



Advisory Council on the
Status of Women

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PEI ADVISORY COUNCIL ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN SUBMISSION TO PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS FOR THE 2022-2023 OPERATING BUDGET

Questions come from the provincial government's survey on their website for pre-budget consultations. See <https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/service/pre-budget-consultations-for-the-2022-2023-operating-budget> (survey page is no longer available).

Introduction: Gender Budgeting

The PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women continues to advocate for Prince Edward Island's government to use the practice of **gender budgeting** to develop the 2022-2023 budget. Further, we advocate for the provincial government to consider developing legislation for the Province of PEI that mirrors the *Canadian Gender Budgeting Act* passed by Parliament in December 2018, with the goal of "enshrining the Government's commitment to decision making that takes into consideration the impacts of policies on all Canadians in a budgetary context." (The most recent WAGE Impacts Report, for Budget 2021, includes an assessment of the impact of every budget measure included in that federal budget and is available here: <https://www.budget.gc.ca/2021/report-rapport/anx4-en.html>.) The federal government notes, "Gender budgeting is a foundational element of the Government's strategy to improve equality in Canada."

Gender budgeting applies tools to the process of budgeting that are already widely in use within the PEI government: the tools known within the provincial government as **gender and diversity analysis** and known within the federal government as **Gender-based analysis plus (GBA+)**.

It is very important to Council members to emphasize that gender budgeting must include consideration of intersectionality in gender and diversity analysis. Gender must be considered alongside intersecting factors such as race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national and ethnic origin, Indigenous origin or identity, age, socio-economic condition, place of residence and disability. To cite the federal government's guide to gender budgeting, "the Government also recognizes that identities are complex. Not all women experience inequality, and not all men experience privilege.

Binary notions of gender do not work for all Canadians, and race, class, sexuality, and ability—among other facets—all intersect to profoundly impact how gender is experienced in daily life.” (See: <https://www.budget.gc.ca/2019/docs/plan/chap-05-en.html>.)

A note of congratulations: one of the first principles of gender budgeting is supporting and encouraging gender-equitable participation and influence in recovery decision-making processes. This is especially important in PEI because of low representation of women, diverse groups, and women from diverse groups in Cabinet. The Department of Finance and the Government of PEI should be commended for work to examine the gender and diversity factors in pre-budget consultations and for consulting with women and gender minorities, diverse groups, and women from diverse groups about what would meet their needs in last year’s consultation process and continuing to use what you heard into the current year’s planning.

Advisory Council members have been analysing reports from all government departments in preparation for the 2022 Equality Report Card for Prince Edward Island, and the steps towards gender budgeting are notable.

In its response to a questionnaire from the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women in 2021, the Department of Finance reported the following excellent progress towards applying gender budgeting in its work. To quote their questionnaire response directly:

- In the course of applying a gender and diversity lens, conversations between staff members of the Department of Finance; the Interministerial Women’s Secretariat; and Executive Council Office led to the formation of the Task Force for Advancing Gender Equity and Diversity – an interdepartmental working group with a goal of building GBA+ capacity in support of government-wide initiatives that promote equity, diversity and inclusion.
- When requesting budget priorities in the capital budget or management planning process, Treasury Board now requires departments, crowns and agencies to ensure submissions are made with consideration to gender equity and diversity, ensuring these important factors are contemplated early in the planning process.
- For the recent capital budget, Departments were required to identify gender and diversity considerations given to its capital projects. The Task Force for Advancing Gender Equity and Diversity representatives in each Department provided assistance with, or developed, the responses.
- For the upcoming operating budget, Treasury Board is requiring departments, crowns and agencies to provide a list of the potential new initiatives to their respective Task Force member. The member will provide the information to the Gender and Diversity Analyst and the Director of the Interministerial Women’s Secretariat (IWS) to apply a gender and diversity lens. The Task Force member will serve as a liaison between IWS and the department.

What areas would you like to see government spending in the 2022-2023 Operating Budget?

BASIC INCOME GUARANTEE

In the view of the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women, the most important investment the provincial government could make right now would be in a program of **Basic Income Guarantee**. We support the province-wide program outlined by the Special Committee on Poverty on PEI and believe their fully costed plan meets gender equity goals and the principles of a just recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. It is our opinion that investment in a basic income guarantee is key to recovery and should be clearly reflected in the 2022-2023 budget.

We are members of the PEI Working Group for a Livable Income and support their December 17, 2020, open letter to Premier King calling for implementation of a basic income guarantee based on the Special Committee's ground-breaking report. (See this link for the Special Committee report:

<https://docs.assembly.pe.ca/download/dms?objectId=ebb58bb4-b7db-43b9-9c69-fa59f27aac51&fileName=FINAL%20REPORT%20-%20Special%20Committee%20on%20Poverty%20in%20PEI%20-%20November%2027,%202020.pdf>. See this link for the Working Group for a Livable

Income response: <https://peiwgli.ca/2020/12/17/open-letter-to-premier-king-in-support-of-the-final-report-of-the-special-committee-on-poverty-in-pei/>.)

CONTINUED COVID-RELIEF AND SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Collective recovery from COVID-19 should be the continued focus for the 2022-2023 operating budget for PEI. It is important to note: the effects of the pandemic have been different on different genders. Women and gender minorities, especially women and gender-minorities who are also young or also racialized, have faced the greatest loss of employment and risk of unemployment. Gender effects are so pronounced, feminist economists have described the pandemic-induced recession as a “she-cession” and have reminded policy-makers there will be no recovery without a “she-covey.”

PEI's Statistical Review of Women (4th edition, 2020) noted significant effects on women's employment in PEI in 2020; these statistics stand out in PEI compared to the rest of Canada. The number of women 15 and over employed in PEI decreased by 5.7% in 2020 compared to 2019, while there was no change in the employment rate for men. Conversely, the unemployment rate in PEI increased in 2020 by 3.8 percentage points for women, while the total labour force shrank. (See <https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/publication/women-in-prince-edward-island-statistical-review-fourth-edition>.)

Recovery will only be as effective as its support for the people most affected. Because those most affected are affected due to gender factors and diversity factors, recovery responses and budgets must be gender responsive and determined based on a meaningful gender and diversity analysis. This is necessary to achieve equitable outcomes for all.

In planning for equity in recovery -- and in all budget processes -- one thing that is important to Council members is to consider equity between on-reserve and off-reserve Mi'kmaw and Indigenous residents. Unequitable disbursement of funds to on-reserve and off-reserve creates divisions in Indigenous communities and even in and between families. The Province has a role in creating greater equity and ending practices that come from a colonialist point of view that is not in the true spirit of reconciliation.

POVERTY ELIMINATION

In the category statement for the Equality Report Card, Council members set their expectations for poverty elimination in this way: "We expect the provincial government to set a high priority on improving the health, dignity, and wellbeing of poor and economically vulnerable Islanders and to work towards a province where everyone has a livable income. Livable income means that people can meet their basic needs in good health and dignity and can also deal with emergencies. Basic needs must include access to enough healthy food and to affordable, accessible, appropriate, and safe housing. We expect responsive, flexible, non-stigmatizing social programs and meaningful action to implement an effective cross-governmental provincial strategy to eliminate poverty."

Accessible and Affordable Housing

The pandemic combined with the high cost of housing has amplified the need for more affordable and accessible housing across PEI. Since the last budget, there have been improvements in the provision of accessible housing (22% or 99 units of new government owned units or units approved through the Affordable Housing Development Program have been accessible) and the Council urges these initiatives to continue.

According to the Province's website, there are more than 350 families waiting for subsidized housing, with 88 of those waiting for assistance from the Seniors Housing Program. Continued investment in affordable housing is essential. We are concerned, however, about the definition of "affordable housing. There is a disconnect between the definition of 22-25% lower than market value which can often translate into rental rates well beyond those that live close to the poverty line; the working poor and seniors can afford and the small number of units that are available at subsidized rates of 25% of gross family income. For example, CMHC's assessment of core housing need is based on a combination of whether "A household is below one or more of the adequacy, suitability and affordability standards" and "The household would have to spend 30% or more of its before-tax household income to access local housing that meets all three standards."

In recent advice to Government about the Residential Tenancy Act, Council members suggested “affordability” needs to consider factors such as vacancy rates, minimum wage and median wages, general employment numbers, core housing needs, Market Basket Measure poverty rates and food bank usage, homelessness and shelter use and occupancy in the community, demographic factors such as household composition (especially the number of lone-parent, social assistance rates, access to public transportation routes, access to crucial communications and information infrastructure, and availability of basic income guarantee programs.

The Council urges government to continue to enhance affordable home ownership programs for seniors through the PEI Home Renovation Program, Seniors Safe@Home Program, and Seniors Home Repair Program.

The Council commends the PEI Government and encourages further investments in Island-wide public transit, and especially to continue rural transit access. We look for continued investment in public transit that supports the goals of the Sustainable Transportation Action Plan.

As stated by the Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Action in a response to a questionnaire from the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, “Women are disproportionately impacted by poverty ... [and] Energy poverty affects two in five households in PEI.” Council would like to encourage continued work by Efficiency PEI in providing support for low-income Islanders wanting to save money and make their homes more energy efficient. This means continuation of programs such as the Winter Warming Program that helped about 700 Islanders make small energy efficiency upgrades to their homes in 2019-2020 and 2020-2021; and the Home Comfort Program that in 2019-2020 helped 270 Islanders and in 2020-2021 helped 385 Islanders make bigger changes to their homes, such as replacing windows and doors, improving insulation, and installing efficient heating systems.

Homelessness and Shelters

The opening of the Community Outreach Centre provides a safe, inclusive environment for Islanders who experience homelessness and housing insecurity and offers wrap-around services including links to community and government resources.

During the COVID-19 pandemic response, the implementation of 211 PEI has been a critical service to Islanders. The service is free, confidential and available in over 100 languages.

Voluntary Sector

Organizations in the voluntary sector play a crucial role in providing services to the community and especially to groups and populations that are made vulnerable by inequality and poverty.

An APEC study of the voluntary sector in PEI found that in 2019, PEI non-profits had a direct economic impact of \$136 million, accounting for 1.8% of the provincial GDP, and employing 3,350 people. In the sector, 70% of employees and 65% of leaders are women, and employment of underrepresented groups is also above the PEI average. (See APEC's reports at <https://www.apec-econ.ca/publications/view/?do-load=1&publication.id=435>.)

Increased investment in this sector is important, with a priority on supporting voluntary-sector groups that help fill gaps in public services to people in low income, people with disabilities, racialized people, people at risk of violence, and other under-represented groups.

FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Continued investment in family violence prevention and support programs, especially using public health and health-equity approaches based on social determinants of health. These must include prevention of violence, and especially gender-based violence and family violence, and proactive supports and programs for mental well-being and addiction prevention including:

- Actions to end violence in post-secondary institutions.
- Actions on Calls to Justice on the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.
- Continued training for intervention in family violence, relationship violence, and gender-based violence for front-line workers such as police, justice workers, child protection workers, and health-care workers.
- Develop a provincial strategy to improve responses and coordination, to prevent harms associated with sexual violence in Prince Edward Island.
- Continue Violence Against Women Grants for community-based organizations to undertake projects for violence prevention.
- Continue funding the Premier's Action Committee on Family Violence Prevention (PAC) at least at 2021-2022 levels or provide an increase for its work across government and community.

WOMEN'S HEALTH & WELLBEING

Other items from our research that require consideration and investment in the budget include the following:

- Further investments in primary health care services (family medicine, home care, mental health and addictions). Over 18,000 Islanders are without a family doctor or primary caregiver.

- Funding for continuous improvements to clinics and/or timely access to primary care for physical and mental health, respite programs, addiction recovery services, and other services that support people before problems reach crisis level. Ensure equal access in rural areas.
- Allocate adequate funding to set up and run a publicly funded registered midwifery program.
- *Promoting Wellness: Preserving Health Action Plan for Seniors, Near Seniors, and Caregivers.*
- Investing in priority actions that emerge from the Women’s and Gender Diverse Islanders’ Health Strategy that is in the final stages of development.

CAREGIVERS AND CHILDCARE

- Additional resources for children with special needs for virtual learning (as required by Health PEI during COVID).
- Continued partnership with the Federal Government to meet the commitment and timeline for \$10/day childcare.
- Continued investment in early childhood educators’ salaries to value their important work.
- Increase childcare access to early learning and childcare for infants and preschoolers.

EDUCATION

- Continued investment in public education, focused on keeping schools open for safe, in-person learning with well-supported and valued teachers, staff, and administrators.
- Ensure proper ventilation and PPE in all schools and care facilities.
- Continued investments in an Island-wide school food program.
- Continued investments in student social, emotional, and mental health through Student Wellbeing Teams and other support.
- Continued teacher and staff mandatory training on areas of diversity and inclusion such as: Cultural Competence, Unconscious Bias, EGALE Safer Schools Webinar, GBA+ training, Four Seasons of Reconciliation, etc.
- Renewed intermediate school sexual health curriculum inclusive of identities and lived experiences of 2SLGBTQIA+ and other emerging identities.

ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Income inequality has deepened over the last decade, including in Prince Edward Island. In the last year of the pandemic, individuals with low income disproportionately suffered lost jobs or had to go to work in essential jobs facing high risk of contagion. Renters struggled to pay for the most basic housing through PEI's housing crisis, while being required to shelter at home to meet public health requirements.

Women make up over 50% of the workforce; yet the wage parity still lags by 18%. In PEI, 33% of all small business owners are women (4000 women-owned businesses). Many businesses have been hit hard and are struggling through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Budget recommendations:

- Programs to support participation of women in primary industries (tourism, fisheries, aquaculture, agriculture).
- Continued funding through Innovation PEI, Finance PEI, SkillsPEI, CBDC, Rural Action Centres and PEIBWA to assist entrepreneurship, business growth and retention of employment.
- Continued capacity building and funding for the voluntary sector, Inclusive Communities and non-profit organizations including those that provide residential, employment and community support for persons with disabilities and other vulnerable sectors.

Finally, in addition to COVID recovery and response, the budget should reflect the increased multi-year commitments to the grants provided for gender-equality organizations through the Interministerial Women's Secretariat (IWS): Violence Against Women Grants (mentioned above); Interministerial Women's Secretariat project grants; and operational funding grants for eligible women's organizations (Women's Network PEI, Justice Options for Women, East Prince Women's Information Centre, and the Coalition for Women in Government).

The Interministerial Women's Secretariat (IWS) requires continued support to meet the unprecedented demand for the IWS to lead gender and diversity analysis on new and existing policies, protocols, and legislation across government.

CONCLUSION

In October 2020, the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women released the report *Gender and COVID-19 in Prince Edward Island*, including a section on "Insights for Policy." Among these insights are items that require investment to meet the urgent needs of the people of Prince Edward Island. (See the full report at <https://peistatusofwomen.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/WEB-PEIACSW-Gender-and-COVID-19-Project-Oct-2020.pdf>.)

These priorities are no less relevant in 2022.

Fundamentally, that report says, “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.” That includes budget planning.

The global pandemic of COVID-19 and the trade dispute limiting export of PEI potatoes have hit Prince Edward Island hard, and the economic effects will resonate in 2022-2023. Council would be concerned by a response that would move to austerity measures. Austerity measures are likely to harm women and groups that face systemic discrimination. For example, cuts to public services hit women first as the majority of front-line public-sector workers and second as disproportionate recipients of public services. Further, it will be important that there be no cuts to public services or to the public service – or to non-governmental organizations that supplement, extend, or fill in gaps in public services.

The measure of PEI society should not be how “balanced” its bottom line appears to be. It should be the health and well-being of its people and communities.

How do you think the Government could increase its revenues?

Due to the catastrophic effects of the pandemic on all aspects of life, the Council is not recommending any tax increases during this budget year. Council is concerned also that the Province consider increases in inflation affecting the cost of living. Canada reached the highest year-over-year inflation rate since 2003 (4.8%), and PEI’s rate of consumer inflation, at 5.1%, was highest in the country, outstripping the 3.4% Canadian average. (See Statistics Canada for the most up-to-date figures https://www.statcan.gc.ca/en/subjects-start/prices_and_price_indexes/consumer_price_indexes.) Now is not the time to balance the budget – make investments in programs and services now but plan to get to balance after the pandemic.

Where do you believe that the Government could reduce its spending?

The PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women has not come to a consensus on recommendations to reduce spending.

Respectfully submitted,



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