Background on the EQUALITY REPORT CARD 2022

Results from Focus Groups and Community Consultations

Prince Edward Island Advisory Council on the Status of Women

The PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women dedicates the 2022 Equality Report Card to all the front-line workers, essential workers, and caregivers of Prince Edward Island whose undervalued resiliency and care are getting us through the global pandemic of COVID-19. Thank you!

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The PEIACSW acknowledges all women-identifying people in our understanding of "women," including cis women, trans women, and gender minorities.

The work of the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women takes place on the island district of Epekwitk in Mi'kma'ki, the traditional territory of the Mi'kmaq: their home today and since time immemorial. We live and work in Epekwitk by virtue of treaties of Peace and Friendship.

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Related publications:

- Prince Edward Island Equality Report Card 2022
 Available https://peistatusofwomen.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/
 FINAL-WEB-2022-Equality-Report-Card.pdf
- Fiche de rendement (French-language summary document) Available https://peistatusofwomen.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/ FINAL-WEB-2022-Fiche-de-rendement.pdf
- Equality Report Card for 2022: Reporting and Assessment Guide Available https://peistatusofwomen.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/ FINAL-WEB-2022-Equality-Report-Card-Model.pdf

CHAIRPERSON'S MESSAGE

The Equality Report Card is a process to assess Prince Edward Island's progress toward gender equality goals. It was initiated by the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women in 2007 and is unique in Canada.

This report is created through the hard work of all members and staff who have served on the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women from April 2019 to March 2022. I have been incredibly proud to be Chairperson during this time.



I was appointed as a member of the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women in January 2018, in time to be part of the process to create the 2018 Equality Report Card. I was deeply impressed with the collaborative process and with the progressive change for equality it inspired in government. I truly believe many initiatives credited in the 2022 report would not have taken place without the work of past Advisory Council members on Report Cards in 2008, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, and 2018.

I am grateful that it has been possible to create the current Equality Report Card despite the challenges of COVID-19. Council members finalized the lists of equality gains to sustain and workshopped category statements for the Report Card in September 2019 as Hurricane Dorian arrived. We thought it would be our only hybrid in-person-teleconference meeting. We were wrong about that. We could never have predicted that the assessment model would be formally presented to government in a virtual meeting in March 2020, with the timelines for the project removed from the model and suddenly uncertain. Much of the final assessment and consensus decision-making in January 2022 took place virtually. Every single member of the Council made her voice heard in the assessment. I believe it is a great achievement that government and Council were, in the end, able to complete the work that created this report.

I would like to thank the Chairpersons before me who led parts of the work for this Report Card. Yvonne Deagle led development of a new assessment model (2019) and Debbie Langston led adaptation of the model and process through the first phases of COVID-19 (2020–2021). The Council and I would like to give special thanks to Jane Ledwell (Executive Director), Michelle Jay (Program Coordinator), and Becky Tramley (Office Manager) for their hard work and dedication to this project.

My thanks go to Minister Responsible for the Status of Women Natalie Jameson and to the Interministerial Women's Secretariat for their support, and heartfelt thanks to all departments of government, all participants in focus groups, and all respondents to the community perceptions survey.

This is the only Equality Report Card that will be published for the current mandate of government. On behalf of the members and staff of the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women, I wish government well in its important work to sustain equality gains and to advance new work to make PEI a more equitable and inclusive place for all.

Cathy Rose, Chairperson March 2022

EQUALITY REPORT CARD 2022 7 KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

1. Greater collaboration in government

Especially when government was in minority, increased collaboration led to more equity considerations in policies, programs, and legislation. Government has been open to good ideas from opposition parties and standing committees of the Legislature, and it has led to better results for PEI residents across many categories.

2. Leveraging federal COVID supports

The federal government rolled out many emergency programs to get Canadians through the COVID crisis. The PEI government was swift and effective in taking advantage of federal programs for the benefit of Island residents, including income supports for individuals or families, wage supports for employers, funding for gender-based violence prevention, and other COVID-19 supports.

3. Putting public health and the common good first in COVID response

The provincial government was wise in the way they heeded to women in public health leadership, listened to science, and focused on messages about the public good through the first waves of the pandemic. A public health approach is inherently conscious of gender, diversity, and social determinants of health.

4. Direct supports and subsidies to support individuals in need

Supports and subsidies directed to individuals do not address root causes of systemic issues such as poverty. Nonetheless, supports targeted for people struggling with low income or discrimination do mean a great deal to people. A \$150 support to a person in low income is \$150 that makes a difference.

5. More public consultations, hearing from a wider range of voices

While there is still work to do for government to act on tangible recommendations from people and groups that have historically been systemically excluded from decision-making, the last three years have seen more deliberate reach-out to a wider range of voices than ever before. Public consultation has taken place on a tremendous variety of public policy questions.

6. Funding for community-sector voices

Increased demand on groups to participate in public consultation has been backed up with some increases in funding for groups. This has included first-time funding for Black and BIPOC organizations and first-time core funding for equality-seeking organizations. It is positive that government has supported communitysector groups that are *advocates* and not only groups providing services.

7. Willingness to sustain positive initiatives from previous governments

Council developed a Report Card model that specified 90 initiatives that were active in 2019 that members wanted government to sustain. In doing so, Council members acknowledged that sustaining equality gains is hard work—and maintaining good programs is never a given. The provincial government sustained 90% of the initiatives Council had identified, even through the challenges of COVID-19, and that has prevented women under-represented groups from losing even more ground than we did through the global pandemic.

The provincial government has set a new high bar for policies, programs, and legislation to sustain into future mandates of government.

EQUALITY REPORT CARD 2022 7 KEY CHALLENGES

1. Programs improving but not keeping up with worsening situations

It is impossible to deny important investments in many programs to support people and groups. However, improvements are not keeping up with worsening situations such as the deeply troubling housing crisis, the highest provincial inflation rates in Canada affecting household costs, or pandemic job losses for women, youth, and BIPOC Islanders.

2. Uneven responsiveness to gender and diversity across categories

Report Card analysis suggests PEI is starting from far behind equality in areas where progress is most vital: poverty elimination; diversity and inclusion; women in decision-making. The Equality Report Card process insists that achieving gender equality in PEI requires action across multiple categories. A great deal of progress in one category does not make up for lack of progress in another. Gender and diversity analysis is not yet incorporated fully or evenly across government.

3. Lag time between gender and diversity analysis and real-world effects

The Equality Report Card process insists that gender and diversity analysis is at the core of what government must do to achieve better, more equitable outcomes for all Islanders. However, there is a lag time between analysis and people experiencing positive effects in their lives.

4. Need for focus on prevention and attention paid to chronic challenges

Too many public systems in PEI, from healthcare to justice to social assistance, respond to *acute needs* or *crisis situations*. More attention is needed on addressing chronic issues, root causes such as injustice and inequality, and preventing challenges from becoming a crisis or an acute issue.

5. Looming crises in mental health and social determinants of health

After two years of pandemic strain, unheard demands of protest movements, and surging local COVID cases, a lot of people are *not doing well*. Those caregivers and essential workers who got our young and old and vulnerable people through the first waves of the pandemic are burnt out. We have experienced collective and individual trauma. It will be urgent for government to plan for the wave of physical and mental health, addictions, social, and traumarelated needs that will emerge.

6. Public consultations failing to result in concrete action for increased equity

While there have been more consultations including wider diversities of points of view, conclusions from consultations often support the status quo, when diverse voices have demanded change. Government continues to have difficulty with intersectionality and acting with *both* gender and diversity in mind—so that no one group is advanced at the expense of another group left behind.

7. Confusion about roles of community groups and of government

Government does not have good or consistent answers to the questions that constantly arise about whether public services for the most vulnerable or marginalized are better delivered by government or by community groups. It is time to work collaboratively across sectors to discern the roles that government and community must play for PEI to thrive.

The PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women hopes that the government decisions made from 2019 to 2021 increase the capacity and political will to address longstanding and emerging crises that affect PEI residents, including gender-based violence, climate change adaptation, welcoming newcomers, and responding to local and global conflict.

INTRODUCTION

"There is most definitely a progressively appreciable effort towards enhancing gender equality. Yet, at the same time, there is almost unanimous agreement that more needs to be done."



This is the first time the Prince Edward Island Equality Report Card has included an accompanying background narrative report with more information from community consultations and from government reports.

Why? In 2019, the members of the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women decided to continue producing Equality Report Cards under a renewed model. Government and Council members wanted the new model to describe where PEI stood on the path towards full gender equality, to create incentives to sustain the Province's modest gains towards gender equality, and to build impetus for government to do more and go further.

The new model was built to examine *sustained* progress and *new* progress, with less emphasis than in past Report Card assessments of progress towards identified priority action areas recommended by Council and community. Council members knew they would need more space for critical voices, dissenting voices, prodding voices. They knew they would need a way to make more room for how women and people of all genders described their experience living with the effects of government action and inaction.

In 2020, the global pandemic of COVID-19 and the public health measures put in place to protect us from the rampant spread of the virus revealed inequities and vulnerabilities with a suddenness we did not think possible. The pandemic also meant Council had to rethink timelines for the Equality Report Card.

However, even while the timelines changed for the Report Card, the Council did not change the assessment model that had been set in 2019. The Report Card model's focus on *sustaining gains* seemed prescient in a turbulent time when the risk felt very real that equity gains could be abandoned, with the pandemic used as cover or as an excuse. On the positive side, there existed a real hope that since the status quo ("sustained progress") had proven so lacking, transformative changes ("new progress") were truly possible.

Whether for the worse or for the better, Council members knew that life was going to change radically. More than ever, we needed tools to press for positive and progressive change. We needed tools to prevent regression to old norms and old stories that systemically excluded women and gender minorities and 2SLGBTQIA+ people; Black, Indigenous, and people of colour community members; people with disabilities; and people facing discrimination as a result of age or language or other identity factors.

"If we didn't lose ground, that is a good thing."

The Council organized focus groups and surveys to hear as much as possible from community members about how Prince Edward Island was doing with regard to diversity, equity, and inclusion from 2019 to 2021. We invited their perspectives on where PEI stands in general and on each of nine priority categories, and if they saw improvement between 2019 and 2021. This narrative report privileges their voices.

More about methods for collecting grassroots and community voices, and the selfreported diversity of participants is in the Appendix.

The Council also worked collaboratively with government to develop timelines and mechanisms for departmental reporting on progress. Coordinated by the Interministerial Women's Secretariat and through the new Task Force on Gender Equity and Diversity, every department of government completed a questionnaire to report on the identified areas of sustained and new progress. Departments were only required to provide updates to March 31, 2021; however, recognizing that many new initiatives require work over a prolonged period, most departments also reported significant initiatives announced up to the end of 2021, and Council members included items after March 31, 2021, in their assessments. This report includes some additional details and examples of government work towards gender equity and diversity.

Full details on the reporting process and assessment model Council members followed are included in the document <u>Equality Report Card for</u> <u>2022: Reporting and Assessment Guide</u>.

> "While we must celebrate the victories when they come, that shouldn't stop us from pushing."

WOMEN'S HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

An example of a government initiative that happened after the reporting period ended March 31, 2021, and that otherwise may have been highlighted in the Report Card assessment is collaborative work by the Department of Social Development and Housing with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, York University, and the Women's National Housing and Homelessness Network to conduct a pan-Canadian survey on women's homelessness in Canada—the Women's National Housing and Homelessness Survey. This survey included lived experiences from Island women facing homelessness. The survey was released in September 2021.

NEW PRINCIPAL ADVISOR ON WOMEN'S HEALTH

Another government initiative announced later than the reporting period was the new Principal Advisor on Women's Health. This two-year temporary position was posted in September 2021. The Advisor in this new role is responsible for developing, coordinating, and evaluating strategies that support the health and wellness of Island women, as aligned with the Department of Health and Wellness's vision and mandate and the responsibilities of Health PEI for health service delivery.

OVERALL PROGRESS TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY

The overall grade achieved by the Prince Edward Island government for progress towards gender equality goals from 2019 to 2021 was assessed by the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women as a B+. The Equality Report Card 2022 report provides the scoring that supports this highest-ever grade on an Equality Report Card.

Council members and focus group and survey participants made it clear that while this is a high point on a long journey, it is not the end point. There are more hills to climb.

Focus group participants and representatives of community organizations were invited to share their perceptions of what point PEI had reached on the journey towards gender equality by 2019 and what progress they perceived between 2019 and 2021. The range of responses was very broad. The chart below shows the median score for community perceptions to 2019 and from 2019 to 2021, in each of the categories scored by the Report Card.



Survey respondents perceived that Prince Edward Island's overall progress towards full gender equality up to 2019 at 50%, about halfway there. On no category did they perceive progress to 2019 at higher than 50%, and they perceived the 2019 status quo as much further behind halfway on Diversity and Inclusion (40%) and on Poverty Elimination (33.5%).

These findings are also reflected in participant comments, with one summing up government progress on gender and diversity by saying, "Some awareness of gender. Little of diversity," and another expressing concern for inclusion of low-income women: "Do the poorest women even have a chance to speak? They work one, two, three jobs ... Can they go to a focus group, can they go to meetings, can they even participate in activities that interest them? They are burnt out, they are tired, and they still have to pay their rent! This is very discouraging to me."

Survey respondents perceived an overall improvement towards full gender equality of 5 points between 2019 and 2021. Looking at individual categories, the community perception of change ranged from 0 points (Making Equality a Priority and Workforce Development) to 8.5 points (Access to Justice), with small gains perceived in all the categories in between. This difference from 2019 to 2021 is the change acknowledged and credited in the "B+" grade for progress from 2019.

"Progress is slow to come and is mostly surface level, as opposed to systemic and sustainable."



In setting the B+ grade, Council members acknowledged the real progress in evidence from government reports. As one member said, "We have to evaluate what is in front of us. We have to argue that it is not enough, but we have to give credit to what we are evaluating."

One commenter from the community perceptions survey summed up the mixed feelings well. They said, "I may be giving more or less credit than this government deserves. All I know is that we do not yet have the programs and services we need to make sure everyone is included and that equality is made real. I appreciate that some

issues have received attention, sometimes through standing committees of the legislature, but so far this hasn't translated into real change." Further, many participants expressed variations on the idea, "A government serious about gender equality and diversity would be investing in public services [such as childcare and social housing], and it would be mandating a living wage for all workers including and especially carers."

All focus group and survey processes took place during 2021, when COVID-19 remained an active concern in the PEI community. Numerous participants saw the crisis as an opportunity for change. As one participant said, "It has been disappointing to see every level of government view the chronic underlying issues related to COVID from an acute lens. Would love to see the same effort made for the public health crisis of misogyny, racism, domestic violence." Another said, "It has been an incredibly hard time to hold on to gains some women have made—while some women remain left far behind. Precarity, intersectionality: if we don't get it now, we'll never get it."

"It does not appear to me that women have had a safe platform from which to declare issues."

Far from being focused on the negative and critical, many focus group participants and survey respondents focused on real solutions. One respondent offered these priorities for an action plan: "Basic income guarantee, mental health access universally, free childcare, anti-racist policies for all." They wanted to see more and faster movement towards these, and other, community-identified solutions.

"While in most categories our government is having conversations about change, the time has come to move those conversations into concrete plans of action."

HIGHLIGHT: GENDER AND DIVERSITY TRAININGS THROUGH THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

The Public Service Commission delivered the following diversity and inclusion training between May 2019 and March 2021 to government employees:

- Valuing Diversity in the Workplace (November 2019, 12 participants; February 2020, 16 participants; November 2020, 14 participants; March 2021, 24 participants)
- Diversity Inclusion and Cultural competency (Dept. of Education and Public School Branch). December 2019, 128 participants
- Dept. of Social Development (Social Assistance Advisory Board, February 2020, 12 participants
- Leaders in Action Diversity session, September 2020, 24 participants

• Western Hospital leadership and management group, February 2021, 28 participants The Public Service Commission also delivered the following series of diversity and inclusion training for employees and managers within the civil service partnering with Ebony Consulting, Nova Scotia.

- Working from Unconscious Bias to Conscious Inclusion, 70 participants
- Fostering Inclusive Communication in the Workplace, 64 participants
- Strategies for Leading Respectful Workplace Cultures, 69 participants
- Applying an Inclusion Lens in Decision Making, 40 participants

Education sessions offered by the Public Service Commission's Diversity Office include:

- Diversity and Inclusion Cultural Competency Training for Senior Management Team (Dept. of A&L, F&C, Tourism and Economic Growth etc.), 25 participants
- Fostering Safer Communities and Inclusion of LGBTQS2+ and Gender diverse groups, 38 participants
- Diversity, Inclusion and Unconscious Bias Training for ITSS Staff Professional Development Day, 80 participants

Additionally, by 31st March 2021:, Gender and Diversity Consideration in Policy Analysis Training, January 2020, 19 participants; March 2021, 23 participants

Lastly, In July 2021, the PSC developed the Unconscious Bias in the Workplace Webinar Course which is hosted by the Government Moodle Website. As of December 7, 2021, 665 staff had enrolled to the course.

MAKING EQUALITY A PRIORITY

In a roundtable discussion, a member of the Council addressed in simple terms why gender and diversity analysis that considers the intersectional facets of an individual's life is so essential, and why policy must deal with root causes across categories, departments, and silos: "The issues are too interrelated," she said. "The issues are 'because of.' Workforce development is related to poverty; you can't get access to justice if you don't have not enough income. ..." And so on!

Another Council member got to the heart of making equality a priority, saying, "The quality of our society is determined by how happy the women are. We are not just asking for ourselves, it is to make *everything* better."

Commenters from the community also underscored the need for gender and diversity analysis. "Women must be at the centre of any real change," one said, "and government must be part of the solution, not part of the problem, through a fierce and demonstrated commitment to intentional inclusion, accessibility, and respect."



"A government serious about gender equality and diversity would be investing in public services (such as childcare and social housing), and it would be mandating a living wage for all workers including and especially carers. It would have developed by now a solid, inclusive and accessible program for public consultation on its policies. It would have gotten serious about proportional representation. Its focus on healthcare would not be on how many doctors we have but on addressing poverty, food insecurity, and affordable housing immediately in practical, unstigmatizing ways."

Consultation participants who identified as Indigenous, or as Black or people of colour, emphasized that gender can never be the sole focus, without examining other identity factors that give rise to multiple layers of discrimination. A young BIPOC woman said, "Day-to-day, I have to say that gender is the part of my identity that causes the least friction,"—compared to race, age, or immigration status.

A BIPOC focus group participant said, "I won't say strides haven't been made: more consideration has been given, positions have been created. But the majority of strides have been of small value, photo opps with a BIPOC woman, not meaningful change in a significant way that would make things better." Another said, "I had conversations in my head if I was a feminist or a Black person first. Those ideas came from white supremacy. I want to be optimistic, but all around me I see higher incidence of anti-Asian hate, anti-Semitism, racism that gave rise to Black Lives Matter." She said, "There was the murder of a Muslim family in London, the discovery of unmarked graves of children [First Nations victims of residential school] in Kamloops: it all weighs on me."

Some focus group participants were hopeful that a time of upheaval could heave up some rocks of systemic discrimination holding people down in situations of oppression. "Something in the [COVID] moment allowed people to pause and reflect," one person commented (and this comment was echoed by others in more than one focus group). The participant said, "The Black Lives Matter march would not have been possible-many men and women and children were murdered in plain sight, and there wasn't a march. ... It is a revolutionary moment that hopefully will continue."

One participant said, "The pandemic exposed and worsened long-standing crises in our system. Housing, lack of childcare, food insecurity, poverty, violence—all became more visible during this time. The government did

THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND LAND'S EXEMPLARY GENDER, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION PLAN

Demonstrating leadership Council members hope to see spread among other departments, the Department of Agriculture and Land developed and released a comprehensive Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Plan for April 1, 2020-March 31, 2022. The Plan created 25 activities to be completed. During the reporting period for the Equality Report Card (up to March 31, 2021), the Department completed at least 11 of the 25 activities, as follows:

- Increase staff awareness of the Public Service Commission's Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- 2. Increase staff awareness of GDI theories, concepts, and terms (through training sessions)
- Increase staff awareness of the structure and impacts of systemic racism (through reviews of expert documents and organizations' recommendations)
- 4. Targeted recruitment towards underrepresented groups for vacant positions
- 5. Increase knowledge of industry priorities for gender, diversity, and inclusion (through consultation with groups to identify insights for the Next Policy Framework and evaluation of the Canadian Agricultural Partnership programs)
- 6. Implement a mental health awareness-building campaign targeted at women in agriculture
- Increase awareness of the Department's language profile to better serve clients who communicate in languages other than English
- 8. Promote diversity and cultural awareness among Divisions' staff (for example, strategic communication)
- 9. Develop multi-language and gender, diversity, and inclusion–focused information for clients
- 10. Translate program information to multiple languages
- Continue to invest in community food security projects targeted at underrepresented groups.

In addition to the activities listed above, another activity in progress was to get 100% of staff to complete the Government of Canada's GBA+ training. Between May 2019-March 31, 2021, 91 of the Department's employees completed the Government of Canada's GBA+ training. very little to analyze impacts on different populations. They did even less to address the different impacts."

It is not enough to do gender and diversity analysis, one participant emphasised; it is crucial to do gender and diversity analysis *well*: "I would be looking to have more roundtables within the communities and centering the voices of people who have been marginalized by white supremacy and colonization," she said. "Ongoing marginalization, we need to learn, is the ultimate violence. I am hoping the next few years will see another substantial revolution and shift."

ROADMAPPING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION: THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION'S DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STRATEGY

The Public Service Commission's Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2021–2024 is a roadmap of various strategies to be implemented across government departments, and it will support departments to develop their own departmental diversity and inclusion plans. The Strategy aims to build an inclusive and diverse public service, establishing a safe and inclusive culture, and ensure inclusive diverse innovative practices; and has further developed an implementation framework that will guide all government departments and agencies to account for new and existing diversity and inclusion plans, programs and services.

The Public Service Commission's Diversity and Inclusion Consultant continues to promote the Diversity Talent Pool through meetings with senior managers, operational managers, and human resource management staff, and the Consultant is actively engaged with the Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Committee representatives from each department, the new Anti-Racism Policy Analyst, and the Gender and Diversity Policy Analyst.

The Commission has consistently continued to encourage staff to enroll and participate in equity, diversity, and inclusion education programs offered through the Commission. The Commission continues to manage the Development and Training Fund which supports eligible staff who initiate further training.

Additionally, the Public Service Commission has a Diversity and Inclusion Pulse Survey that will be rolled out government wide for employees to self-disclose diversity/demographic identities within the public service to better understand our diverse workforce.

WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING

While pointing to under-representation of women, minority groups, and women from minority groups in decision-making, some commenters were quick to remind that "under-representation" is a term that mislabels and deflects from structural barriers and systemic exclusion. Yet, numerous commenters spoke about the importance of representation and pointed to the bald facts of where women are under-represented—and where *over*-represented: "Women still aren't represented in corporate/government management, [and] are the working poor with limited access to childcare," one said.

"To increase women in decision-making, representation is important," one focus group participant insisted. "It is important for women's confidence to have [role models as] inspiration, as aspiration to other things; to have models who show us that it is, in fact, possible."

> "Women are poorly represented and trans, queer, and non-binary are nonexistent when addressing *most* issues."



One participant in the consultations connected the low number of women in decision-making among a list of interrelated concerns. "There is so much to do!" they said. "I am concerned about the few government women elected in the Legislature, about lack of non-profit housing, about our shared environmental and land resources, about access to justice and violence prevention, and about poverty." If these issues are links in a chain; lack of women in decision-making remains a weak link.

One woman reflecting on the changes brought about during the COVID-19 pandemic worried, "People have gone back to gender roles, we've gone back to the '50s, and I am afraid we (women) could lose ground so quickly."

"Women's power shouldn't only consist in being handed a token role, where we say, 'Bravo, you're going to be called Madame Minister.' Women's power must also clearly consist in the concrete actions we take, in which we feel heard."

The culture of politics was of concern around several focus group tables. As one participant said, "We have seven out of twenty-seven seats women [in the PEI Legislature]: 26% women and only two of them are Ministers, and that is just ridiculous. ... Women are not engaged in the political system, as it doesn't serve them." At another table, a focus group participant said, "So few women were elected last round. We didn't support women at the ballot." She also connected women's poor electoral showing to systemic issues, saying, "I resent the way media represents women and calls them out for their voices, their

clothes, their hair, their bodies—who wants that?" At yet another table, a participant said, "Not all women are feminists, but we need to elect more women and men who believe in equality."

Another participant who was concerned about diverse representation in decision-making implied that quotas are needed: "I think that [women and diverse groups] should be [included] *systematically*. I'll even go as far as that: to call for systematically equal representation of genders in all decision-making groups. ... You have to have a voice if you want to change anything. "Let's stop talking and celebrating: let's integrate [equality in decision-making] into our daily life!"

"It's good to consult [women and diverse groups], but in real life, when we arrive at conclusions, and it's time to make decisions, are they still around the table? Or were they just there initially?"

A survey respondent who objected to the toxic political environment said, "Government does not actually support women to get into politics. We need to engage young girls earlier, make the environment one that women might want to get into political leadership. We need to rout out the misogynists. PEI is small and can make change."

No youth under 18 took part in focus groups, but a high-school-age, woman-identifying youth consulted on the topic of women in decisionmaking felt government missed an opportunity when they voted against lowering the voting age to 16. She said, "I think that we are in the age group that will be most affected by the decisions politicians make. I think that young people know

GENDER, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION TRAINING FOR AGENCIES, BOARDS, AND COMMISSIONS

In March 2021, the Department of Agriculture and Land started to develop a new policy for agencies, boards, and commissions (ABCs) that included equity, diversity, and inclusion terms for ABCs and requirements for new members on agencies, boards, or commissions to complete the Government of Canada's GBA+ training and review the Department's Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Policy. This new policy and GDI requirements were communicated to all representatives for the Department's ABCs in the summer of 2021.

what we need in the world. I think we could elect better leaders, who would be more fair. I feel like young people have a much better view on social rights and social justice issues than a lot of adults do." She reflected that older generations look to young people for hope and expect them to fix crises they created or failed to address. They valorize young people without respecting or empowering them.

"How do we hold government accountable and make the changes that we need to make, to see, and to experience? [Community] groups have been [advocating] so long. Where is the vision, and where is the will?"

Another participant said, "Until women are in positions of power in government, we will continue to have gender inequality." To her, representation needed to be present at all levels of political decision-making: "That means workers from the Minister to backroom staff."

VIOLENCE PREVENTIÓN

The topic of violence is often under-discussed in focus group settings. There is both tenderness and stigma in talking about violence in a group of strangers, in a documented discussion. It can be traumatizing both to speak and to hear about gender-based violence, especially as it touches ourselves, our friends, our families, and our neighbours.



What was most on the minds of participants in community consultation in 2021 was the interplay of pandemic conditions (such as stress, lockdown, isolation, economic strain, reduced access to coping outlets, and reduced access to services) and the dynamics of gender-based violence (such as coercive controlling behaviours, or cycles of violence from honeymoon periods to explosive rage, or presence of children as witnesses of abuse).

Mostly, participants expressed this as worry. Said one past Chairperson of the Council, "I don't know how people who are living in home situations of violence and walking on eggshells are doing, but I am pretty sure the shoe has yet to drop on that situation and its effects."

"I don't think the increased vulnerability of women in abusive situations was recognized."

Several participants in focus group had experience as front-line workers or volunteers with victims of violence. One participant is a justice of the peace for family violence who issues emergency protection orders. During the pandemic lockdown in 2020, she said, "It went quiet. The fact we weren't getting calls meant the women were going silent. It picked up a bit in the fall in calls for emergency protection orders. But the sudden drop in numbers was worrying." A participant connected to a victim-serving organization said, "We've seen a rise in gender-based violence with more people staying at home from COVID—people are in closed spaces for a long time. More are coming forward for help and therapy."

A participant in the international student/recent graduate focus group rated the dangers of poverty and the housing crisis higher than the COVID-19 crisis for victims of violence, speaking particularly to the situation of young BIPOC women: "Women may have to stay in abusive or toxic relationships because it is more expensive to live as a single person. This usually happens for more vulnerable women in the community." Another respondent agreed: "[There is] growing understanding of intersectionality of how feminism makes sure we are paying attention to who is still not safe, who is still not cared for, who is more at risk as a result."

"While there have been some improvements considerations to accommodate women and families who are victims of abuse in employment standards and the new residential tenancy act for example— ... there is still some way to go.." Some focus group participants saw education as integral to preventing gender-based violence because of the essential role effective education plays in building confidence, independence, and self-efficacy. For example, one participant said, "I am confident if I can manage my money if my spouse decides to leave me; if I am financially literate." She then reflected, "Confidence also comes from my physical safety: if my physical safety is not threatened, or I am able to defend myself—and that comes from education too, I think." Education helps prevent violence, and freedom from violence makes way for self-actualization.

PEI'S RESPONSE TO THE CALLS FOR JUSTICE FROM THE NATIONAL INQUIRY INTO MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS

In response to the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, the PEI government created both an Interdepartmental Working Group and an Indigenous Working Group to coordinate responses related to the National Inquiry and the Calls for Justice. The coordinating committee for the working groups includes representatives from the Indigenous Relations Secretariat, the Interministerial Women's Secretariat, and Victim Services. Work is carried out in close collaboration with Lennox Island First Nation, Abegweit First Nation, PEI Aboriginal Women's Association, Mi'kmaq Confederacy of PEI, and the Native Council of PEI.

The Interdepartmental Working Group comprised of representatives from each department has tabled two reports in the Legislature (June 2020 and June 2021). The Indigenous Working Group meets regularly to guide and contribute to the work.

During the reporting period to March 31, 2021, government had made or begun work on the following commitments:

- Establishment of a Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Fund which will provide \$250,000 per year to First Nations and Indigenous organizations that are represented on the Indigenous Working Group to support MMIWG work within their organizations and communities.
- Implementation of an Indigenous Health Navigator to provide support and increase access to health networks and services for Indigenous people.
- Establishment of an Indigenous Housing stream through Social Development and Housing.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Past focus groups for the Equality Report Card have typically put more emphasis on gender aspects of access to justice. One focus group comment from the 2021 consultations sums up issues that came up frequently in past consultations: "There is no access to justice, no legal aid. If you're not well off, you get nothing. How can a woman afford legal costs in child custody situations?"

"Single mothers need penalty regulations when fathers miss child support."

Access to justice was the least discussed category at roundtables and was also identified on the community perceptions survey as the most improved category between 2019 and 2021.

When Council members discussed the consultation results in this category, they were curious: Are sustained and new programs in this category meeting the demand, especially the increased



demand and demand affected by COVID? The answer may only reveal itself in longer-term effects.

The main discussion around access to justice that came up in focus groups in 2021 related to the inequitable treatment of Indigenous people, Black people, and people of colour in PEI's justice system. "It is more and more clear to me every day how people are shut out due to systemic barriers," a Council member said. Another Council member expressed concern about how many are *locked in*, rather than "shut out." An Indigenous consultation participant placed highest priority on decreasing the disproportionate incarceration of BIPOC youth, but in the meantime called for more inclusive youth and adult policies in Corrections, especially to respect the full spectrum of gender and to support traditional practices and ceremony for incarcerated youth. The goal, she said, needs to be "less discrimination across the full system."

The Black Lives Matter movement filled the streets with voices of protest and calls to action across North America and around the world, including in Charlottetown, after the horrifying murder of George Floyd, a Black man, by a white police officer. Issues of racism and white supremacy and their fatal effects were much on the minds of many community consultation participants.

For one Black participant, the lowlight of PEI's COVID-19 response was the treatment of a young black man who was arrested for breaking self-isolation and was treated differently in the media and in the court system than if he had been white. "There was a lack of transparency, and there was secrecy, why he was in jail, when there were different rules for others." Speaking of the same situation, another participant said, "Seeing how that man was treated when he was clearly having a mental health crisis... I sure know other people having mental health crises went on to not be treated the same way—if they were white." It underlined for her why it is crucial to "stand up and come together to protest."

"How does police response make things worse rather than better?"

In 2021, conversations about police response to gender-based violence, the limitations of the justice system, and access to justice emerged around alarming reports of drink-spiking incidents and related sexualized violence. Most of the most intense discussions of sexualized violence and access to justice came to light later in the year than the focus groups and community perceptions survey. In terms of access to justice, affected individuals had more supports than ever before, thanks to programs such as RISE, a program providing legal support to victims of sexual violence through Community Legal Information.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROGRAM

The Province reports that the Restorative Justice Program now receives referrals Island-wide for youth and adult cases across the criminal justice continuum.

Due to the traumatic impact of crime, in particular crimes against marginalized communities and sexual harm, each case is thoroughly screened at intake and continually assessed throughout the entire Restorative Justice process—should the case be deemed appropriate.

The program's flexible approach enables referrals to be made pre-charge to post conviction. In addition, the program uses a co-facilitation model comprised of trained community-based facilitators from a diverse variety of backgrounds; continuing professional development opportunities for facilitators through training and mentorship will improve the sustainability of the program.

Through engagement with stakeholders, clients, and referral sources on an ongoing basis and formally through an evaluative process, it will ensure the program continues to develop and evolve to meet the needs of victims of crime and the larger community.

JOINT DECLARATION ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Announced on January 22, 2021, the Joint Declaration for a Canada Free of Gender-Based Violence was endorsed by the Federal, Provincial, and Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women during their 38th Conference. Prince Edward Island Status of Women officials were heavily involved in this work.

This declaration is a historic milestone in the response to gender-based violence and the advancement of gender equality for people across Canada. This federal, provincial, and territorial collaboration represents an important step towards the future announcement of National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence in Canada.

LEGAL REPRESENTATION FOR VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

A new initiative that will increase Access to Justice is that the Department of Justice and Public Safety and Justice Canada have entered into an agreement to develop access and supporting policies to provide independent legal representation to victims of sexual assault for Criminal Code of Canada applications under section 276 and 278 (complainant records). The access will be coordinated through Victim Services.

WOMEN'S HEALTH

When Council members had the opportunity to review the lists of services available through the Women's Wellness Program and through Sexual Health Services and to see the progress laid out for healthcare for people of all genders, the list made an impression. "I didn't know there were services like this available for me as a menopausal woman," said a Council member. Council members were quite amazed and appreciative of how far our small province has come in a short time. It was only a few years ago that repatriating abortion care to PEI required a constitutional challenge and intensive community advocacy, after thirty long years with lack of access.



Some focus group participants continued to find programs and

services difficult to navigate: ""I find everything related to childbirth and the gynecological side is very complicated on the Island," one said. "because to see a gynecologist you have to go through the general practitioner first, but to have access to a general practitioner, you have to go to the emergency room or to a clinic."

When Council met to assess government progress in January 2022, the Prince County Hospital had recently had to suspend maternity care for a four-day period at the end of the Christmas holidays, and all births had to take place in Charlottetown.

Maternity care and desire for access to midwifery and birthing options remained a theme among focus groups in 2021. "[Midwifery] is such an important job. It's a woman's job!" said one participant. "It's often a totally forgotten profession, not valued because it's a woman's profession... And it could help the current system so much."

"If you are healthy and happy, you will step up and take power and responsibility."

The challenges and strains on our healthcare system were very much in evidence in 2021 when focus groups met. Participants understood the sacrifices we had made for each other during lockdowns and following masking mandates and gathering restrictions were meant not only to protect vulnerable people but also to protect a precarious healthcare system. One participant said, "Unfortunately, [the COVID crisis] also shone a light on those that were disproportionally affected—those individuals and families on low income."

The word that resonated through all focus groups that discussed healthcare was *access*. Some of the concerns related to regional access. "I live in a rural region, and I find that access is sometimes quite worrying because the hospitals are not always open," said one focus group participant. That being said, one participant was happy with access to daytime, non-urgent care (and, presumably, care for one-off, non-chronic illnesses) in her rural region: "I must say that if it's in the middle of the day that you need to see a doctor, it's quite easy, and it doesn't take a lot of time because it's a small community."

Women's health was the most prevalent topic among those who participated in the focus group for Francophone women. As one said, "We are doubly discriminated against because we ask for services in French that don't even exist in English, so it is difficult to be heard." Returning to the theme of birthing options, a Francophone woman said, "For my two children [when I was getting ready to give birth], I asked for services, because I was really worried. I asked, 'How am I going to give birth in English?' I was really worried about that."

"All medicine is done in English."

Focus group participants who were newcomers to PEI from other provinces or other countries reflected, "The system is not welcoming. All the signs you get are, 'You can't see a doctor, you're not designated, you have to wait'; 'The emergency room is full, you can't see a doctor'; [or] 'There are no more doctors, use Maple (virtual health care) ... but it's not in your language.'"

"Access in general here is not easy, access as a newcomer is not easy, and access as a Francophone is not easy: I think there are just so many layers that make it seem so difficult to access care."

Commenting more generally, another focus group participant said, "While there seems to be a move to make healthcare services more accessible (mobile mental health units; collaborative models of practice) ... there is still some way to go." They urged government to press on with new initiatives for greater access.

A participant in a focus group who was a newcomer to Canada reflected on risks of access for people without permanent resident status seeking help for stigmatized conditions or care—and especially BIPOC people who do not know what systemic racism they may confront. "When we see the need for mental healthcare, we see what happened recently with the young man who was reported to immigration when he was in the middle of a crisis and was looking for help ... when you see that the health authorities can report you to immigration, it also sends a pretty strong sign."

"I'm a permanent resident now, but I've been in the situation of being without status, and it's precarious. I find it scary."

A newcomer to Canada at another focus group spoke to the other side of accessibility: "Immigrant doctors are working at Superstore or driving a taxi—it is outrageous government is not fixing the system to allow trained experienced people to work as doctors." Recognition of foreign credentials is also discussed in the section on Workforce Development.

Educating more nurses to fill the gaps in PEI healthcare—and improving working conditions to retain nurses—came up in several focus group discussions. One rural woman said, "We're short 700 nurses on PEI. Nurses are not given full-time work, how does that happen? A huge gap in nursing and all health professions. Retired nurses double dip and work full time. Professional hinderances mean health professionals are leaving."

Community consultation participants expressed strong concerns about mental health and addiction services. Healthcare staff turnover was a concern for people needing mental health help as well:

"Women's Health is one of the big things for me, and part of it is because I have experienced this, is the turnover in general at the clinics for mental health. How can they keep staff? How can we keep people in helping professions, which really benefit people who need trauma support? I know for me, my counsellor retired, and it was a year before they filled the position, then a maternity leave, then a new counsellor, and now I am without a counsellor again, spending time at the walk-in clinics when that time would be available to someone else if I had a regular counsellor."

Other gaps in mental health and addiction services were exacerbated in the wake of the pandemic. A participant who identified as a rural, senior woman said, "Speaking as a senior I think that ... seniors were affected in a different way, and I think the isolation is paramount in their recovery." From her own perspective, when she moved back to PEI, she said she expected "I would reconnect with the people I knew in PEI, and I have only connected with two. I feel a little bit afraid to reconnect with people, and I think that will grow as seniors start to pick up their lives." Travelling to the focus group was a big stressor for her, even though, she said, "I used to come down here practically every second day." She concluded, "The longer the time in isolation, the more fear. The more time in isolation, things creep up."

A past Chairperson of Council said, "One thing not mentioned specifically in our concerns is the concern we have about the mental health of individuals, the stress of being a woman in your home and doing your job and educating your children, or of an older person in isolation—but we are facing now a tremendous collective mental health crisis, and we don't have the trained people to take up the slack to deal with that."

"The need for mental health resources increased, and the system was overloaded, including decreased capacity in Unit 9 [the psychiatric unit at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital]."

Another past Chairperson of the Council expressed her concerns about addiction services specifically. "During lockdown," she said, "twelve-step programs were at a standstill, and I have several friends who need to go to a meeting, and even today [June 2021] they can only meet in small groups. I think addiction is even more prevalent than it always was." She spoke of suicides in her small community that were addiction related. "We need more money for help with people in PEI. It is not enough to have one addiction centre that is not even halfway effective." She added, chillingly, "If you have to wait two weeks, you might be dead, and some are." She hoped recent investments announced in women's corrections would support addiction services.

> "Wait times are too long for people waiting for counsellors, mostly women I think, and I have to ask, how do we find an incentive to keep staff there? I know they get burnt out. Is there a way the morale could be better for them so they want to stay and do the difficult work?"

By March 2022, during the final phases of preparing this report, Council members were hopeful about the upcoming provincial health strategy for women and people who are gender-diverse and wanted to urge government to make noise about the strategy so the services and strategies would be known.

REPRODUCTIVE AND SEXUAL HEALTH SERVICES

Health PEI provided a list of reproductive and sexual health services available for people of all genders through the Women's Wellness Program and the Sexual Health Services:

- Abortion care
 - o Aspiration and medication abortion services available at Prince County Hospital
 - o Medication abortion services available at The Mount
 - Coordination of late-term abortion off-Island
 - o Initial intake assessments available by phone with a registered nurse
 - o 24/7 registered nurse on-call coverage available for post care (clinical)
 - Mental health counselling services available with a registered nurse anytime either before (pregnancy options counselling) or following abortion if requested
 - Sexual health services available at both Prince County Hospital and The Mount
 - o Sexual health education and counselling
 - o Sexually transmitted infection screening and treatment
 - Birth control counselling and prescriptions (including Nexplanon insertions and removals)
 - o PrEP and PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis)
- Reproductive health services available at both Prince County Hospital and The Mount
 - o An initial fertility assessment for couples without a primary care provider
 - o Prenatal care for individuals without a primary care provider
 - o Menopause counselling and care for individuals without a primary care provider
 - o Maternal (perinatal and postpartum) mental health services
 - o Pregnancy loss counselling
 - o Pap/pelvic exams

RENEWED SEXUAL HEALTH CURRICULUM

Worth promoting as an initiative to support women's health and the health of gender-diverse people is the renewed sexual health curriculum for PEI students. Government says, "Sexual health is a crucial aspect of personal health and social welfare that influences individuals across their lifespan. Therefore, health promotion programs focusing on enhancing positive sexual health outcomes and reducing negative sexual health outcomes must be available to all Canadians regardless of their age, race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background, physical/cognitive abilities, religious background or other such characteristics."

SUPPORTS FOR CAREGIVERS

As is so often the case, one person's experience sheds light on what is working and what is not in systems of support for caregiving. "I am thinking about support for caregivers," one respondent said. "I have firsthand experience with trying to support ill parents, my own life with an ill partner, and [children] with their own challenges. And I have enough money and was barely hanging on! Without all the resources and supports I had available, I don't know how I would have survived. No matter your choices, your profession, women may well have to be caregivers to their family." The respondent encapsulated community needs in this way: "Seniors in our



community and young people are definitely going through things. Handling people in need, in distress, need more than to be handed pamphlets. Caregivers need to be supported in the important work they're doing. Service organizations need to be more receptive, more compassionate, more willing to provide 24-hour support to caregivers. To expect people in the sandwich generation to just keep going is unacceptable. The caregivers are getting sick. Then it all falls apart."

"Cost of childcare is a penalty for women—strides are being made but it feels like pulling teeth, it feels like the community has to advocate, advocate, advocate, and come together instead of government being proactive"

Caregivers keeping it together through the pandemic was a frequent theme in focus groups. It was due to these discussions that the members of the Advisory Council dedicated the 2022 Equality Report Card project "to all the front-line workers, essential workers, and caregivers of Prince Edward Island whose undervalued resiliency and care are getting us through the global pandemic of COVID-19." Appreciation, however, is not a tangible support. "Women are not making enough to pay someone else to care for their kids. They have no quality of life," one participant said, while another summed it up by saying, "Women are overworked. Tired. Tired of doing it all."

Echoing others, one commenter said, "Caregivers, front-line workers, and workers in healthcare roles are predominantly women, and a large portion are newcomers and members of the BIPOC community. As the pandemic unfolded, it showed that these groups were hit harder than others." In this participant's view, "very little was done in PEI to address these inequalities in caregiving and wages." As they reviewed reports from government, Council members expressed surprise to learn about strategies and supports they had never heard of. One member, impressed with the health strategy for seniors, near seniors, and their caregivers she had never heard about, said "They need to promote it, if it is good!" Another commented, "It is significant that we don't know much about much of the work government is doing," while another commented, "We can't have navigators for everything."

Many needs of seniors came to light during the pandemic, especially the needs of seniors and vulnerable adults in long-term and community care. In addition to that concern, supports and services for seniors to "age in place" healthily in their homes remained a continuing focus for many respondents. A participant familiar with the Meals on Wheels program (run by a non-profit) spoke about that program as an example: "There are large gaps in this province that don't have Meals on Wheels in their communities. It has been operating 40 to 50 years, such a long time, and many

A HEALTH STRATEGY FOR SENIORS BUILT ON STRONG PILLARS

Council members were impressed by the strategy *Promoting Wellness, Preserving Health Action Plan for Seniors, Near Seniors, and Caregivers* and wished they, as interested members of the general public, had known more about it and its implications.

In 2020-2021, the Department of Social Development and Housing chaired the Seniors Health and Wellness Action Plan Implementation Council, which was established with strong community representation in fall 2019. The plan resulting from their work contains 38 recommended actions designed to promote wellness and preserve the health of Island seniors, near seniors, and caregivers in four priority areas:

- 1. Developing and implementing "Home First" age-in-place initiatives
- 2. Incorporating an age-friendly approach to communities, housing, workforce, and health-care facilities
- 3. Addressing ageism and supporting active aging
- 4. Supporting upstream endeavours that address the social determinants of health

groups on a hamstring budget" The participant shared the experience of a program in a small town serving sixty people a week, from a kitchen run by two women who are both in their eighties. "We have a large population in need demographically in an aging province, people who have worked their entire lives, are near their end point, and want to live in dignity. They don't have the option to live in their own homes if they don't have food security. They need support—not because you want their vote but because you want to care for people because they want to live this part of their lives with dignity."

"Indigenous elders in long-term care and community care need to be accommodated for their culture and ceremony."

Focus groups heard perspectives on childcare both from parents and caregivers and from early childhood educators. Childcare remains an essential support for women's economic and social participation, and finding childcare spaces remains one of the most stressful projects for new parents in PEI. A participant who could not find infant spaces commented not only on what made it a challenge but why childcare spaces are vital to equality: "I couldn't get daycare until both my kids were 3+. Such a challenge to do all the housework, childcare, paid work in our household. Men don't work the same hours or have the same expectations as women." The solution they suggested was, "A primary caregiver top up would address many challenges for women."

"[I had] no maternity leave as self-employed. I worked full time while raising a two-year old. We need childcare that is affordable and regulated."

An entrepreneur concerned with childcare access said, "Single moms are so challenged, childcare is a huge concern. I own a [store], but often I am a psychologist. Women are not making enough to pay someone else to care for their kids. They have no quality of life. We need trained, quality, affordable daycare."

Another participant in the circle of rural women entrepreneurs reflected on her experience pioneering children's care and education in a small town. "What has happened with childcare since?" she wondered. "Why has nothing improved? Running a daycare is not profitable—there is no real money in it! Another big problem is the ratio of women's wages in relation to child care costs."

"Childcare workers, as essential workers, and childcare centres, as essential services, have had very little choice in the context of COVID."

An early childhood educator who took part in a focus group spoke about the crucially important work of ensuring children's diversity, equity, and inclusion needs receive attention. "I'm working on a file, and we noticed that there is no policy … for children in early childhood who are different, in relation to their gender, their sexual identity, etc. Educators are not trained. So we are reviewing, creating policies in relation to that, and we have to make sure that we have the necessary tools."

Focus group conversations and community perceptions survey responses preceded provincial-federal agreements to move Prince Edward Island towards an average of \$10-a-day childcare, and before the first phase of fee reductions became a reality. There may be new hopefulness in the community for the early childhood care and education sector and growing opportunities for children, educators, and caregivers to thrive.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The general consensus across focus groups and community perceptions survey respondents is that the world of work is changing more quickly and more radically than Prince Edward Island's workforce development efforts are accommodating. Workers and employers have struggled through the pandemic. Economic and workforce effects have been profound for women, youth, and BIPOC communities.

"I feel the PEI government could do more in being engendered in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic," a community perceptions survey respondent said. "For example, some organizations who have been working with women were finding it difficult to access government funds allocated to help the



community due to policy considerations and how the organization was registered as opposed to their work with the community."

"COVID allowed a lot of people to work from home and that [gives] a lot of caregiving women not big options for employment—one change catapulting from the COVID situation is employment standards needing to be updated, making more options for working from home."

One focus group participant shared their reflections on slow-to-change work hours and expectations: "One thing that came into my mind was a Beyonce song I was listening to this morning: 'Crazy how all the people have to work 9-5 to just stay alive.' It really is crazy, Beyonce, I agree! ... More time outside of work is a better quality of life. Right now, people do not have time to become more engaged in the community or take care of their kids. Work and preparing for work, getting to work (transportation on this Island!) take so much time, and some jobs expect you to be on call outside of work."

A participant with experience living and observing the work world in a European country said, "Women in Canada work insanely hard, compared to Europe. We need to take better care of ourselves and our children." A parent made the impassioned comment, "I have a daughter and she'd rather be poor and do a job that she loves. Young people are not willing to work 80 hours a week for someone else's profit. F*** that! We are not going to be filling those sh**ty jobs. We have to make them worthwhile and livable. Capitalism is not the end all and be all to [youth]."

"The MeToo movement has had an impact for sure. People got the courage to leave abusive relationships. Women woke up and don't want to return to terrible

living and working conditions. It can be especially harsh for women and single parents. Financial insecurity and lax employment standards all contribute."

Participants in the focus group made up of rural entrepreneurs expressed mixed sentiments about minimum wage and whether challenges some face filling available jobs in their region result from a labour shortage or a wage shortage.

A business owner participant stated that her employees make a living wage, and everyone has health benefits. "As owners and entrepreneurs we have to make decisions that are good for our community, for the wellbeing of the community. We can never over-rely on government. Our business will grow if we are conscious, aware, compassionate, and fair." She advocated for other employers to pay livable wages: "Business people have to make equitable choices. Minimum wage is NOT a living wage—pay more."

"The first thing that comes to mind when I think of poverty elimination is the minimum wage, and I think of the recent increase of \$.15. It is really a joke if you look at the increased cost of housing, or consumership at food banks, or the cost of childcare. It is not a livable wage."

A small retailer shared, "Until this year I've had reliable staff for eight or nine years. COVID is a crock! Where are the young people working? I had grants to hire, but no one applied. No one. I have hired two retirees. There are no people to work." Another commented, "There are lots of glaring issues with how small businesses are run. Especially in hospitality. I never had legally required breaks. As long as the unsafe and unfair practices continue young people will continue to leave hospitality." A participant suggested people leaving the workforce could result from "offer[ing] constantly minimum wages, complaining about people taking the CERB."

One woman shared statistics that since COVID, Canada nationally has lost 250,000 people in the hospitality industry. An employer in the industry saw better wages as the key to recruitment: "We pay \$18/hour in housekeeping with benefits, bonuses, and three days off a week."

"They talk about trouble attracting people to fill jobs and a shortage of workers: Jobs don't pay the bills."

"Business can afford to pay people a living wage," another participant chided. "Charge more for your products. Don't blame CERB."

On the other hand, at another table, a social assistance recipient talked about how the design of support programs can create structural barriers to seeking paid employment. "Even though there has been a slight increase in [social] assistance, the program still means that when I go back [to work], [the clawback] is going to be dollar for dollar on my income. … What do you do? Go to work for your mental health? Stay home because you can't afford to go to work?" Another participant advocated for better pathways from income support programs to livelihood through investment in public services: "Government could spend *great* money by subsidizing daycare, etc. to at least bridge a better way of life."

"The bulk of the discussion is about employees, but we need to help employers as well. Because when an employer decides to employ someone, regardless of the position, the cost of living is exorbitant. How can the employer hire successfully?"

An employer who has hired migrant workers for their business said, "Immigrants are the solution to the labour crisis." However, at another focus group, a participant said, "There are employers here who hire [from outside Canada], who fill positions by bringing in employees who will not be able to make a living on the Island, who will fall directly into poverty. They will not be able to pay rent, and they will have to seek help from community agencies just to make ends meet. And for me, that is totally unacceptable. It is living in a state of emergency."

Yet another participant addressed community attitudes that are a barrier to immigrants in the workforce. "I think it's also important to change this mentality of 'No one comes to work.' No immigrant is going to come and say, 'I'm going to live on welfare in your country, I'm not going to do anything with my life, I'm not going to do anything with my career.' In fact, everyone wants to succeed and participate in their success!"

"[A community agency] was shocked that I was looking to hire workers [with a disability]. As employers we are not always making the effort to include everyone and appreciate diversity. We should consider that 'someone different' in our workplaces."

A participant in another roundtable said, "There are employers here who hire [from outside Canada], who fill positions by bringing in employees who will not be able to make a living on the Island, who will fall directly into poverty. They will not be able to pay rent, and they will have to seek help from community agencies just to make ends meet. And for me, that is totally unacceptable. It is living in a state of emergency."

One participant said, "The Foreign Workers Program has so changed the reality of employment for young workers in rural areas. Temporary foreign workers work harder, have experience and maturity, and are desperate." An advocate for migrant worker rights wanted to make sure that desperation is not exploited. They added, "A note specifically about migrant workers—there has been some positive movement towards better protections, with the development of provincial legislation—but the issues related to inadequate housing, and patchy healthcare coverage have not been addressed."

A number of participants saw training and education, especially for young people, as essential in workforce development. One said, "Government needs to focus on help to train younger people in trades—to create self-esteem." Another advocated for free post-secondary education: "The equivalent of a Bachelors degree should be paid for everyone. That would go a long way to eliminating poverty." At the same time, a participant in the focus group of international students and recent graduates put it bluntly: "Government is not doing concrete things to retain us here."

There is also the matter of well-educated immigrants whose education is not recognized in Canada or PEI. Recognition of foreign credentials came up at two focus groups. "One of the big gaps …is the

infamous issue of recognition of credentials," said one participant who spoke of experience working alongside immigrants. "We have newcomers who arrive here, who will take lower salaries, lower positions, and who will not have jobs that allow them to live a full life [because their credentials are not recognized]."

Supports for the voluntary sector, which employs a substantial number of women, were a topic of discussion as well. In discussing this report, a community advocate made a case for a "basic organizational guarantee," like a basic income guarantee for organizations. "This guarantee would provide reliable, stable, year over year core funding to organizations that are struggling to survive in a competitive pool for limited project-based funding," she said.

FUNDING FOR A REPORT ON THE NON-PROFIT SECTOR IN PEI Government provided the funding for a report on the non-profit sector in PEI, entitled The Non-Profit Sector in Prince Edward Island. The September 2021 report was completed by APEC and found, "PEI nonprofits play a key role in the economy but sector struggles were intensified by the pandemic." The conclusions continue, "Nonprofits are an important, successful and growing part of Prince Edward Island, providing essential supports and services. However, funding and labour challenges, and now COVID-19, are impeding their success." The Province recognizes that given the high percentage of women in non-profit organizations, it is important to bring information about this sector to the public and to raise awareness within government. Relevant report highlights: "In terms of diversity, 70% of employees and 65% of leaders are women. The share of employment of underrepresented groups is also above the PEI average. Non-profit leaders are highly educated but have below average wages."

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

To begin to consider diversity and inclusion, it is essential for those of us with privilege to reckon with three things: first, that if there has been a seeming lack of diversity in PEI in the past, it was not accidental or inevitable but was due to differences being denied, driven out, and made invisible through oppression (Mi'kmaq, Acadians, Black Islanders); second, that we only need to figure out "inclusion" because the dominant culture's practices of exclusion have been cruelly systemic and structural; and, third, that the processes of colonization, the enforcement of cisheteropatriarchy, and the operations of white supremacy are all active and ongoing today.

All focus groups grappled with questions about how to dismantle systems of privilege and move beyond *recognition* of diversity, through initiatives to build equity, towards a goal of actual inclusion. Many participants emphasized that equality focused only on gender is unjust. As one participant put it, "Equity requires a consideration of intersecting precarities."



Numerous community consultation participants put a priority on

reconciliation not only in their comments on diversity and inclusion, but also in their comments on COVID-19 recovery, healthcare, justice, and gender and diversity analysis.

"We do expect the budget surpluses of the province to be spent on services to citizens, especially those most vulnerable and excluded. What actions have been taken to address racism in PEI since the massive [Black Lives Matter] rally in 2020? What tangible advances have been made in reconciling with Indigenous people? There seems to be a focus on building roads, highways, and infrastructure and not on social programs."

The historic and contemporary realities of Mi'kmaw and other First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people were on the minds of international students and recent graduates. Several participants were surprised to discover settler Canadians' general ignorance of Indigenous history: "School systems outside Canada also have more content about colonization than we have here," one participant said. "I studied the Canadian Indian residential schools in my country, knew about the idea they would 'kill the "Indian" in the child' ... and I came here only to find people here didn't know even what I had learned about."

"Newcomers have to learn Canadian history in a way white Canadians don't."

Another international student or recent graduate said, "When I think Canada I think white Canada, and when I came here, I found out about Indigenous people. We learn about that coming here, but it has to show, it can't be that the first thing people think about Canada is a white man in his fifties."

An Indigenous participant at a roundtable wanted others to have greater knowledge and understanding of historic and contemporary realities—and Indigenous rights unequally accessible in her community. She said, "The only issues I have is the division that is between my [Indigenous] community right now about on and off reserve. I would like to see equality, where there is no division of on- and off-reserve people, and we all have the same rights and access to the same programming and benefits. ... We shouldn't have to reside on reserve in order to benefit from our inherent rights."

Council members noted that on diversity and inclusion, in general, "We are not as far ahead as government thinks." While government is doing better at understanding social inclusion, for example, and "seeing it as everyone's responsibility," as one member said, "They do not see social inclusion as including class and income considerations."

Many participants echoed the theme that "PEI is way [behind] where it should be to provide everybody decent life conditions and equity in [the province's] active life." As one participant observed, "PEI is still very closed-minded despite efforts to show willingness to be open. Nowadays there are lots of talks and demonstration of intentions but tangible actions are yet to be seen. The greatest intentions without actions are not a sign of change. ... It's time for real action and really walk the talk in every [sort] of PEI communities (local and businesses)."

"To bring people to the table seems simple, but it's not necessarily simple. ... It will be very important for government to consider whose voices are heard and whose are not."

Participants were concerned to move beyond tokenism and window-dressing in consultations. One participant who identified as being from a minority community said, "I find there is a lot of talk, a lot of consultation, and that's good, as a starting point. But there comes a point where just talking, just consulting to say that voices were included, to say that diversity was considered, loses its credibility. It loses the sense there's an intention to really take action. I am eager to see implementation!"

A participant who said she was speaking from a place of privilege said, "I would be looking to have more roundtables within the communities and centering the voices of people who have been marginalized by white supremacy and colonization. Ongoing marginalization, we need to learn, is the ultimate violence." A participant from a different table but speaking from a similar standpoint agreed: "On diversity and inclusion, I would really like to hold government accountable to be listening and including because I'm sure it is difficult in government, but that is where the real action is and where it is so important to know what is current, on the ground, and to ask, are we including everybody?"

"It is more and more clear to me every day, how people are shut out due to systemic barriers. It is not fair, and that is the reason I want to advocate, because of systemic discrimination." BIPOC participants in community consultations shared numerous experiences of exclusion and racism. Most of the participants in the international student and recent graduate focus group were people of colour, and most had a story to tell. "As a BIPOC person," one said, "I had culture shock but also being in a very white space for the first time, navigating that. I had grown up watching American movies, I knew what I was going into, but I had never lived it."

Another recalled, "I had never been a minority until I landed in PEI, and suddenly, I'm BIPOC? That was news to me."Markers of difference were barriers to inclusion for several respondents. One participant said, "If you have an accent, it is assumed you are dumber than people around you. They can't make out what you say, don't bother to try." Another participant quipped, "Ironically, you could probably speak six other languages!"

"White majority countries are not forced to learn about the majority world—countries of the global south," said one participant. "Countries of the global south *have* to know about white majority countries and culture."

A young BIPOC woman spoke about her experience in a PEI workplace of racism and discrimination based on immigration status: "I worked where three-quarters of the workplace was BIPOC, and I can't explain the extent we were taken advantage of. They were trying to trick us to work more than 20 hours [the maximum allowed to international students]." The participant described the power imbalance and discrimination: "You have to do what you have to do to keep the job. I need my permanent residency. … White people were allowed to go home after shift—allowed to leave early -- whereas I could not."

"You're in such a vulnerable position [as a BIPOC person in the workplace]. You need the money, you don't want to get in trouble, so you just shut up and accept that."

They said, "You don't have family and friends here who can go to bat for you. Employers take advantage of young people, but an international student doesn't have same supports in the community." Another commented, "There is a lack of commitment to actual inclusion. Government needs to show students that they are valuable by action not just by saying you are valuable because you pay more fees."

Later in the conversation among international students and recent graduates, a participant said, "What ends up happening is that people who have been through the journey grab someone, pull them through the doors, and create a parallel network compared to the Canadian students. Everyone (who has been an international student) has helped someone else."

"As BIPOC people, every time we meet someone, when we are very visibly non-white people, we are expected to applaud them doing the bare minimum as white people."

The Council also discussed the urgent need for diverse voices in decision-making on issues that disproportionately affect systemically excluded groups, issues such as poverty and violence prevention. Council members talked about the need for more and better inclusion of people with disabilities, while also acknowledging increased capacity for community agencies that provide excellent programs and services. Council members very positively assessed progress on gender and diversity guidelines in schools, noting that education beginning in early childhood care and education is also needed.

Nonetheless, Council was pleased to see increasing space for 2SLGBTQIA+ people, and recognition of gender diversity and the wide variety of kinds of family structures in provincial programs such as Positive Parenting from Two Homes.

One Council member said, "I'm not the voice of diversity, but something I have been noticing is the difference between people in rural and urban [settings] and the disparity and difference, especially for people from diverse communities. There are significant differences, even just outside the city limits." She noted lack of Internet, information technology, and transit options.

At one rural focus group, participants grappled with competing values and interests around diversity and inclusion,

IMPLEMENTATION OF 211 SERVICE

In May 2020, a 211 service was implemented in PEI to connect Islanders with quick and easy access to information and referral to community and social services. The service is free, confidential and available in over 100 languages. The Department of Social Development and Housing staff coordinated with the United Way to implement this service.

During the first year, support has been provided to over 31,600 Islanders through the multiplatform navigation services including 3,200 callers being provided with 3,600 referrals. During the COVID-19 pandemic response, 211 PEI has been a critical service to Islanders.

COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS FOR EDUCATORS

Government reports that expanded professional learning will continue for educators about engaging in courageous conversations about diversity, specifically on Promoting Rights, Identity, and Self-Actualization of Minorities (PRISM). The Department of Education and Life-long Learning provided engaging sessions in 2022 that were highly evaluated. Past Advisory Council on the Status of Women Chairperson Debbie Langston has been hired at DELL as a Diversity Consultant, and her department reports she deserves much credit for her professional learning sessions for educators.

wondering how to be inclusive of groups in their region who desire to be separate and distinct from the culture around them. One woman spoke about her Amish neighbours and the gender roles expected of women and children. She asked aloud, "What is our role as women in the community, to care for these women and ensure they're healthy and safe? ... I'm just devastated by the lives these young girls are relegated to—cleaning cooking, marriage and babies from their teens." Another participant asked, "How does this run up against our desire to be open to diversity and inclusion of cultures?" Another participant shared her experiences with a young Taiwanese Buddhist nun in her community and treatment she saw as unjust. Another participant said, "It's tricky because there is such an emphasis on culture. At what point does it become a thing that the government prohibits? We want to respect cultural practices and norms but also promote equality.

"We are a mosaic; where does equality begin?"

Education was discussed as a solution to bring about greater inclusion at more than one table. "I think there's still a lot of clash between the people on the Island and the new people coming in, so a lot of outreach is needed," admitted one participant. "There definitely needs to be education on the value of the community that is coming into PEI," said another. A BIPOC newcomer to PEI said, "There certainly does exist a need for education, learning more about more outside the province, and not just getting people to acclimate when they arrive." Another agreed: "Education is needed for the white system in general of BIPOC people's history, for respect, understanding of inclusion—not just '20% of our staff is BIPOC or LGBTQ and we are checking off boxes!'"

"In the everyday reality: Do we see diversity? Do we see it on councils? Do we see it in the public services? Do we see it in government? Is it true inclusion?"

Focus group and community perceptions survey participants were ready for diversity and inclusion to become more than a list of lingering questions and instead be a list of action points, with wide engagement across the Island.

POVERTY ELIMINATION

"Poverty is still a huge problem," was the sole comment offered by one community survey respondent, and that observation was echoed in all the focus groups and many survey responses. Many if not most community consultation participants were attuned to the acute—and preventable—suffering caused by poverty in the PEI community.

One woman shared her experience of living in low income in PEI



in 2021: "There are people like me sitting and wondering if it is better to go to work or not, whether they can eat healthy food or not. Even though there has been a slight increase in assistance, the program still means that when I go back after EI, it [the clawback] is going to be dollar for dollar on my income. When I went to work and when I had to be made to apply for CERB and EI (which has been good), I got cut off assistance like 'that' [snap of the fingers]. I didn't know if medications would be paid for. I had no idea what was going to happen. I went three months not knowing what I was supposed to do –what was going to happen? That goes with mental health, hand to hand. It is not just me—it is everywhere. What do you do? Go to work for your mental health? Stay home because you can't afford to go to work? Risk being cut off assistance without any steps to take—or adjustments, I guess that's the word? Paid employment is great for my mental health, but financially it's been a stress. A huge mess." In response, someone else commented with compassion, "You're talking about choices which are not choices, and they aren't sustainable."

As they assessed quite a long list of government programs and initiatives aimed at poverty reduction, Council members assessed many of the initiatives as positive but reflected, as one said, that "the system is broken. There are still eligibility and accessibility barriers." Members were looking for programs that empower rather than providing just charity. One characterized the current approach to poverty reduction as a system to "throw programs at them [people in low income], and then leave them alone, poor things." Another agreed, saying, "Social Assistance keeps people in poverty. It doesn't lift people out. It is not keeping pace with what is needed. When you lose benefits if you work a certain amount, that keeps people in situations without dignity."

> "The analogy is four wheels and a car, and the car is never going to go anywhere if we only start it and don't steer it—and nobody here is steering anywhere. If you want to get in the car with the four wheels around you and stand still, go for it."

A pernicious effect of poverty is its power to exclude people in low income from enjoyment and engagement in the community. One focus group participant asked, "Do the poorest women even have a chance to speak?" They continued, "They work one, two, three jobs... Can they go to a focus group, can they go to meetings, can they even participate in activities that interest them? They are burned out, they are tired, and they have to pay their rent again! This is very discouraging for me."
"People on assistance, or living paycheque to paycheque, need to *thrive*, not just survive, and to *belong*, without judgment."

Housing was a major topic for community consultation participants. The Advisory Council on the Status of Women has long advocated for housing that is affordable, accessible, appropriate, and safe. As discussed at each of the focus groups, housing that meets all four of those definitions is increasingly hard to find for many people in Prince Edward Island.

"Usually poverty elimination is just talked about as increased minimum wage, but if you look at it in a holistic approach, you need to look at costs. Housing is a really, really big one. If you are maintaining a household."

The discussion with the strongest focus on housing was among international students and recent graduates. Participants were quick to define the housing situation as a "crisis." One participant said, "we hear international students find it very difficult to find housing, especially when not on the Island to look at housing and having to look for housing through online ads. They are exposed to rental scams when they have to look online..."

An international student/recent graduate commented, "It's just hard to see sometimes: people living five people in one room, so many people sharing one tiny room. It's not how you want to have your experience as a student. People should have their own rooms and be able to afford that."

"Students are coming in who want to study in Canada, but there isn't a place for them to go. There are not that many rooms at UPEI, so they are in precarious positions."

Agreed another, "We are going through our own struggles. Finding a home, \$1,700 for a one-bedroom with no utilities included, and it's ridiculous. Everything is located within Charlottetown the way the Island is structured, so we can't look elsewhere for housing."

The housing crisis is on the minds of many who are not experiencing its effects. A Council member said, "I am very concerned about lack of housing. There are people living in porches, and people having to move an hour or hour-and-a-half outside where they work, living in sub-standard housing, and the number of people who can't find places to live now." Council members expressed a deep concern that homelessness has become so visible, and it leads to profound worry about the invisibly homeless and those on the brink of homelessness, living in inappropriate, inaccessible, unsafe, or unaffordable housing.

A focus group participant said, "There are landlords who think they can do anything. Rent increase by \$30 [a month]?! You are not allowed to do that! That's not the 1% allowable increase. They see there is room to take advantage—they know international students will hesitate to go get help, and they might silently accept that." Another comment noted, "We were asked for two months rent up front, and we were going to be taken advantage of because of being a vulnerable group if I hadn't said it was illegal."

One student/graduate participant talked about getting calls from incoming students, asking for help with housing: "I get calls, and I don't know how to help them with housing, I'm struggling with housing myself."

"People on assistance, or living paycheque to paycheque, need to *thrive*, not just survive, and to *belong*, without judgment."

Several of the other focus groups linked housing and tenancy issues with ensuring Prince Edward Island is a welcoming place for newcomers of all kinds. As one participant said, "One of the things I worry about is housing. People are looking at PEI as a little haven now. That can make it harder and harder for people who need affordable housing." A participant who works in the not-for-profit sector said, "There are a lot of mothers here who are experiencing housing evictions because there are many more people arriving," driving increased demand and prices for housing.

Far from expressing xenophobia, this participant wanted current residents to have secure housing and also for new arrivals to be welcome and to stay, "I think a lot about the number of newcomers," they said. "What will make them stay here? Because as soon as they have permanent residency, they leave because there are other provinces that offer much better, much cheaper lives." She expressed concern about "all the basic questions: housing, food..." and concluded, "I hope that there will be more and more services for women in poverty."

As noted, the idea of precariousness came up in several focus groups. In one, a participant said, "Precarious is the word: we don't understand everything is a domino." By that, she meant that if a person's housing situation tips over, it often knocks flat their ability to meet basic food needs, their employability, their caregiving capacity, their personal safety, and their health. And, from a systems perspective, a housing crisis has cascading effects for social services, the workforce, caregiving, violence, and health systems.

Participants in several focus groups were concerned about definitions of "affordability" for housing, which are shifting to look at rents as a proportion of the *market rate* instead of as a proportion of *tenant income*. "My issue with affordable housing here in PEI, is that rents in these 'affordable' housing units being built are not affordable. Rents are in the \$1,250 range and more." This participant said, "rent should be based on a person's income."

"It keeps people suffering when systems 'do just-*not-quite*-enough."

At one of the discussion tables, there was a conversation about a situation in which people were unhoused from their temporary housing to make way for summer tourists. One participant commented, "There is money to be made for rich people in [maintaining] poverty, running slums. I've been looking at the corporate side of interests in poverty and housing, looking through a feminist lens to how you address those poverty cycles." Asked to say more, the speaker said, "We look to slums from the outside as horrible situations, and we forget to look at the inside, and who is making money from those situations."

There were also landlord participants in focus groups. "I am a landlord," one participant said. "Just a little one, but you don't want to tell people you're a landlord anymore." This participant was concerned about conflict and tension made worse in the context of the housing crisis. Their preferred solution was investment in public housing.

"It broke my heart to see the people in Halifax pushed out of encampments. It is so easy to make a small, safe place for people to live in our communities."

A participant at another table was not hopeful. "From the conversations that I have had," they said, "it just seems like the government wants to do the bare minimum that they possibly can get away with to say they did something—the least they possibly can do. I have been in situations around government officials who were making a joke of the housing crisis." Regardless of their hopefulness, focus group participants saw a definite role for the provincial government in addressing the housing crisis. As one participant concluded, "Just like you can't just expect community to step in to deal with poverty, you can't just expect the private sector to do something about housing. Government has to pull its weight."

Overall, assessing the provincial government's response to poverty, a participant said, "It's a handout model. Not a dignity model." A participant with experience working in the voluntary sector with charity organizations said that the "handout model" is too often replicated among community groups. They said, "Working with non-government organizations doing (fundraising) drives, you get attached to the topic (of poverty elimination), but this really shouldn't be the focus of the non-profit sector. It is nice to help in troubled times, but there should exist a social security net. People who end up in circumstances of poverty shouldn't have to depend on community stepping up where

FUNDING FOR THE UNITED WAY COMMON OUTCOMES INITIATIVE

The Province, through the Department of Social Development and Housing, provided financial support to the United Way to carry out common outcomes reporting for organizations they support that engage in poverty reduction strategies. Many of these organizations are also supported by the Department. This work began in winter 2021 and was set to take place over two years. It included the following:

- Canada–Prince Edward Island Housing Benefit
- Summer Food Security Program
- Trauma Informed Care training for SDH staff
- Implementation of 211 PEI
- Amendment to the Adoption Act
- Suspension of Birth Alerts
- Poverty Reduction Action Plan
- Enhancements to Triple P Positive Parenting Program
- Expansion of the Senior's Independence Initiative
- Social Sector Community Partners Fund
 - Promoting Wellness, Preserving Health Action Plan for Seniors, Near Seniors and Caregivers

government should be helping in that instance."

"It often feels like we have band-aid solutions to issues like poverty but are not addressing causes. So many people are struggling and don't know where to look where to find even a little bit of help."

Among the focus groups, the most widely supported solution to bring about poverty elimination was a basic income guarantee. As one participant observed, "Women are having to choose between medication and food. It's awful. The solution is a baseline basic income for everyone." Another said, "It was very

promising there was a model [for basic income guarantee] presented in the Legislature, the whole house voted on it, and it was very exciting. ... As time goes on, we're going to lose that momentum and PEI's chance to lead the country for once, and help people who live here."

"Poverty among senior women living alone is heartbreaking. Many live on \$1,300 a month. ... That is shameful."

Several commenters recognized a need for a change in public revenues as well as public investments: "We need progressive taxes, a total overhaul of the tax system," they said. On a similar note, another commented, "We don't just have a poverty problem. We have a wealth problem. We don't just have to eliminate poverty. We have to eliminate excessive wealth." Around another table, a participant observed, "Systems have lost connectivity to people," and she linked that loss of connection to systems preoccupied with economic, rather than social, values. "It is time to build relationships, rather than a focus on profits," she said. Another commenter said, "The priority during COVID-19 has clearly been economic recovery, with marginalized groups and communities not being provided with adequate supports to weather the pandemic."

"I believe we are called as a society to move beyond the charity model."

A plain-spoken question was this: "When will this government show leadership and start a basic income guarantee demonstration in PEI?"

A past Chairperson of the Advisory Council concluded, "Basic income, affordable housing, looking at sectors that are actually essential: all has been illuminated. It will take groups like the Advisory Council on the Status of Women and other women's groups and the Black Cultural Society and Indigenous groups to make sure we don't slip back."

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Participants in community consultations felt that public health measures were very effective in curbing the spread of the first waves of COVID-19 in Prince Edward Island, with one commenting, "I think PEI has been one of the safest places during the entire pandemic."

Past Council Chairpersons, who met for a focus group in June 2021, focused their consultation on feminist recovery from COVID-19, and one began with appreciation: "I have had great admiration for how our government and Chief Public Health



Office have responded, by paying attention to science and health matters. They have had to deal with a lot of criticism. This [COVID] is an experiment no one had experienced before. [...] But, in general, I was pleased with how things were being handled."

"COVID-19 took us all by surprise and left the government scrambling to respond to something they've never responded to before. Mistakes were made, but generally Islanders felt protected from a healthcare perspective. Health PEI and front-line health staff are to be commended for their committed response."

Unfortunately, as many community consultation participants observed, public-health measures failed to address inequities based on gender and identity that were exposed during the pandemic, and some measures revealed and exacerbated deep-rooted inequalities. Said one participant, "The disparate ways we've set things up has become visible. I'd like to see stronger direction from leaders. ... There's a real expectation of improved lives, and what is going to happen if it is not met?" Many participants shared similar comments on the turbulent times. "The pandemic exposed and worsened long standing crises in our system," one said. "Housing, lack of childcare, food insecurity, poverty, violence—all became more visible during this time. The government did very little to analyze impacts on different populations. They did even less to address the different impacts." A participant summed it up cogently: ""We can't have an economic recovery without a social recovery."

"In my opinion, no specific considerations were taken regarding diversity or gender equity, neither in guidelines nor in impact of guidelines or mandates."

Many participants spoke about the specific needs of parents and caregivers. "I don't think gender was a factor in the government response to COVID. There did not seem to be any consideration of the impacts of school closures on parents/caregivers of children," said one. Another commented, "People were working extra hard if they were women. The jobs of taking care of children and helping them learn fell on women to a great extent. When we went into essential services, most of the front-line workers … were mostly women: women who were working lower wages and yet considered 'essential services.'"

For one respondent, the list of essential workers' needs government could better have met included "childcare needs, boost wages, implement an adequate paid sick leave policy."

> "With so many women filling essential roles in the workplace caregiving, grocery clerks and having to remain at work. there did not seem to be action on increasing wages, paid sick leave ... which would have had a positive impact on many lives."

School closures created a particular stress for parents, especially those with intersecting challenges, and one observed, "Single moms that were essential workers [struggled] to find child care in a continually unpredictable school vs. school-at-home situation,"

COMPREHENSIVE EARLY YEARS RESPONSE TO COVID-19

A number of programs assisted young children and their parents and guardians, early years centres, and early childhood educators from the first phases of the COVID-19 crisis. These included the following:

- The Essential Worker Child Care provided funding support for emergency child-care services to ensure that essential workers could return to work.
- The Child Care Allowance Program offset child-care costs for families returning to work during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The Emergency Relief to Child Care Centres provided funding support to licensed centres to pay for parent fees not collected by centres due to families not accessing child care as a result of COVID-19.
- The Early Childhood COVID-19 Relief Grant Safe Restart provided funding to support licensed centres to enable compliance with COVID-19 requirements and the CPHO Directive on Licensed Child Care Centres.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN DURING COVID-19

The speedy attention to the needs of children during lockdown and athome learning periods of the COVID-19 pandemic will have long-term positive effects. Examples of programs led by the Department of Social Development and Housing included these:

- During school closures due to COVID-19 and throughout the summer of 2020, healthy lunches were delivered to PEI students from self-identified families. Over 110,000 meals were delivered, and 1,420 gift cards were provided across PEI in 2020. An average of 732 students participated per week. Families whose children were not in their care due to child protection concerns were provided cellphones to connect with their children during the COVID-19 lockdown.
- Children in care of the Director of Child Protection were provided increased access to electronic devices to be able to virtually visit with their families and to participate in on-line school.
- To support parents during COVID-19, 250 additional access codes to Triple P Online were purchased in 2020. Triple P Online is a web-based version of Triple P Positive Parenting Program including a specialized module to assist with parenting strategies during COVID-19.

while another said, "They totally left out parents with special needs children." Another concluded, simply, "More could have been done, I think, to support women who were needing to deal with school closures."

Past Chairpersons of the Council paid special attention to the effects of the pandemic on senior women. "My perspective on this question is the perspective of senior women," one said. She noted "a lot of research is going on about the welfare of seniors, and there are many reports about the amount of fear and of not wanting to go out, even when it's safe, even when we have two immunizations. There is fear of going back to routines we might have had." She expressed special concern for the "effects of isolation on long-term care. As a country we have learned some lessons about isolating people as was done in the early days of the pandemic, and the effect was as detrimental as the pandemic." Thinking of elder abuse, she said, "There is, of course, as much or similar concerns about elder abuse and women abused by a partner—and seniors dealing with neglect or self-neglect."

> "I believe PEI has invested very little that has not been mandated and financed by the federal government. I have heard little to no analysis about who has suffered most and who continue to be excluded, except from national and non-government sources."

Mixed feelings about the pandemic response were the order of the day for many consultation participants. One respondent said, "We have been fortunate, mostly by accident and not design. I do appreciate that this government has respected CPHO [Chief Public Health Office] advice and prioritized the health of all over business needs. I expect to see more leadership in addressing the glaring inequities the pandemic has exposed."

A common concern was perceived priorities in policy decisions, with most participants in focus groups wishing to see decisions more focused on people. One wanted government to live up to its own slogan, "It's about people." One observed, "as the situation became clearer with respect to [essential workers and marginalized] groups, very little was done in PEI to address these inequalities in caregiving and wages while economic issues seemed to be a central focus. Another commented, "The provincial government has continued to respond to the needs of the business community instead of more vulnerable groups such as non-profit organizations who serve populations disproportionately impacted by the pandemic."

"Industry voices that traditionally do well have already done well (for example, construction), but the gap between people who do well and those who don't has widened."

Some participants decried missed opportunities to do better. One said, "The pandemic could have been a pivotal moment to address housing, poverty, and more, and we did almost nothing." Some participants continued to hold out hope."I feel like with so many things shut down or forcibly changed, it is such an opportunity to do better in so many sectors. A lot of things, because of COVID, are very problematic to do right now, but there are chances to do recovery better in many sectors."

A participant with experience working in healthcare said, "Looking at our response to COVID, if we can be that responsive and flexible in the [already stretched] health sector on a short basis [that is, quickly], how can that be done in the future? How can that be leveraged in the future. For example, how can that be done in court, increasing access to justice with more online options? What else can make justice more accessible for women?"

"We need to look to see if there are better ways of moving forward. How can we use that strength of pivoting quickly?"

As a participant concluded, "Some things we have to learn from this: to do some things better, address inequalities between different groups, do better for how we care for people in community care and nursing homes."

FOLLOW-UP: PRIORITY ACTION AREAS FROM 2018

"What about issues the Advisory Council on the Status of Women has been advocating about for twenty or more years that were not included as either 'sustained progress' or 'new progress' in the 2022 Equality Report Card?"

Past Equality Report Cards identified priority action areas on which Council members wanted to see progress. The new assessment model for 2022 de-emphasized priority targets to focus more on *sustained progress* and *new progress*. Council gave up the prerogative to point to the goal. Nevertheless, a review of priority action areas from the 2018 Equality Report Card to see where work remains to do reveals few priority recommendations were left behind.



Priority action areas where there was "some progress" or "good progress" in 2018 were carried over to 2022 as "equality gains to sustain," and, as noted in the 2022 Report Card, Council assessed 90% of these as "sustained" from 2019 to 2021. Further, some items that showed "some" or "good" progress up to 2018 saw significant enhancements from 2019 to 2021 that Council could credit as "new progress."

The 2018 report also assessed "little or no progress" on a large number of priority action areas. During the period from 2019 to 2021, there was action on an impressive number of these; others still require sustained attention and effort.

STILL MORE TO DO

A half-dozen priority action areas identified as showing little or no progress up to 2018 also saw little or no progress from 2019 to 2021. These include the following:

- Recruitment to agencies, boards, and commissions keyed to specific, publicly advertised gender and diversity goals for appointments: Recruitment strategies, selection rubrics centred on diversity (like those used for appointments to the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women), and even improved and updated Engage PEI application forms are still needed.
- Steps to examine and reduce barriers to women being nominated or elected: Women are still drastically under-represented in Executive Council, but to get to Executive Council, they need to get nominated and elected, and barriers still remain for women and gender diverse candidates, candidates from other diversity groups, and, especially, women and gender-diverse candidates who are also part of other diversity groups.
- Implementation of a domestic violence court option and/or other therapeutic court options: It is now more than two decades since advocates working collaboratively with government put forward proposals for a domestic violence court option, and April 2022 will mark ten years since a Speech from the Throne promised action on therapeutic court options.
- Opportunities for caregivers of school-aged children, especially women and diverse and under-represented groups, to collaborate meaningfully in education governance and

leadership: *While government has taken initial steps to return to an education governance model with elected school boards, changes are not yet implemented.*

- Changes to legislation that allow for supported decision-making in compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities: After more than 20 years of advocates working with government on drafts of legislation, some draft legislation has been drawn up, but it falls far short of what advocacy groups have called for, and their analysis says the draft does not meet the bar of upholding the rights of people with disabilities.
- An expanded mandate for social assistance programs to support more economically vulnerable islanders: Expanding the mandate and supporting more low-income Islanders really means expanding eligibility, or, ideally, transforming/replacing income support with a basic income guarantee.

In its advice to government, the Advisory Council on the Status of Women will continue to press for action towards these goals.

SOME NEW PROGRESS; MORE STILL NEEDED

On some other priorities tagged with "little or no progress" in 2018, there was some progress from 2019 to 2021; however, the human need is so crushing, so pressing, "some" progress does not get us to the markers we need to meet as a province.

The following are examples of priorities where there has been some work and progress from 2019 to 2021—even some significant progress—and where continuing, engaged commitment is essential: improved access to family law legal aid lawyers; increased social assistance rates to levels that ensure individuals and families are able to meet their basic needs; and steps to implement Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Government has undertaken continued work on recommendations regarding mental health and addictions, but the full implementation of the mental health and addictions redevelopment plan is still in the offing. Pandemic conditions urged along some much-needed updates to employment standards and minimum wage; however, the comprehensive review of the Employment Standards Act has only just begun.

IMPRESSIVE NEW PROGRESS

Priority action areas that saw little or no progress up to 2018 but that have seen new progress since 2019 include increased core funding for Family Violence Prevention Services and the PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre; enhancements to medical sexual assault response in hospitals; investment in literacy programs; steps towards Island-wide public transit; and steps towards establishing a provincial Ombudsman's office. Where the progress on these priorities fell within the reporting period, it is credited on the Equality Report Card 2022.

APPENDIX

METHODS FOR COLLECTING GRASSROOTS AND COMMUNITY VOICES

The Advisory Council on the Status of Women gathered data on grassroots and community voices for this report through four in-person focus group consultations, a roundtable of Council members, and an online community perceptions survey conducted between June and November 2021.

Focus groups were arranged by invitation but open to all genders. Four in-person focus groups and a roundtable of Council members included 38 individuals in total. Discussions were led by the Council Chairperson and/or Council staff. Most but not all participants were women. Participants were not asked to describe their identities during the roundtable discussions, but they were invited to complete the community perceptions survey, so for those who chose to complete the survey focus group members' self-identifications are included in the survey data. The four focus groups included the following:

- **Past Chairpersons of the Advisory Council** (Charlottetown, June, coordinated by Council staff and chaired by Chairperson Cathy Rose);
- International students and recent graduates (Charlottetown, July, coordinated and chaired by Council's Program Coordinator, with thanks to Sweta Daboo of the PEI Coalition for Women in Government for assistance in inviting participants);
- **Rural women entrepreneurs** (Montague, October, coordinated and chaired by Chairperson Cathy Rose with support from Council's Program Coordinator); and
- **Francophone women of varied backgrounds** (Summerside, November, chaired by Council's Executive Director, with thanks to Johanna Venturini and Actions-Femmes for assistance in inviting participants).

All Council members and staff completed an online community perceptions survey, and all focus group participants were invited to complete this same survey at the end of each focus group discussion. Some completed the survey on paper rather than online and Council staff transcribed their responses. The online survey was in English only. Francophone focus-group participants received an on-paper translation of key elements of the survey.

Past Chairpersons of Council who missed the June Chairs Circle were invited to complete the survey in June. In October, an invitation to complete the survey was shared with approximately 70 representatives of community organizations connected to equality and diversity work. The survey included optional open-ended questions. Responses to open-ended questions are included among quotations and other qualitative data in this report.

Of 38 focus-group and roundtable participants, at least 34 responded to the community perceptions survey, based on responses identifying themselves as focus group participants, past Chairpersons, or current Council or staff members (the categories covered by the focus groups and roundtable).

All quotations included in this summary are anonymized. English sessions were recorded by Council staff; the French session was recorded by Actions-Femme's Maryne Floch–Le Goff and translated by staff. Quotations throughout this report and the Equality Report Card are edited for length, clarity, and/or grammatical consistency. Some quotations are translated from French. Some quotations emerged from discussions of the draft of this document.

SELF-REPORTED DIVERSITY

Council members, focus group participants, and community organization representatives had the opportunity to describe themselves and their intersecting identity factors as part of the community perceptions survey.



Sixty-four (64) respondents total chose to describe their gender. Of them, 96.8% were womenidentifying. One (1) described their gender as "gender fluid (female/non-binary)." One (1) described their gender as "male." "She" is only used in this report for speakers who identified themselves with that pronoun; otherwise, the report defaults to a singular "they."

Invited to "Please list any diversity or intersecting identities you use to describe yourself and that you are willing to list," fifty-one (51) chose to list one or more factors. Some listed gender, but gender data listed above is more complete.

Thirty-one (31) respondents described themselves identifying at least one factor other than or in addition to gender that is subject to systemic oppression due to white supremacy, cisheteropatriarchy, ableism, ageism, or capitalism. Sixty-five (65) surveys included responses to at least two questions. Of the 62 people who responded to three or more survey questions

• 40% of respondents (25) indicated they were a "Representative of a community organization"

• 31% of respondents (19) described themselves as a "Past Chairperson (Chairs Circle)" or "Focus Group participant"

• 19% of respondents (12) indicated they were a "current Council member or staff member"; this represents *all* current Council members and staff members

• 10% of respondents (6) indicated "Other": three (3) of these specified they were focus group participants AND an additional category; one (1) indicated they had been invited to a focus group but had not been able to attend; one (1) indicated they were an "individual"; and one (1) did not indicate.



They listed one to eight intersecting self-descriptive words or phrases. The average number of intersecting self-descriptions in this group was 3.9.

Twenty others (20) described themselves identifying one or more factors other than or in addition to gender that could lead to discrimination in some contexts, but they did not list factors that are as clearly subject to systemic discrimination. (An example would be "A 50+ woman in the workforce.") They listed one to eight intersecting self-descriptive words or phrases. The average number of intersecting self-descriptions in this group was 4.3.



CATEGORIES SURVEY RESPONDENTS USED TO DESCRIBE THEMSELVES

- RACE AND ETHNICITY: Thirteen (13) respondents described themselves using terms associated with BIPOC identities. Several respondents described cultural factors, other than or in addition to race, including one (1) describing religion ("Muslim"); and several describing non-European cultural background in addition to BIPOC racial identity. * *One respondent commented on the survey questions and content: "These questions are difficult to answer without taking race into account. I answered the questions for white women. When it comes to BIPOC women we have MUCH less equality. Please take us into account too."*
- **IMMIGRANTS AND MIGRANTS:** Ten (10) respondents described themselves using terms associated with being an immigrant or migrant to Canada. One other (1) described themselves as a "second-generation Canadian."
- **2SLGBTQIA+:** Eight (8) respondents described themselves using terms associated with 2SLGBTQIA+ identities.
- LANGUAGE: Most respondents who described their language described themselves as Englishspeaking. Two (2) described themselves as francophone, using terms "Acadian/French" or "Francophone"; two (2) described themselves as "bilingual" or "multilingual"; and one (1) described a first language other than English or French.
- AGE: Thirty-one (31) respondents chose to describe their age. Those who specified an age ranged from 20 to 70+. Eleven (11) identified themselves as "seniors," "elders," or 65+, and three (3) identified as "youth" or <25.
- **ABILITY:** Four (4) respondents described themselves using terms associated with having a disability.
- EMPLOYMENT: Twenty-six (26) respondents described their employment status. Two (2) respondents described themselves as retired. Three respondents (3) described themselves as "self-employed," "business owner," or "starting business." Others (21) described themselves using terms similar to "employed"; one (1) specified "non-traditional career"; one (1) described themselves as a "temporary foreign worker"; and one (1) described themselves as working part-time "in search of full-time employment."
- **STUDENTS:** Nine (9) respondents (who may or may not also have described their employment status) described themselves as a "student," including "international student" or "part-time student."
- **LOW INCOME:** Two (2) respondents (separate from their employment status) described their circumstances as "lives in poverty" or "low income."

MEMBERS OF THE PEI ADVISORY COUNCIL ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN, 2019–2022

The following appointed members of the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of women contributed to the model development and delivery of this Report Card project from 2019 to the present. They were supported by staff members Office Manager Becky Tramley, Program Coordinator Michelle Jay, and Executive Director Jane Ledwell.

Those who were members to 2019, led by Chairperson Yvonne Deagle, developed the assessment model, including the categories, the statements of expectation for each category, and the lists of equality gains to sustain.

Those who were members in 2020 and 2021, led by Chairperson Debbie Langston, finalized the assessment model, adapted timelines in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, and presented Report Card plans to government and the public.

Those who were members from 2021 to the present, led by Chairperson Cathy Rose, participated in all aspects of the final assessment and grade-setting, using a consensus decision-making model. They saw the Report Card publications through to completion.

We thank each of the following present and past members of the Council for their contributions:

- Garima Mishra, member from March 2021 to the present
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- Chris MacPhail, member from January 2018 to the present
- Cathy Rose, member from January 2018, Chairperson March 2021 to the present
- Debbie Langston, member from 2016, Chairperson October 2019 to March 2021
- Yvonne Deagle, Chairperson to September 2019
- Pam Schurman Montgomery, member to September 2019
- Madison Blanchard, member to September 2019

The members of the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women are grateful to all those who have supported the creation of the Prince Edward Island Equality Report Card 2022. They will decide together in the coming months whether or not to continue producing Equality Report Cards into the future.



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