

Fall 2020 Ontario Pre-Budget Submission Prepared for the Minister of Finance

October 16, 2020

YWCA Toronto transforms lives. As the city's largest multi-service women's organization, we help women escape violence, move out of poverty and access safe, affordable housing. We work tenaciously to break down barriers that hold women and girls back from achieving equality. Annually, our Association serves over 13,000 people, including trans and non-binary community members. To learn more about our Association, please refer to our [2019 Annual Report](#).

As a member of a provincial YWCA coalition, we offer a range of housing options, employment and training programs, community supports, and girls' programs – all designed to address the needs of girls, women, and gender-diverse people. We also engage in systemic advocacy to advance substantive gender equality in our city and our province.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated gender and racial inequalities. We are tremendously concerned about the communities we serve and the unequal impacts of the pandemic on low-income individuals and families, particularly women who are precariously housed and survivors of gender-based violence. Fairness, equality, and justice are just some of principles that we think should guide recovery efforts – and to ensure the needs of women are not overlooked during a health crisis that is clearly gendered.

To support an equitable, gender-responsive 2020 budget, YWCA Toronto recommends the Province

1. Reinstates the \$4 salary enhancement for front-line workers

- a. Reinstates the \$4 per hour salary increase for front-line workers that ended in August, 2020. The 'pandemic pay premium' was a powerful financial acknowledgment of the dedication, long hours, and health risks assumed by front-line workers. Although Personal Support Workers continue to receive a wage enhancement, front-line workers in our sector no longer receive a top up.
- b. Front-line workers at certain shelters are dealing with a workplace exclusivity order and now a reduction in the premium pay – and some are struggling to make ends meet in a city as expensive as Toronto. The wage enhancement will boost employee morale and support front-line workers who face a level of risk today that is parallel to COVID-19's first wave.
- c. Many front-line jobs are performed by racialized women. It is important the Province continues to demonstrate its commitment to gender and racial equality by enhancing support to front-line workers.

2. Invests \$100 million in COVID-related upskilling for women workers

- a. Recognize women as a specialized demographic within the transformation framework of the Employment Ontario program. Women should be considered a priority employment group particularly in light of COVID-19.
- b. Invest \$100 million in new money towards women's upskilling programs for women impacted by COVID and to support low income women's access to the labour market. Invest in women-specific training programs provided by women-centered non-profits.
- c. Focus investment in trades and technology programs for women. YWCA Toronto has not yet received a call for proposals for these trades-related programs.
- d. Continue funding for the Women's Economic Security Programs (WESP).

3. Prioritizes Child Care

- a. Implement base-funding to licensed centre-based care and home child care agencies to ensure that child care options remain accessible and affordable, allowing child care workers to survive the pandemic financially.
- b. Implement the 17 recommendations captured in the Ontario Coalition for Better Childcare's Report, "[From Reopening to Recovery](#)."

- c. Prioritize support for non-profit child care centres that are currently operating at a deficit to ensure these spots do not close permanently. Currently, many non-profit child care spots like YWCA Toronto's Early Learning Centre are operating at a substantial deficit. Non-profit operators across the province are facing the threat of sector-wide child care closure.
- 4. Reforms Social Security**
- a. Accept the federal government's assessment that a minimum of \$2000/month is needed for individuals to make ends meet, and invest in increases to OW and ODSP until monthly benefits reflect this minimum standard, ensuring that people living with disabilities have access to additional supports.
 - b. Increase the Ontario Child Benefit (OCB) and remove all immigration status-based barriers preventing access to provincial child benefits.
 - c. Remove immigration status barriers from eligibility to income support so that all people in Ontario can access income security measures.
- 5. Implements a Sector Stabilization Fund**
- a. Commit to a stabilization fund for Ontario's non-profits immediately as [recommended by the Ontario Nonprofit Network](#) (ONN). Commit to contributing at least \$680 million to this fund by the end of 2020.
 - b. The non-profit sector needs public funding to support necessary infrastructure costs to continue providing responsive essential services, as well as cover additional costs related to COVID-19.
 - c. Many non-profits are at risk of permanently closing services. The ability to support communities facing poverty and other forms of marginalization will be greatly reduced without sustained government investment – with alarming consequences for women and racialized communities.
- 6. Introduces a Robust Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS)**
- a. Develop a PRS that tracks disaggregated socio-demographic data to measure progress on poverty reduction targets and evaluate outcomes. Such metrics will hold the PRS accountable to the needs of communities disproportionately impacted by poverty such as women, Indigenous and Black communities, newcomers, people with disabilities, seniors, and LGBTQ2S+ populations.
 - b. Not all jobs offer a path out of poverty. A narrow definition of poverty reduction that focuses on employment alone ignores [the rise of the working poor](#) in Ontario and the proliferation of precarious employment. **To reduce poverty in Ontario, labour market conditions must improve.**
 - c. A robust PRS should emphasize the need for quality wraparound supports including increased social assistance rates, enhanced investment in employment programs, the prioritization of affordable and supportive housing solutions, and the improvement of labour conditions in particular low-income and feminized industries. Please refer to YWCA Toronto's [comprehensive PRS submission](#) for more details.
- 7. Invests in HousingTO 2020-2030**
- a. Invest dollars to realize the [HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan](#). To create 40,000 new affordable housing units in Toronto, the City has urged the Province to invest approximately \$7 billion over the next nine years. Only \$148 million has been committed to-date. Provincial and federal investments are required to make this goal a reality, and the province must do its part to address Toronto's housing crisis.
 - b. HousingTO will deliver 40,000 new units of affordable housing, including 10,000 new units for women and girls by 2030. Supporting this innovative housing plan through new provincial dollars will demonstrate the Province's commitment to address the specific housing needs of women and women-led families, which have only grown during the pandemic.
- 8. Creates a Provincial Action Plan Against Gender-Based Violence (GBV)**
- a. The rise of domestic violence dubbed the 'shadow pandemic' has impacted many women and added additional strain on the Violence Against Women shelter system, mental health services, and related programs.
 - b. Despite several one-time increased investments by both provincial and federal governments, without a provincial strategy specific to Ontario, responses to gender-based violence will continue to be fragmented and inadequate.
 - c. A comprehensive action plan with ambitious targets and robust funding will help address and eliminate the rise of violence against women, girls and gender-diverse people so often associated with economic recessions.

For more information, please contact [Heather McGregor](#), CEO, YWCA Toronto.