

Submission to 2022-2023 Pre-Budget Consultation

About the New Brunswick Women's Council

The New Brunswick Women's Council is an independent advisory body for study and consultation on matters of importance, interest, and concern to women and their substantive equality. Its objectives are:

- 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.

In delivering on these objectives, the Women's Council may conduct or commission research and publish reports, studies, and recommendations. The Women's Council is directed by an appointed volunteer membership that includes both organizations and individual women. The work is executed by a small staff team.

Current situation

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it undeniable that we are only as safe as our most vulnerable community members, that the economy will grind to a halt without care work, and that some groups of essential workers are low paid and economically insecure.

The pandemic is also likely to be a mass disabling event. This, paired with a population that is aging, will also lead to higher rates of disability in New Brunswick. This means an increase in vulnerability in our population as well as an increasing demand for caring labour.

All of this has implications for women. Compared to men, women face different rates and experiences of vulnerability in terms of [violence](#), [poverty and economic precarity](#), and [disability](#); are disproportionately the [providers of both paid and unpaid caring labour](#); are [overrepresented among low-wage workers](#); and [may face higher rates of long-COVID](#).

Building resilience

As government seeks to build resilience via Budget 2022-2023, it must act as if it understands the above and believes it to be true.

Building resilience in New Brunswick requires supporting our most vulnerable now while also reducing vulnerability longer-term. It requires properly valuing the work that keeps society, including but not limited to the economy, functioning. This is essential not only as we continue to grapple with COVID-19 but as we prepare for future destabilizing events like it.

It is also critical that government understand that addressing vulnerability and the undervaluing of caring labour and other low paid work isn't only about managing risk or bolstering the labour force. It's also about making sure that we have access to the full range of creativity, problem-solving, and leadership that individuals and communities in New Brunswick have to offer. Many of the practices and technologies that shape our world were, in fact, created by individuals and communities that have historically been excluded from institutional decision-making and leadership spaces. There is no viable future for New Brunswick without the contributions and leadership of those who are often pushed to the margins socially and economically.

To create the conditions required for resilience and a viable future, government needs to engage in decision-making, policy development, and budgeting that is not only evidence-based but also equity-based. Equity is a term that is often used interchangeable with equality; though related, they are not actually the same thing. One of the most common tools used to explain the differences between the two concepts is an image of a group of people attempting to watch a ballgame over a fence. In the following section, we use this image¹ to explain equality and equity.

¹ This image is widely used and iterated. The Women's Council has produced its own version of the image which reflects both the most common elements of the image as well as the most common revisions.

Equality and equity explained



In the first image, crates are distributed equally. Everyone is a different height and so giving each person a crate boosts them up the same amount but doesn't ensure they can all see over the fence. In the second image, height differences are accounted for in crate distribution. Everyone gets what they need to achieve a comparable outcome in terms of being able to watch the game.



It's worth pausing here to emphasize that that the image is using "equality" and "equity" in terms of *interventions* (the adding of crates) not *outcomes* (whether people can see the game over the fence). In terms of interventions, the image contrasts the sameness of equality with the responsiveness of equity. The image demonstrates that equity-based interventions are required to ensure comparable outcomes for people in the face of circumstances or opportunities that disadvantage them or privilege others. In situations of unequal circumstances and opportunities, equity-based measures contribute to equality of outcomes.

The image also has limitations. It shows the same intervention (boosting height) effectively meeting everyone's needs. A more robust version of the image would show different interventions to meet different needs; for example, a wheelchair user being provided with a ramp to a platform rather than a crate.



The image also portrays naturally occurring differences between individuals (height differences—or, in the updated image, the need for a wheelchair) as the reason people require equity measures to reach equal outcomes. In reality, equity measures are required because of systemic oppressions like poverty, racism, colonialism, ableism, and gender-based oppression like misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia. These are neither naturally occurring nor meant to be understood at the scale of the individual. Increasingly, an additional image is used to convey this.



This image shows that the cause of inequality in opportunities and outcomes, as well as the impetus for equity-measures, was never individual differences but the fence—a literal barrier that was an issue for some people but not others. It also makes it clear that while equity-measures are important, they are not justice. While we need equity-measures, we also need to dismantle the oppressions that necessitate them.

Does government already use an equity-based approach? Not consistently or comprehensively. Consider this example that the Women’s Council recently highlighted in a [submission](#) to the Select Committee on Accessibility:

Under the [new provincial health plan](#), a Primary Care Network is being established. Via the Network, “anyone without a doctor or nurse practitioner in the province will be able to access a family doctor or nurse practitioner in a timely manner while they wait for a longer-term placement with a local community clinic or a primary care provider.” There is no acknowledgement that inconsistency in providers affects some populations differently than others and these populations should be prioritized for connection with permanent providers. Due to complex health care needs and the realities of medical discrimination, some populations—including disabled, racialized, and LGBTQIA2S+ people—benefit significantly from having consistent providers with whom they have established trust.

Recommendations

Government must create the conditions required for equity-based decision-making, policy development, and budgeting. This requires building government’s capacity for [co-creation](#) and its ability to reckon with [social deficits and debts](#). It also requires strengthening government’s work on gender-based analysis (GBA), which is the focus of our recommendations for the 2022-2023 budget.

What is gender-based analysis?

GBA is a tool used to assess how specific populations may experience policies, programs, and initiatives differently than others. GBA goes beyond sex and gender to consider intersecting factors that shape individuals’ experiences, including age, location, race, culture, disability, and language. It is an essential part of effective and evidence-based public policy.

The Women’s Council has consistently recommended that government publicly share more information on its use of GBA as well as information generated by GBA processes. This recommendation for government to [show its work](#) is about ensuring that GBA is not only being done, but done well and actually affecting decision-making. It arises from a long and ongoing history of women—especially those who are Indigenous, racialized, LGBTQIA2S+ and/or disabled—being overlooked, marginalized, or treated as tokens in decision-making.

Gender Impact Statement on Budget 2022-2023

Last year, government made strides on its GBA work by publishing a [Gender Impact Statement \(GIS\)](#) as part of the budget. The GIS did a number of things well in terms of providing public education, increasing transparency, and affirming the importance of GBA in decision-making. The GIS was not as strong in its account of how GBA informed and shaped budget decisions and priorities; it provided high level process information and highlights from a final product without accounting for how government arrived there. The GIS format must be iterated to speak more robustly to the use of GBA in the budget process and how GBA contributed to budget decision-making. Guidance on what that could look like is available in our [2021-2022 budget submission](#).

Disclosure of GBA on other decisions and policies

Budget development is one of government’s most opaque processes—which means that if a GIS can be produced for the budget, it can be produced for other decisions and policy processes. Government should allocate resources to pilot publicly releasing information on how GBA processes shaped decision-making and policy development. This pilot should be informed by consultation with organizations and groups that represent equity-seeking populations, especially those with impacted leadership or leadership with lived experience.²

Production of a statistical profile on women in New Brunswick

Until 2016, a [statistical profile](#) on women in New Brunswick was published biennially (initially by the New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women and then the Women’s Equality Branch). It was not only an essential resource for media, researchers, and community-based organizations, it was also presumably critical to government’s GBA processes. Government should provide the resources (as well as directives for necessary information-sharing between departments) required for the Women’s Equality Branch to resume production of the statistical profile with an increased focus on intersectional data (e.g. data that accounts for sex, gender, race, disability, etc.) and mechanisms for regular updates based on new data.

Want more information on how the COVID-19 pandemic isn’t affecting everyone in the same way?

The Women’s Council has created a library of online content on the COVID-19 pandemic that considers marginalized populations, the not-for profit sector, or uses a social justice lens. Visit the library at bibliothequecovidlibrary.ca

² Marginalized groups often face the issue of having people who are not part of the group attempt to represent and advocate for them (this is further explored in the “Nothing about us without us” section of the Women’s Council’s [submission](#) to the Select Committee on Accessibility). Impacted leadership and leadership with lived experience refers to when the leaders of groups and organizations are actually of the marginalized experience that is being represented.