

April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.  
Prime Minister of Canada  
Langevin Block  
Ottawa, ON  
K1A 0A2

**RE: YWCA Canada needs Funding to Fight the Spread of COVID-19 and Protect Gender Equity**

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

During these challenging times, I want to thank you for your steady, responsive leadership and your willingness to respond to the emerging needs of vulnerable people across Canada while also supporting the middle class. In these volatile circumstances, we have appreciated your commitment to speed and supporting vulnerable communities.

**At this time, the federation of 32 YWCAs are requesting \$2.8 million dollars to support YWCA's efforts in flattening the curve and serving vulnerable populations in communities across Canada.** Collectively we invest \$258 million into 300 communities across Canada annually. We want to stay open to fight this coronavirus.

We were so glad to see the commitments over the last few weeks to support domestic violence shelters, the Reaching Home program to address homelessness, and the creation of the Canada Emergency Relief Benefit, all of which will greatly help women and gender diverse people.

**We need to ensure that the pre-existing commitment of ensuring a minimum of 25% of the National Housing Strategy funding invests in women-focused initiatives continues. This includes programs such as Reaching Home.**

COVID-19 has only increased the need; that's why charities like YWCAs across Canada have stepped up and gone above and beyond the call of duty. But we are struggling. We worry about the ability to keep our doors open and the lights on. Our YWCAs need urgent support to provide emergency relief to women, girls, Two-Spirit and gender diverse people. We're preventing gender-based violence and complementing our domestic violence shelter work.

The requested funds \$2.8 million in funds would be critical to:

- Supporting non-VAW shelters, second stage housing, supportive housing, residential services for women with disabilities and other shelter and housing services YWCAs provide that need personal protective equipment and physical distancing measures not currently supported from the \$26 million dollars for domestic violence shelters and sexual assault centres. Our staff have moved women into hotels and dealt with landlords who are demanding sexual favours in exchange for rent decreases.
- Supporting non-VAW housing to support women who have experienced human trafficking and sexual exploitation; as we have seen demand for these services double since the pandemic's inception.
- Purchasing personal protective equipment for essential workers to be safe while providing care; as asymptomatic transmission puts our workers at risk. Also purchasing equipment so we can continue to connect with vulnerable community members and support with safety planning and counselling.
- Allowing YWCAs to stay open and address anticipated revenue shortfalls due to cancelled fundraising events, diminishing donations and corporate sponsorships, and closure of social enterprises

This is by no means an exhaustive list but highlights the key urgent needs we have to address COVID-19.

As the CEO of YWCA Canada, one of the largest movements serving women, girls, Two-Spirit and gender diverse people, I am seeing the gendered impacts of COVID-19 play out across the country in devastating ways.

Women are on the frontlines of this crisis, risking health and safety to keep our society running.

From grocery store clerks, to shelter workers to cleaners to early childhood educators and other essential frontline workers, women are stepping up for their communities in extraordinary ways. They're doing essential work but don't have the supports they need to be safe. For people to do their jobs and stay healthy, they need personal protective equipment, paid sick leave and pay top-ups so they can put food on the table, pay rent and take care of their families.

As we saw in last week's labour force participation data from Statistics Canada, they are also facing the brunt of this economic crisis. In March 2020, 1.8 million women either lost their job or had a reduction of hours. 63% of the 1 million workers who lost their job in March 2020 were women. Black, Indigenous and racialized women are disproportionately represented in these job losses. If we don't do something, women and gender diverse people will be left behind.

**In the days to come as the Federal government works with provinces and territories to fund top-ups for essential workers, the definition must expand to include the full breadth of people continuing to work to support us all.** This includes food preparation workers, child care workers, shelter workers who work within and outside the violence against women sector, supportive housing workers, cleaners, facilities management staff and all other essential frontline workers. All essential workers are making it possible to keep our work safe everyday.

Since the start of this crisis, the YWCA federation has been on the ground providing emergency relief and operating essential services. We will always be there for our communities, but we need the power and support of the Federal government to make that happen. During this unprecedented time, we have an opportunity to do right by the people we need the most. Together, we can flatten the curve, support communities and move towards equitable recovery so we can all thrive and stay healthy.

Yours Sincerely,



Maya Roy, BSW, MSc., CEO of YWCA Canada

Co-signatories:

YWCA Calgary	YWCA Moncton	YWCA Regina
YWCA Cambridge	Y des Femmes de Montréal	YWCA St. John's
YWCA Halifax	YMCA-YWCA of the National Capital Region	YWCA St. Thomas Elgin
YWCA Hamilton	YWCA Niagara Region	YWCA Sudbury
YWCA Kitchener-Waterloo	YWCA Prince Albert	YWCA Toronto

CC :

The Honourable Maryam Monsef, P.C., M.P., Minister for Women and Gender Equality  
The Honourable Ahmed Hussen, P.C., M.P., Minister of Families, Children and Social Development