



# INSIGHTS FOR POLICY

## FOR THE PREMIER'S COUNCIL FOR RECOVERY AND GROWTH

*The following insights and policy directions for a gender-sensitive recovery in PEI come from participants in interviews and a roundtable for the forthcoming report Gender & COVID-19 in Prince Edward Island: In the Words of Women-Identifying Islanders, March to July, 2020, from the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women.*

*The PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women would be pleased to provide more substantive analysis and recommendations on any of these insights.*

○ The resilience of caregivers, most of whom are women, will determine how healthily and fully Prince Edward Island emerges from lockdowns and from the pandemic. Caregivers' resilience is built on reliable support systems that provide respite, priority on social contact and networking for caregiving above other kinds of social interaction, mental health and addiction supports, accessible public services and spaces, and support for voluntary sector programs and services.

○ The public education of our children is essential, and priority should remain on keeping schools open for safe in-person learning with trained, valued teachers, staff, and administrators—even if keeping schools open requires sacrifice of economic and social opportunities for adults (for example, in bars or eat-in restaurants).

**There will be no recovery without high-quality accessible and affordable childcare, eldercare, and other supports for caregivers.**

○ A basic income guarantee, which distributes economic benefits to meet basic needs according to human rights rather than ability to work, has the best chance to value unpaid labour and increase gender equality after the pandemic. The Province of PEI should work tirelessly with the federal government to ensure a permanent Basic Income Guarantee (BIG) program launches in PEI and is built to be scaled up to all of Canada.

○ A recovery plan that focuses on restoring or making whole those who were doing well before the pandemic will reinstate the same inequalities that left women and other groups vulnerable to the worst effects of the pandemic. Benefits resulting from investment in recovery must be available equitably across all genders and structurally disadvantaged groups: an explicit goal needs to be making the distribution of benefits better than it was, for more people.

○ Focusing a recovery on the pipedream of limitless "growth" will cause irreparable harm to ecosystems; recovery must be founded on principles of sustainability. Prince Edward Island's gender-sensitive plan for recovery should be fully integrated with plans for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

○ Investment will be needed in the public sector to support public sector workers, public services, and public spaces. Austerity measures are likely to harm women and groups that face discrimination.

○ Social infrastructure is as important as physical infrastructure. Public services and spaces need to be universal and accessible and to include childcare and eldercare, housing, public transit, health care, Internet, green spaces, and active transportation routes.

- Due to continuing barriers to women in construction and trades, a recovery plan needs to invest in social infrastructure, including the voluntary sector, to better support gender equality. Building only physical infrastructure will not address women's unemployment.
- Programs to support small business need to include supports for entrepreneurs with small budgets, few or no employees, or that are set up for owners' subsistence.
- Now more than ever, during recovery from COVID-19, the promised comprehensive review of the Employment Standards Act with inclusive, extensive, meaningful public consultation is urgently needed. Employment Standards also need to respond to more workers teleworking than ever before to ensure minimum standards and job protections.
- Occupational Health and Safety regulations require updates to ensure the health and safety of workers who return to offices and workspaces (for example, new standards for air filtration and circulation) and also to workers who are directed to work from home and face different health and safety challenges there.
- Strong provincial support and leadership are needed for major national programs that will promote health and resilience, such as pharmacare, childcare, and eldercare.
- Information-sharing within systems and across departments and silos is even more challenged than prior to the pandemic, with some services closed to the public, some teleworking part-time or full-time, and some facing restrictions on how they fulfill their mandate. New systems for sharing information to protect the health and wellbeing of people facing complex challenges in this new context are urgently needed.
- A compassionate and fair plan for people who received overpayments of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit or other emergency benefits will be required if PEI and Canada return to past income support models.
- Proactive planning is needed to continue and build prevention programs. Prevention of violence, prevention of chronic disease, and social determinants of health require priority even in an emergency situation; ignoring prevention risks long-term harms.
- Access and continuous improvements to walk-in clinics for physical and mental health, respite programs, addiction recovery services, and other services that support people before problems reach crisis level are essential services, and they normalize asking for help and support before situations become acute or chronic.
- The pandemic revealed gaps in research and data related to burdens of caregiving and to gender-based or family violence. These gaps should be filled with gender-disaggregated data and support for feminist research and analysis.
- Rigorous, real-time comparison of what is working well to support gender-sensitive recovery in other jurisdictions is vital so we can adopt similar strategies for PEI.
- Communications and messages from government matter. Participants in this report generally praised the PEI government for its communication of key messages and for making clear public statements about gendered issues such as gender-based violence.
- Recovery planning in PEI still needs improvement in gender-equitable participation and influence in recovery decision-making processes, especially because of low representation of women, diverse groups, and women from diverse groups in Cabinet. While there is greater gender parity and diversity on the Premier's Council for Recovery and Growth, and lived experience is important, the Premier's Council lacks experts in gender and diversity analysis.

**All aspects of recovery planning require application of a gender and diversity lens to ensure greater equality of outcomes for all genders, all groups that face systemic and structural barriers to equality, and women and gender minorities who also belong to groups that experience discrimination.**

