



Issues Brief

A roundup of past recommendations from the Women's Council to government that still need attention and action

Economic security

Bring social assistance rates in line with the Market Basket Measure

Social assistance rates in New Brunswick are below the Market Basket Measure, Canada's official poverty line. These low rates not only fail to meet the needs of recipients, they also do not make fiscal sense given the long-term costs to government that result from individuals living in poverty. Living in poverty is correlated with decreased health and mental health outcomes and increased vulnerability to violence.

Minimum wage

The Women's Council recommends the minimum wage be moved to \$15 at the time of the next scheduled increase on April 1, 2021. It should subsequently be adjusted annually to reflect increases in the cost of living. As this rate is not a true living wage, it must be accompanied by investments in strengthening employment standards and social programs. This would not only improve women's economic security, it would also contribute to addressing the systemic undervaluing of women's labour (as the majority of minimum wage jobs are for labour that is traditionally considered to be "women's work" such as retail, customer service, office or sales support, hospitality and food service).

Legislate pay equity for the private sector

In 2017, the Institute for Women's Policy Research estimated that equal pay for women would reduce the poverty rate for working women by half.¹ Legislating pay equity in the private sector would not only improve wages in the present, but would increase workers' earnings over their lifetime, helping to ensure that they do not age into poverty.

Some workers in community-based caregiving services receive pay equity adjustments from government, but the Women's Council and the New Brunswick Coalition for Pay Equity have concerns that the [methodology used to determine the adjustments is flawed, resulting in wages that are too low](#) (government also has not reviewed these adjustments since they were first made). Legislating pay equity in the private sector would provide an opportunity to address these challenges.

Support newcomer and immigrant women seeking to enter the workforce

As government works to grow the population and workforce through immigration, newcomer and immigrant women require tailored supports to increase their access to employment opportunities in all fields and at all levels of work.

¹ Hartman, Hayes, Huang and Milli. (2017). The Impact of Equal Pay on Poverty and the Economy. Institute for Women's Policy Research. Retrieved from <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/C455.pdf>

Care work

Recognizing unpaid labour

New Brunswick is working to address complex issues such as poverty, an aging population, and increasing demands on health care systems. Many proposed solutions have focused on community-based approaches rather than institutional intervention. While this is positive, it runs the risk of increasing the burden of unpaid labour on communities, families, and individuals – labour that we know is likely to be performed by women. Government must consider how reductions in services or increased reliance on community, family, and individuals will likely result in increasing demands for unpaid labour from women.

In relation to dementia, the Women's Council has suggested that concrete supports for unpaid caregivers could involve investing in respite services and other support programs as well as support for travel costs, home modifications or other financial costs; this could apply to other areas of unpaid care as well.

Supporting homecare workers

In addition to pay increases, home care workers need improved working conditions, including enhanced support for their safety and security, reimbursement for costs incurred on the job (e.g. mileage), and predictable scheduling. This is a matter of economic security and personal safety for the workers in this sector, the majority of whom are women.

Early childhood education and care infrastructure

Government needs to treat early childhood education and care as a critical infrastructure investment and as an essential component of women's equality and improved future outcomes for marginalized and vulnerable children. Government must also work with New Brunswick's early childhood and care sector to shift toward a not-for-profit model.

A note on wages for early childhood educators and home care workers

Wages for early childhood educators and home care workers must be raised so that workers are properly compensated for their labour – which will, in turn, ensure that day care and home care services are available in New Brunswick. The availability and accessibility of these services directly affect women's ability to participate in the labour force, the early learning achievements of children, and the health and well being of seniors and individuals with disabilities.

Violence

Increase funding for [Preventing and Responding to Sexual Violence in New Brunswick: A Framework for Action](#)

Funding the framework will help close service gaps for survivors of sexual violence and provide better support for community organizations addressing this issue. These organizations are facing increasing demands on their services, often without accompanying increases in resources.

Improve police response to reports of sexual violence

In 2017 government [convened a multi-sector and agency stakeholder](#) group led by the Department of Public Safety to provide recommendations on improving police response to reports of sexual violence. The Women's Council is part of this group and hopes to see it provide recommendations to government in the coming months. The recommendations will require commitment and support.

Racism

Establish a commission of inquiry into systemic bias and racism against Indigenous people in police and justice systems, as per the call to action from the Mi'gmaq and Wolastoqey Chiefs in New Brunswick

The Chiefs have expressed that a review of existing reports and recommendations, as proposed by government in response to their call for an inquiry, will not suffice. While an inquiry must take existing reports and recommendations into account, new work that is New Brunswick-specific must also be undertaken. The inquiry must be independent and Indigenous-led.

Responding to Black Lives Matter calls to action

Black Lives Matter Fredericton/New Brunswick has issued [these calls](#):

- “incorporate content on the history of slavery, segregation, and systemic oppression in New Brunswick and Canada into the public school curriculum of New Brunswick”
- “commission independent research on the personal, social, and economic impacts of racism in New Brunswick and develop an action plan to remedy these issues through an anti-racist strategy” and
- “implement mandatory cultural competency/ anti-racism training for police and government officials.”

Health care

Many New Brunswickers struggle with adequate access to primary health care. While this brief does not speak specifically to this, many of the recommendations below will support work to address the issue.

Improve access to mental health services

Increase the availability of mental health services. This will relieve pressure on family practices, community health centres, walk-in clinics and

hospitals. Early-intervention, ongoing maintenance, and crisis services must all be available.

Increase support for midwifery services in New Brunswick

Midwifery care saves money and reduces stress on hospitals and specialists by moving low-risk pregnancies into a community health care setting. The existing demonstration site in Fredericton must be better resourced not only to serve the local community, but also to generate data required for evaluating the site and planning the expansion of midwifery services to more regions of the province.

Enable pharmacists to prescribe hormonal birth control

In other Canadian jurisdictions, pharmacists’ regulated scope of practice allows them to prescribe hormonal birth control. This should be explored in New Brunswick to help improve access to health care while reducing stress on family practices, community health centres, walk-in clinics, and hospitals. Should this be integrated into the services pharmacists can offer, it should be eligible for billing to Medicare.

Abortion access

Regional access to surgical abortion must be expanded by the Regional Health Authorities.

Stakeholders inside and outside of government must work together to find ways to provide information to New Brunswickers on how to access medical abortion outside of Family Planning Clinics at hospitals (i.e. how to access a prescription from family practice or community health centre and have it filled at a community-based pharmacy).

Despite the closure of Clinic 554, we continue to recommend that government revise regulations under the *Medical Services Payment Act* to allow surgical abortions outside of hospitals to be billed to Medicare. Unfortunately, it is clear that

government will not do this unless it is legally compelled to, so we are eager to see the Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA) [pursue this matter](#). We sincerely hope that in responding to the CCLA government will engage with the substance of the challenge rather than attempting have it dismissed, as past governments have done, by challenging the standing of the complainant.

Health care for the LGBTQIA2+ community

The closure of Clinic 554 has significantly increased the gap in health care for the LGBTQIA2+ community in our province. This must be swiftly addressed and members of the community must be engaged in planning how this issue is addressed.

Better decision-making

Address social deficits and debts

Social deficits are the gap between what people need in terms of services and what is available to them. Like fiscal deficits, social deficits do not simply disappear at the start of a new year; they become debt with interest. The interest looks like problems becoming more entrenched and complex, both in individuals' lives and as public policy issues, the longer that adequate services are missing.

These deficits and debt are not publicly accounted for with the same attention that fiscal or infrastructure deficits are; they are not typically assessed rigorously and regularly by governments to have dollar values assigned or long-term costs projected clearly—that has to change.

Engage in co-creation

One of the best ways to increase the odds of success when addressing an issue is by involving the people and communities who are impacted by it in the process of identifying the problem, designing the solution, and establishing how the outcomes will be evaluated. This is co-creation.

Too often, however, this is not what happens. Government often relies on superficial engagement and consultation, which erodes public trust. Co-creation will not only result in better decisions but will also increase public trust in government. This, in turn, can help ensure that evidence-based decisions and investments in effective initiatives, programs, and services are resistant to being altered or cut without good reason.

Public disclosure on the use of gender-based analysis

Gender-based analysis (GBA) is a tool used to assess how specific populations may experience policies, programs, and initiatives differently than others (GBA that is tailored to the budget process is sometimes called gender budgeting). GBA goes beyond sex and gender to consider intersecting factors that shape individuals' experiences, including age, location, race, culture, ability, and language. As a matter of transparency and accountability, government should publicly share more information about when GBA is used in decision-making and when a decision may be exempted from requiring GBA as well as information generated by GBA processes.

A note on community-based not-for-profit organizations

These organizations have a critical role to play in understanding and addressing social deficits and debts, co-creation, gender-based analysis, and gender budgeting. Government must move to longer-term, sustainable operational funding models for these organizations to support service delivery, internal capacity-building, and improve wages for workers.