



# Council for Women's Advocacy

## IN RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC FIVE THINGS THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT CAN DO RIGHT NOW TO SUPPORT WOMEN AND FOSTER ECONOMIC GROWTH

Women in the workforce, as employees and business-owners / entrepreneurs, have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ensuring women have opportunities to fully participate in the recovery is essential for widespread job creation and sustained economic growth.

This is not a women's issue; it is an economic issue. The Canadian Chamber's Council for Women's Advocacy is calling on the Federal Government to immediately realize the five recommendations below to support women, foster inclusive recovery and ensure sustained economic growth.

### **Facilitate safe, reliable and affordable childcare:**

- 1) Build on the July 2020 'safe restart' transfer, work with provinces and territories in their respective efforts to ensure that there is safe full-time return to school policies for September 2020 that take into account international experiences, learnings and best practice to date.
- 2) Augment, and then expand the mandate of the [Expert Panel on Early Learning and Child Care Data and Research](#).
  - Add parent and business community representatives to the Expert Panel to ensure all pertinent stakeholders are at the table make to informed decisions and recommendations.
  - Expand the mandate of the Expert Panel to include developing recommendations on tax incentives for both for parents/guardians and childcare providers. This could require transforming the Expert Panel into a National Secretariat (as discussed in the 2019 Liberal election platform). This should be done by the end of the calendar year, with recommendations to follow shortly thereafter.

**Support women's entrepreneurship:**

- 3) Extend eligibility for the Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy to include hiring in-home childcare so business owners can return to work.
- 4) Track and breakdown data for federal funding and programming for business in a way that it has been done for individuals, looking specifically at female-owned businesses and entrepreneurs. Ask questions re: ratios of applications, rates of successful applications, timing for funding received and adapt eligibility, funding and programming accordingly going forward. Consult widely with external stakeholders as this is done.

**Support job pivots for women:**

- 5) Earmark recovery funding for upskilling and re-skilling women. Appreciating this is a significant and ground-breaking undertaking with a longer term horizon, it is critically important to start and start now.

# Canadian Chamber's Council for Women's Advocacy Recommendations in Response to the COVID-19 Crisis August 2020

## The Canadian Chamber's Council for Women's Advocacy

The Council for Women's Advocacy (CWA) is a cornerstone of the Canadian Chamber's inclusive growth and recovery efforts, established in order to:

- bring the voice and perspectives of women to national policies.
- inform the Canadian Chamber's initiatives in advancing the gender equality agenda.
- drive meaningful action to address the identified issues and barriers.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, CWA members agreed to focus on recommendations for a gender-inclusive recovery.<sup>1</sup>

Ensuring women have opportunities to fully participate in the recovery is essential for widespread job creation and sustained economic growth.

A list of CWA and its Working group members can be found [here](#).

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<sup>1</sup> Within the category of women, we recognize that there are further different experiences, challenges and opportunities based on where women live in the country (e.g. Northern Canada, urban/rural), the sector which they are involved in (e.g. knowledge-based, essential workers, personnel services, retail) and other respective experiences women live (age, income, racialized, immigrant, marital status, LGBTQ+, domestic violence survivors).

**Framework:**

**What is needed to ensure a gender-inclusive recovery**

For women to thrive and advance post-crisis, the CWA has developed the below framework, which delineates three core areas of focus for support in response to how women have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic:

- 1) Access to work
- 2) Access to financial support
- 3) Access to services

In order to ensure a gender-inclusive recovery, there needs to be a collaborative, collective and results-drive effort across governments, organizations, businesses and individuals, both men and women. Over the coming months the CWA will continue to bring forward specific recommendations for various stakeholder groups in order to address the below.

RESPONDING TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ENSURING A GENDER-INCLUSIVE RECOVERY		
1. Access to work		
Access to affordable and reliable childcare	Access to upskilling and reskilling	Access to career advancement opportunities, with a BIPOC focus
2. Access to financial supports		
Access to business supports (deferrals, credits, grants)	Access to bridge funds in the absence of revenues, including fundraising dollars	Ongoing access to capital and opportunities
3. Access to services		
Mental health services	Career services, including mentorships, with a BIPOC focus	Education and training

Immediate term focus
Medium-term focus
Longer-term focus

## Background: Women and the COVID-19 pandemic

Canada, at various stages and timings across the country, is slowly re-opening as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic. We are entering a period of cautious recovery and employment may not return to pre-crisis levels at any point soon. Available jobs and the skills required will shift. Employers might increasingly look to automation to maintain operations during future crises and reduce risk. Canadians will need reskilling, upskilling and skills training programs to get them back to work. Education and training will also change, including a greater need for online learning and durable skills, with a focus on both work-integrated and lifelong learning. A new normal based on the realities of a potential second wave and long-term impacts to businesses, communities and every aspect of the economy must be considered.

One of the biggest impacts of the pandemic is the negative consequences for women. We must acknowledge how women have been disproportionately affected in order to design effective interventions and ensure a successful recovery. [Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey \(LFS\)](#) data through the crisis period demonstrated how quickly and deeply the women's labour force was affected in the early days of the shut-down, how their re-employment rates were half of their male counterparts when reopening started, and cumulatively to date women continue to lag behind men in returning to pre-crisis employment rates and have lower rates of labour utilization/hours worked. Women also bear the larger burden for childcare which has affected their labour force participations rates in a way not experienced by fathers. LFS data from June 2020 clearly demonstrated that employment recovery for parents is slowest for mothers with school-aged children.<sup>2</sup>

As RBC recently noted,<sup>3</sup> "the COVID-19 pandemic knocked women's participation in the labour force down from a historic high to its lowest level in over 30 years." Women have accounted for approximately 45% of the decline in hours worked through the crisis, yet they are only expected to account for about 35% of the recovery. To further underscore the gender imbalance, another example is that CERB data between June 28 – July 12, 2020 shows 61% of applicants were women.

In examining the workforce, it is also important to acknowledge to role of women as business-owners and entrepreneurs. In the first weeks of the crisis, according to the [Statistics Canada/Canadian Chamber of Commerce's Canadian Survey on Business Conditions \(CSBC\)](#), almost 50 percent of women-owned businesses were forced to close as they were not deemed essential services (compared to a national average of one-third). Positively, and as confirmed in the second wave of data released in mid-July, woman-owned business are showing innovation and ingenuity. For example, CSBC Wave 1 (April 2020) data showed that women-owned business have increased investment in training and education at a higher rate (16.2%) than the national average (11.3%) and CSBC Wave 2 (July 2020) data showed

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<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey Data June 2020: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200710/dq200710a-eng.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> [https://thoughtleadership.rbc.com/pandemic-threatens-decades-of-womens-labour-force-gains/?utm\\_source=Morning+Brief&utm\\_campaign=af0fcd706d-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2016\\_12\\_02\\_COPY\\_874&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_a43c5d924a-af0fcd706d-206995257](https://thoughtleadership.rbc.com/pandemic-threatens-decades-of-womens-labour-force-gains/?utm_source=Morning+Brief&utm_campaign=af0fcd706d-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2016_12_02_COPY_874&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_a43c5d924a-af0fcd706d-206995257)

women-owned business are 7% more likely to be adapting their products or services for customers than the national average.

Having said this, what both waves of data demonstrated that while diversity-led businesses, including women-owned businesses, are able to endure in the short-term similar to the overall business community, as the crisis continues and re-opening/recovery is prolonged, they appear to be more vulnerable. We must ensure to avoid a K-shaped recovery.

Moreover, it is well document that women-owned businesses are less capitalized, and because they tend to be smaller, have less employees, often not incorporated and/or women are self-employed, they are therefore less likely to qualify for government emergency program funding. For example, as stated in a July 16 Toronto Sun op-ed that was co-authored by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce's Michelle Eaton:

"Women-owned businesses tend to be smaller, with fewer employees, and are less likely to be incorporated. Unfortunately, most government support programs during the pandemic favour SMEs with employees. Many of the programs are designed for SME owners with payroll and although eligibility was recently expanded in the loan program to address this issue, many self-employed Canadians still may not meet the requirements.

The thresholds for many of these programs do not accommodate women, leaving them no options but to find other means of supporting themselves, their workers, and their businesses"<sup>4</sup>.

Furthermore, unlike previous economic crises, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected women-dominated sectors immediately and particularly hard. With the notable exception of health care, female-dominated sectors service producing sectors including retail, childcare, marketing, real estate, restaurants, education, non-profit and personal-services were the first affected and will be among the last to recover.

There is widespread concern that the gains women made throughout the workforce in the past decades will be erased because of the crisis. The CWA share many of the concerns and wants to ensure that there is no regression in any areas. Further, the CWA believes there is the opportunity through a number of key interventions for Canada's female labour force to not only survive – but to advance if given the chance to re-skill and re-set for longer term success in a changing economy.

Such success will not happen in a vacuum however, there must be strong efforts and supports from all levels of government and various stakeholders, including male leadership and colleagues. There will be no inclusive recovery – or recovery period – without the participation of women in the workforce. Ensuring women have opportunities to fully participate in the recovery is essential for widespread job creation and sustained economic growth.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://torontosun.com/opinion/columnists/opinion-women-must-be-central-to-canadas-pandemic-recovery>