remained.¹³ One persistent non-financial barrier women reported was unwelcome workplace environments.¹⁴ This represents a major barrier to progression for female apprentices, and it manifests in the form of inappropriate behaviour from male colleagues (including immediate supervisors), stereotypes, and increased stress due to feeling like outsiders.¹⁵ The AIW-G evaluation report cites a 2018 conference in which “female apprentices and trades workers identified

⁹ Office of the Auditor General of Canada, *Report 5—Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care System*, 2025, Office of the Auditor General of Canada, <https://www.canada.ca/en/auditor-general/our-work/audit-reports/canada-wide-early-learning-and-child-care-system.html>

¹⁰<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/news/2025/02/government-of-canada-launches-the-next-phase-of-the-national-skilled-trades-advertisinits-introduction-increasedg-campaign-to-promote-careers-in-the-skilled-trades1.html>

¹¹ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410041602>

¹²<https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/esdc-edsc/documents/corporate/reports/evaluations/apprenticeship-grants-im-pact/AG-eval-report-en.pdf>

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

'stereotypes and unwelcoming workplaces' as “the biggest barriers women experience” in pursuing careers in the trades...They advocated a zero-tolerance response to bad behaviours”¹⁶

ECONOMIC IMPACT

There are labour shortages in the sectors the Canadian government identified as crucial for Canada’s growth in the coming years. The government of Canada can address the labour shortages that prevent it from pursuing its “Canada First” goals by addressing the systemic factors that keep women out of these roles. Targeted funding facilitating women’s entry and retention in trades can also address the earnings gap in this sector. In 2019, women with apprenticeship certification earned less than their male counterparts and less than any other women except for those who did not complete high school. ¹⁷ The AIW-G evaluation report cites research on the earnings gap in higher-paying trades: “in Architectural and Construction trades, they earned 78% of what men did; in Electrical trades, 85%; in Mechanical trades, 89%. These disparities may result from differences in hours worked, perhaps due to childcare responsibilities, which women more often assume.” ¹⁸

Recommendation 3: Commit to sustained funding for WAGE and increase the permanent funding to its funding programs: Women’s Program, Gender-based Violence Program, Equality for Sex, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression Program.

CURRENT STATUS

Budget 2025 commits to funding for WAGE with scheduled ends. Frontline service organizations deserve clarity and certainty about their funding, as this enables them to be better prepared to deliver essential services and programs to Canadians. There is financial value in consistency, as it reduces administrative waste and ensures no knowledge is lost between funding cycles.

GENDER EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

WAGE is the only federal department dedicated to advancing equality concerning sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity or expression through the inclusion of women and 2SLGBTQI+ people in every aspect of Canada’s social, economic, and political life. Given this essential mandate, sustained funding to WAGE and permanent funding to its funding programs will ensure Canada continues to work towards gender equality.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

The overall uncertainty around future funding renewals makes it difficult for frontline organizations supporting survivors of gender-based violence, advancing women’s economic security, and strengthening 2SLGBTQI+ communities to plan for long-term, systemic impact.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

The populations organizations serve could experience gaps and delays in accessing services due to a lack of funding, placing them in a state of precarity. Furthermore, staff recruitment and retention are among the highest costs for organizations. With funding gaps or inconsistent funding, staff are placed on temporary contracts with no benefits and are more likely to move on sooner. Consistent funding equals permanent positions, stability and longer retention. Permanent funding will also free up time spent writing grant proposals, allowing focus on serving communities.

Recommendation 4: Increase funding and action on the epidemic of gender-based violence.

CURRENT STATUS

The Government of Canada invested \$539.3 million over five years, as part of Budget 2022, to enable provinces and territories to supplement and enhance services and resources within their jurisdictions to prevent gender-based violence (GBV) and support survivors. CFUW recommends that the funding be extended beyond March 2027 and that funds be allocated specifically to sustain federal transfers to the National Action Plan to End GBV.

Gender-based violence remains prevalent in Canada, with more than 11 million people having experienced intimate partner violence since the age of 15.¹⁹

GENDER EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

It is essential to examine disaggregated statistics, as it is in the specificities of the data that the most vulnerable populations can be identified. GBV disproportionately affects women and girls, particularly those who are Indigenous, racialized, 2SLGBTQI+, living with disabilities, or in rural and remote communities.²⁰

In Canada, women experience higher rates of intimate partner violence and more severe forms of abuse. In 2023, 78% of those who experienced intimate partner violence were women, and women were nearly four times more likely than men to be victims.²¹ Indigenous women remain significantly overrepresented among victims of violence. For example, 46% of Indigenous women have experienced sexual assault, compared to 33% of non-Indigenous women.²² Indigenous women face unique barriers to reporting violence or seeking help afterward, including a lack of access to culturally appropriate resources, inaccessibility of support services, a general distrust of law enforcement and a perceived lack of confidentiality in the justice system (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). When justice systems fail to respond adequately to violence, trust in institutions is eroded, and barriers to reporting crimes increase.

¹⁹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/women-gender-equality/gender-based-violence/facts-stats.html>

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

Women and girls are also killed in ways that differ from other forms of homicide. Between 2011 and 2021, an average of 102 women and girls were victims of gender-related homicide each year, with 93% of these killings committed by an intimate partner or family member.²³ As femicide is recognized as the most extreme form of discrimination against women and girls, the government's response should also "address the distinct motivations and patterns involved in male violence against women and girls, acts which are deeply rooted in sex/gender inequality and misogyny"²⁴.

However, current data in Canada does not adequately capture the broader sociocultural and systemic drivers of this violence. Increased funding for disaggregated data collection and research on GBV, including femicide, is necessary to better understand root causes and inform effective policy responses. There should also be funding and action to address the role of men and boys in preventing gender-based violence. Without targeted, evidence-based interventions that address the underlying causes of violence, Canada will not be adequately equipped to end the epidemic of gender-based violence.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

The most recent estimates of the cost of gender-based violence estimate that intimate partner violence and sexual violence cost the Canadian economy \$12.2 billion annually.²⁵ WAGE estimates that the yearly cost of GBV federal, provincial and territorial governments is in the billions due to spending on "healthcare, justice, and social system responses."²⁶ Furthermore, WAGE estimates that Canadian businesses incur millions of dollars in productivity losses and GBV, which prevent individuals from working.²⁷ The cost to the survivors of GBV is felt directly and indirectly, through opportunity loss and the impact on their lives and across generations.²⁸

²³ <https://www.canada.ca/en/women-gender-equality/gender-based-violence/facts-stats.html>

²⁴ <https://femicideinCanada.ca/femicide-law/>

²⁵ Oxfam Canada, *Investing in a Feminist Future: Oxfam Canada's Recommendations for Budget 2020* (February 2020), <https://www.oxfam.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Oxfam-Canada-Federal-Budget-Brief-2020-FINAL.pdf>

²⁶ <https://www.canada.ca/en/women-gender-equality/gender-based-violence/facts-stats.html>

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.