



**Prosperity for the Majority:
Toward Economic Security for Women**
Pre-Budget Submission to the House Standing Committee on Finance
YWCA Canada
August 13, 2010

The Economic Status of Women in Canada: Not Equal Yet

For over 100 years, YWCA Canada has advocated for policies and programs that improve the lives of women and girls. Our perspective is grounded in first-hand knowledge of the life experiences of tens of thousands of women who use our programs and services every year, from Victoria to Yellowknife to Iqaluit to Halifax, and in our roles as Canada's largest provider of shelter for women and children fleeing violence and second largest provider of childcare.

In 2009, women surpassed men to become the majority of Canadians in paid employment. Women make up 47% of the nation's taxpayers, yet earn only 71% of what men earn, measured in annual earnings of full-time, full-year workers.¹ With the highest levels of working mothers in our history, 23% of mother-led families still have incomes below the poverty line and 36% of children living in a low-income family live with a single, female parent.² The median income for single moms remains more than a third lower than for single dads.³

Poverty rates are higher for women of colour, Aboriginal women and women with disabilities, that is, for women who have historically faced barriers of discrimination in Canada.⁴ As we noted in our 2008 summary *Report on the Status of Women in Canada*, the enormous changes for women over the last fifty years have not "have not been enough to right Canada's historical gender imbalance, nor to raise the status of all women."

Prosperity for the Majority: Ensuring Women's Economic Security

Women make up the majority of Canada's population, and are a steadily increasing portion of a workforce that is, at this point in our history, essentially comprised equally of men and women. Building a prosperous future for our country must include building a prosperous future for women in Canada. When women and their families prosper, the nation prospers. Women can no longer be treated as an add-on in our economic

prospectus. Women are central to the nation's prosperity and productivity. An economic policy that fails to recognize this will fail for lack of foundation in the realities of Canada today.⁵

Implement Gender Budget Analysis: Extensive, Effective and Equal

Gender-based analysis of spending is used to assess the impact of policies and budgets on women and to evaluate for gender bias in government spending. Also known as gender budget analysis, this is a tool for understanding the “gender impacts of budget processes and macroeconomic policies.”⁶ Application of gender-budget analysis is not an end in itself but a step in the budget process that permits correction for gender bias of policies incorrectly assumed to be gender neutral. For example:

- Stimulus spending announced in Budget 2009 contained \$8 billion for infrastructure projects. Only 7% of construction workers and of trades and transportation workers are women. Gender budget analysis reveals that 93% of this labour force spending would go to men, massively exceeding the greater impact of the recession on male workers.
- Personal tax changes in Budget 2009 also reveal gender bias, with 70% of the benefit of raising the upper limit of the income bracket taxed at 22% going to men as well as 67% of the benefit for those in the 15% tax bracket.⁷

In October 2009, at the Public Accounts Committee, the Auditor-General requested, without success, documentation of how the government's central agencies use gender-based analysis in their advice to Cabinet. If, as has been reported, no such written record is maintained, documentation should be instituted immediately and released to the Auditor-General for verification when requested.⁸

Budget 2011 should commit the federal government to implementing the recommendations of the February 2009 Report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, *Towards Gender Responsive Budgeting: Rising to the Challenge of Achieving Gender Equality*.

With Women in View: Economic Choices for the Federal Government in 2011

While the federal government has expressed concern with the federal budget deficit, created by years of tax cuts that have shrunk the national tax base and the sharp recession of 2008-09, it should also be concerned about fostering a modern economy that embraces the increasing role of women in the workforce. Government action can and should change the poverty picture for women in Canada. This is not about spending more, but about spending differently, investing in a future workforce that will be at least equally women and men, and may well be dominated by women in the not too distance future. The economic cost of poverty to Canadians has recently been estimated at \$30 billion per year;⁹ the cost of violence against women exceeds \$4 billion per year.¹⁰ The federal government should look to this figure - \$34 billion - as a source for the initiatives discussed below, because spending on these will be offset by cost reductions.

1) Child Care: Women need quality, affordable early learning and child care for their children.

Despite more than 30 years of uninterrupted increases in women's workforce participation, access to quality child care remains massively inadequate. Canada needs a publicly-funded early learning and child care program based on the principles of universality, quality and affordability and delivered in regulated non-profit and public settings.

With the federal government's abandonment of a national child care program in 2006, provincial governments have turned to full-day kindergarten as one step in building toward universal child care. The federal government needs to return to the field and engage with provincial and territorial governments to support creation of accessible, affordable child care across Canada. Investment in child care for low-income families yields a substantial financial rate of return, anywhere from \$4 to \$16 for every dollar invested, according to studies.¹¹ Early learning and child care is a fiscally smart investment today that can reduce the future national debt burden on the very children who use it.

Budget 2011 should commit the federal government to opening discussions with the provinces on a new federal-provincial agreement on early learning and child care to be funded in Federal Budget 2012.

2) Housing: Women need safe, affordable housing, with access to social supports when necessary to maintain their housing.

Every year 100,000 women and children in Canada leave their homes fleeing violence, risking poverty and homelessness in order to find safety.¹² This is the equivalent of the entire population of Moose Jaw or Thunder Bay packing up and leaving home. A strong income support system is crucial to women leaving abuse behind and establishing secure lives for themselves and their children. So is a safe place to live.

The federal government, in cooperation with provincial and territorial governments, needs to develop and implement a comprehensive National Housing Strategy, with a gender lens. The strategy must cover Emergency, Second Stage and Permanent Housing and ensure every woman in Canada has a safe, affordable roof over her head. Inuit, First Nation, Métis and urban Aboriginal women and their organizations should lead development of sectoral housing strategies for their populations.

Budget 2011 should commit to the development of a comprehensive National Housing Strategy with a gender lens, including Emergency, Second Stage and Permanent Housing for women and substantial re-investment of funding in CMHC with a mandate to ensure every woman in Canada has a safe, affordable home.

As an element of the National Housing Strategy, the federal government must ensure that all Canadian women have access to emergency shelter when they need it. This means addressing the lack of a shelter system in the north and access to shelter for women with disabilities and rural women. A housing crisis exists in all three territories and women with children who are trying to escape violence are profoundly affected by the shortage of all types of housing. Women in the three northern territories have been seriously disadvantaged by the lack federal social housing funding.¹³

Budget 2011 should include immediate funding of \$100 million for women's housing in Northern Canada - including emergency shelters which accommodate children, second-stage and low-income housing - to address the housing crisis in Nunavut, the Yukon and the Northwest Territories.

It's long past time that Canadian governments, at all levels, addressed women's street homelessness with an effective coordinated program. Women living on the streets of Canadian cities are highly vulnerable. With an annual sexual assault rate of 20% and an average time on the street of 3-4 years, for women, street homelessness is a virtual guarantee of being raped.¹⁴ Many have experienced abuse and trauma, and struggle with resulting mental health and addiction issues. Yet, there is a severe shortage of detox beds dedicated to women. Street-focused programs specifically for women are few and far between. We are a nation slowly waking to the disappearance of almost 600 missing and murdered Aboriginal women¹⁵ and on the evidence these occurrences are not unrelated. By failing, as a nation, to ensure no woman has to live on the streets, we have left women open to murder. Costs of the initiative will be offset in reduced costs for health care, policing, justice administration and incarceration.

Budget 2011 should make \$35 million in funding available through the Homelessness Partnering Strategy to non-profit service and health agencies working with homeless and marginalized women to support innovative programming to ensure no woman sleeps on the street including increasing detox beds dedicated to women.

3) Violence Against Women: Canada Needs Coordinated Policies

At a cost to Canadians that has been estimated at over \$4 billion annually, violence against women and girls has a high price tag economically and personally. Incidents of violence appear daily in the news, from mothers and children murdered to teenagers assaulted, to a local chief of police explaining the source of her broken arm. Canada needs to implement coordinated policies at all levels and across jurisdictions that will ensure women's safety. The federal government should lead the coordination process.

Budget 2011 should commit the federal government to leading a process to coordinate policies on violence against women at all three levels of government to ensure women's safety.

Women need a legal environment that supports their efforts to establish safe, secure lives for themselves and their children post-violence. Leaving home to escape violence often causes severe disruption of income. Without access to legal representation, court proceedings can leave a woman and her children at a disadvantage that impacts life-long.¹⁶ Women need access to legal representation through provincial and territorial legal aid systems to ensure they do not plead to offences they haven't committed - such as assault charges for self-defence against an abusive spouse - and that they are adequately represented in custody and child support hearings.

Budget 2011 should increase the proportion of federal transfer payments for legal aid to the provinces and territories that are dedicated to family law and commit funds for a national consultation on mandatory charging.

Building Prosperity for Women and for Canada

Women are key to Canada's economic prosperity today and will become more critical in the future. Policies which ignore women's role in the economy will not strengthen the nation. Adoption of gender budget analysis is essential to providing policies that build Canada's economy. Nation-wide child care is essential to supporting women and men in the workforce and to raising resilient children with the capacity to fully realize their potential. As women continue to assume a greater share of the tax burden, policies must be shaped to support their lives.

Prepared by Ann Decter, Director of Advocacy and Public Policy, adecter@ywcacanada.ca

¹ Statistics Canada, *Income Trends in Canada, 2007* and *Canadian Labour Force Survey, 2007*.

² Based on the LICO-AT, and Statistics Canada, *Income of Canada*, 17 June 2010.

³ Statistics Canada, *Income of Canada*, 17 June 2010.

⁴ Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada: A Gender-Based Statistical Report, 2005*.

⁵ For example, although general poverty rates for Aboriginal women are much higher than for non-Aboriginal women, for women with one or more post-secondary degrees, Aboriginal women have a higher median income than non-Aboriginal women. *The Income Gap between Aboriginals and the Rest of Canada*, CCPA 2010.

⁶ Isabella Bakker, "Gender Budget Initiatives and Why the Matter in Canada", *Alternative Federal Budget 2006*, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2006.

⁷ K. Lahey, *Budget 2009: Designed to leave Women Behind – Again*, January 2009.

⁸ Cynthia Munster, "Treasury Board won't commit to documenting GBA", *The Hill-Times*, Oct. 26, 2009.

⁹ Nathan Laurie, *The Cost of Poverty: An Analysis of the Economic Cost of Poverty in Ontario*, Ontario Association of Feed Banks, November 2008.

¹⁰ Minister of State for Status of Women Guergis, Speech to the Economic Club, Toronto, Feb. 8, 2010.

¹¹ Nathan Laurie, *The Cost of Poverty: An Analysis of the Economic Cost of Poverty in Ontario*, Ontario Association of Feed Banks, November 2008.

¹² J. Sauv e & M. Burns, *Residents of Canada's shelters for abused women 2008*, Statistics Canada, 2009.

¹³ YWCA Canada, *Life Beyond Shelter: Toward Coordinated Policies for Women's Safety and Violence Prevention*, YWCA Canada, October 2009.

¹⁴ Sistering and Street Health, *Women's Homelessness Bulletin*, June 2008.

¹⁵ Native Women's Association of Canada, <http://www.nwac-hq.org/programs/sisters-spirit>, 2010

¹⁶ YWCA Canada, *Life Beyond Shelter*, YWCA Canada, October 2009.