



New Brunswick
Women's Council

Annual Report
2016–2017



**New Brunswick Women's Council
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Province of New Brunswick
PO 6000, Fredericton NB E3B 5H1 CANADA

www.gnb.ca

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The New Brunswick Women’s Council (formerly the Voices of New Brunswick Women Consensus-Building Forum) is New Brunswick’s independent advisory body on women’s equality issues.

551 King Street – Suite 103
PO 6000, Fredericton NB E3B 5H1

506-462-5179 / Toll-free: 1-844-462-5179
Fax: 506-462-5069

council@gnb.ca | nbwomenscouncil.ca

2016–2017 in New Brunswick

May 2016

- Government introduces the *New Brunswick Women's Council Act* in the legislative assembly.

June 2016

- Government announces it will make medically necessary gender-confirming surgeries an insured service in New Brunswick and allow transgender individuals to change their birth certificates to match their gender identities.

July 2016

- The *New Brunswick Women's Council Act* passes and receives Royal Assent in the legislative assembly, but is not proclaimed.

August 2016

- Final report of New Brunswick's Child Care Review Task Force is released.

September 2016

- Government solicits public input on electoral reform and changes to the *Employment Standards Act*.

November 2016

- Electoral reform commissioners are announced.

December 2016

- Legislation is introduced to render the names of the Office of the Rentalsman and the Office of the Ombudsman gender-neutral (Residential Tenancies Tribunal and Ombud New Brunswick).
- Government announces Fredericton will be the demonstration site for midwifery in New Brunswick.
- Government holds a Childcare Task Force Review forum.

January 2017

- Government launches its *Family Plan Framework*.
- Launch of the *Women for 50% in 2018* initiative to increase the number of women running in the 2018 provincial election.
- Mifegymiso reportedly becomes available in Canada for the first time.

February 2017

- The Atlantic ministers responsible for the Status of Women launch a *Guide to Gender Diversity in Employment* while meeting in New Brunswick.
- A 20-month investigation by the *Globe and Mail* reveals that New Brunswick has the highest rate of sexual assaults classified as unfounded by law enforcement in the country.
- The *Intimate Partner Violence Intervention Act* is introduced in the legislative assembly.

March 2017

- The Commission on Electoral Reform submits its report to government.
- Government holds a *Family Plan* summit on advancing women's equality.
- Legislation is tabled to amend New Brunswick's *Human Rights Act* to include gender identity or expression and family status in the list of prohibited grounds for discrimination.
- Government announces plans to amend the formula for public financing of political parties to provide a gender-based incentive.

Message from the Co-chairs



The April 2016-March 2017 year brought important changes for this agency as the Voices of New Brunswick Women Consensus-Building Forum became the New Brunswick Women's Council.

The year began with the introduction and passing of the *New Brunswick Women's Council Act* in the legislative assembly. This legislative framework evolved the forum into a statutory entity called the New Brunswick Women's Council.

While the act would not be proclaimed during 2016-2017, the forum began working under its new name and in accordance with the provisions of the act immediately. With clear standing and a strong mandate, the council was able to address and move beyond many of the challenges that had prevented it from operating at full capacity and with appropriate independence.

During the final months of 2016-2017 the council was finally able to hire a full staff team to support and execute its work. This enabled the council to respond more frequently and more robustly to issues of women's equality. In this report, you can read about the various issues on which the council provided advice to government while also raising public awareness. There is also information on the internally-focused work the council has done to further strengthen its foundations.

This year saw important movement on a number of longstanding gender equality issues in New Brunswick. In some cases, New Brunswick caught up to the rest of the country after years of lagging behind; this includes extending human rights protections based on gender identity or expression and paving the way for the introduction of emergency intervention orders to the civil justice system in order to provide temporary measures to support to survivors and victims of domestic and intimate partner violence. On increasing the number of women seeking political office, New Brunswick led the country when government announced its intention to take concrete measures aimed at the political establishment with the creation of gender-based incentives for public financing of parties.

We are pleased to present you with this report that details work and transformation of the council in 2016-2017.

Jody Dallaire and Jennifer Richard
Co-chairs, New Brunswick Women's Council

Members and staff

Members

The council's work is informed by its volunteer membership, which includes organizations (represented by a woman staff member or volunteer) and individual women committed to women's equality.

Members shape the council's issue-based work by collaborating with staff to identify and analyze priority issues and propose solutions. Members also ensure that the voices of women from diverse identities, communities, and experiences are represented within the council. The membership also has a governance role that includes developing policies to direct the council's operations at a high level.

2016–2017 membership

Organizations

- CBDC New Brunswick (represented by Line Doiron)
- Fredericton Sexual Assault Centre (represented by Jennifer Richard)
- Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre (represented by Rina Arseneault)
- New Brunswick Coalition for Pay Equity (represented by Jody Dallaire)
- New Brunswick Multicultural Council (represented by Madhu Verma)
- Regroupement féministe du Nouveau-Brunswick (represented by Lyne Chantal Boudreau)
- Saint John Women's Empowerment Network (represented by Joanne Britton)
- YWCA Moncton (represented by Jewell Mitchell)

Individuals

- Madeleine Nickerson
- Noëlla Richard
- Constance Sewell
- Paulette Sonier Rioux
- Phylomène Zangio

Ex officio members

- Jocelyne Mills, assistant deputy minister, Women's Equality Branch
- Beth Lyons, executive director, New Brunswick Women's Council

Staff

Early in 2016-2017, Linda Landry-Guimond began working with the council as officer manager.

In January 2017, Erin Whitmore and Brit Mockler joined the staff team as researcher/policy analyst and public engagement officer, respectively.

Beth Lyons continued as executive director throughout 2016-2017.

Notes on membership

Jody Dallaire and Jennifer Richard served as co-chairs throughout 2016-2017. Insofar as their co-chairing responsibilities were concerned, Dallaire and Richard held the position as individuals and not on behalf of the organizations they represented.

In 2016-2017, the Saint John Women's Empowerment Network and YWCA Moncton were appointed for a second term (2016-2019) and the New Brunswick Multicultural Council, Madeleine Nickerson, and Constance Sewell were appointed for the first time (2016-2019).

Meetings and committees

Meetings

Members are engaged year-round in the work of the council via regular email communications and committee work. They also meet multiple times a year in-person and via teleconference. In-person meetings allow members to discuss issues and develop policy positions in real-time, as well as provide opportunities to connect with communities in the province.

In 2016–2017, the council held three meetings:

- Fredericton, October;
- Teleconference, December; and
- Moncton, February.

Minutes for all meetings (excepting those portions or whole meetings that are in camera) are available on the council's website at nbwomenscouncil.ca or by contacting the council.

Committees

The council uses standing and ad hoc committees to advance various pieces of work between meetings and ensure accountability. Staff and members sit on committees; special contributors may be invited to join as well. In 2016–2017, the following committees were active:

- Finance (standing);
- Governance (standing); and
- Issues advisory (standing).



Governance

New Brunswick Women's Council Act

During the final months of 2015–2016, the Women's Equality Branch led the development of a legislative framework for the council, then known as the Voices of New Brunswick Women Consensus-Building Forum. The council had requested legislation to enshrine its mandate and independence and to address challenges it was facing that prevented it from becoming fully operational.

In May 2016, government introduced the *New Brunswick Women's Council Act* in the legislative assembly with the support of the forum. The act passed into law without amendments and with support from all sides of the house. It received Royal Assent in June. The law was not proclaimed during 2016-2017.

The act does not change the membership structure of the council. It defines the council as a body for study and consultation with the following objectives:

- A. to be an independent body that provides advice to the Minister on matters of importance to women and their substantive equality;
- B. to bring to the attention of government and the public issues of interest and concern to women and their substantive equality;
- C. to include and engage women of diverse identities, experiences and communities, women's groups and society in general;
- D. to be strategic and provide advice on emerging and future issues; and
- E. to represent New Brunswick women.

Mission, vision and strategic directions

Mission

To further gender equality in New Brunswick by strategically addressing ongoing and emerging issues through research, informed and committed membership, and engagement with government and the public.

Vision

A diverse and inclusive New Brunswick of real and deeply-rooted gender-equality.

Strategic directions

Become a leading voice on issues of importance to women and relating to gender-equality in New Brunswick.

- Establish clear positions and, where appropriate, recommendations on key issues.
- Become a leading resource for research, analysis, commentary and recommendations.
- Be able to identify and respond nimbly to emerging issues and opportunities.

Be engaged with and informed by the women of New Brunswick in their full diversity.

- Membership and analysis reflect the diversity of women's identities, experiences and communities.
- Provide opportunities for women to identify and share priorities, needs and solutions.
- Build connections with women-focused and equality seeking groups throughout all regions.

Develop robust membership and internal processes centred on consensus-building and anti-oppression.

- Develop policies and processes that are sound, equitable and reduce barriers to participation.
- Foster a committed membership in which members experience solidarity, trust and respect with one another.

Advocate, educate and partner strategically.

- Focus on systems-level change.
- Take a collective impact approach.
- Identify strategic roles for the council given its unique mandate, resources and relationship to government.

Operating standards

Throughout 2016-2017, the council updated its operating standards to align with the *New Brunswick Women's Council Act*. The council also contributed to the development of a memorandum of understanding with the government. The memorandum of understanding was not finalized during 2016-2017.

The council's operating standards address:

- mandate, mission and vision;
- interface with the government;
- membership;
- co-chairs;
- meetings;
- decision-making;
- role and accountability of the executive director;
- financial management;
- language;
- research, projects, initiatives and ongoing work; and
- external engagement.

In instances in which the Government of New Brunswick already has a policy addressing a topic included in the standards, the standards reflect the policy and provide further direction.

As the standards are fairly high-level, they also call for the development of accompanying policies and guiding documents with further details. Work on a guiding document on membership began in 2016-2017.

Issues

Health care

The council applauded the government's policy change to include gender-confirming surgeries under Medicare, as well as plans to allow transgender individuals to change their birth certificates to match their gender.

The council welcomed the announcement of a midwifery pilot program in Fredericton and advised that the program would need to support the effective integration of midwives into the healthcare system and ensure midwives would be able to practice the full scope of their skills.

The council advised that action was required to ensure access to medical abortion (i.e. abortion completed by using the drug Mifegymiso instead of surgery). The council advised government that listing Mifegymiso on provincial formularies for hospitals and drug plans would significantly improve the drug's accessibility. The council also advised government to address other potential barriers to medical abortion, including timely access to ultrasounds and establishing a unique code for physicians to use when billing medical abortion services to Medicare. The council continued to recommend expanded access to surgical abortion and public funding for abortions performed outside of hospitals.

Electoral reform and women in politics

The council participated in the Commission on Electoral reform by submitting a brief and presenting recommendations. The council recommended changing the way in which members of the legislative assembly are elected from Single Member Plurality to Mixed Member Proportional Representation and building gender-based incentives into the public funding process for political parties.

The council responded to government's commitment to implement a number of the recommendations from the final report of the commission by:

- Welcoming government's announcement that it would introduce a gender-based financial incentive for parties in provincial elections.

- Reiterating the importance of proportional representation.
- Recommending that the civics course/module to be introduced into the public education system include discussion of institutional and attitudinal barriers that limit participation in politics by women and other groups that have historically been excluded from decision-making tables.
- That the annual update on the state of democracy in New Brunswick include gender-based benchmarks, such as those recommended by the commission.
- That the draft code of conduct for members of the legislative assembly be developed and reviewed using gender-based analysis.

The council drew attention to the growing movement to increase the number of women participating in elected politics, including Equal Voice's *Daughters of the Vote* initiative and the *Women for 50% in 2018* group. The council is a member of the *Women for 50% in 2018* working group.

Child care

The council responded to the final report of the Child Care Review Task Force by supporting many of its recommendations, particularly the call to recognize child care as infrastructure and move existing services toward a system supported by greater public investment.

The council submitted a brief to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in response to a request to provide input on potential changes to the Daycare Assistance Program. The council advised the department to investigate the impact of current subsidy rates and cut offs, increasing access to the program for individuals looking for work and recent high school graduates, and improving promotion of the program and the application process. The brief also encouraged the department to consult with stakeholders before implementing any changes and to consider feedback on the program that parents and children provided to the Child Care Review Task Force.

Family Plan Framework

The council released a gender-based response to the government's *Family Plan Framework*. The goal of the response was to support consultations on the framework by providing stakeholders and citizens with a document that explicitly put a gender-lens on the framework. The council also participated in consultations on the framework. The council drew attention to the fact that the framework relies heavily on care work to maintain or enhance New Brunwickers' quality of life and that this work is often underpaid and precarious and is overwhelmingly performed by women. The council advised that the framework evolve to address this reality in ways that advance, rather than cost, women's equality.

Violence

In response to a 20-month investigation by the *Globe and Mail* on the rate at which law enforcement classifies reports of sexual assault as unfounded, the council called on government to take immediate action to improve institutional responses to sexual violence in the province. The investigation determined that 32 per cent of all sexual assaults reported in New Brunswick are classified as unfounded by law enforcement – the highest rate in the country and nearly double the national rate of 19 per cent. The council recommended that government develop a plan with institutional and community-based stakeholders to address challenges survivors of sexual violence face not only when reporting, but when interacting with the justice system. The council advised that the plan should include concrete measures to be taken, a timeline for implementation, and an accountability framework. Measures the council hoped to see include:

- A comprehensive review of policing procedures relating to reports of sexual violence.
- Trauma-informed training for those who work with survivors through law enforcement or the justice system.
- Implementation of a case review process that involves community-based organizations with specialized knowledge and direct-service experience in sexual violence.
- Access to free legal advice for survivors, including those who have not reported to law enforcement.
- A plan to resource and support all of the above.

The council supported the government's introduction of the *Intimate Partner Violence Intervention Act* in the legislature. The act would integrate emergency intervention orders into New Brunswick's justice and public safety systems to provide temporary civil measures in situations of intimate partner violence. They could serve to provide the applicant for the order with short-term remedies such as exclusive occupation of the home, temporary possession of personal property (including pets), custody of children, etc. The orders could prevent the respondent from turning off utilities to the home or selling the home, retaining possession of firearms, contact with the applicant, etc. The council provided members of the legislative assembly with detailed feedback on the act to ensure it is accessible and effective.

Human Rights

The council welcomed legislation to update the province's *Human Rights Act* by adding gender identity or expression and family status to the list of prohibited grounds for discrimination and modernizing language on disability. The council was pleased that the amendments do not include a rigid definition of the family, instead leaving the concept open to interpretation based on emerging legal precedent.

Employment

The council supported proposed changes to the *Employment Standards Act* to repeal the exemption of employers of domestic workers and other persons who work in a private home. The council provided advice on appropriately amending the definition of employee in the act and introducing a definition of domestic worker, as well as defining hours of work and minimum standards for employer-provided accommodations. The council also advised that these changes should be executed in a way that ensures that domestic workers under the Temporary Foreign Workers Program (including workers under the In-Home Caregiver program) are covered by the updated act.

Finances

Expenditure status report by primary fiscal year ending March 31, 2017		
	Budget (\$)	Actual (\$)
Personal services	262,800	163,600
Other services	148,500	102,100
Materials and supplies	5,500	3,700
Property and equipment	4,200	14,000
Contributions and grants	–	–
TOTAL	421,000	283,400