



# International Women's Day 2023

## A Conversation Starter



Canadian  
Chamber of  
Commerce

Chambre de  
Commerce  
du Canada

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*Advancing the  
Conversation*



# A Message to the Canadian Chamber Network

**March 8 marks International Women's Day (IWD). Since 1911, the day has been circled on calendars to recognize women's rights.**

Over the decades, International Women's Day has been an opportunity to focus on various issues — as a focal point in the women's rights movement, bringing attention to issues like gender inequality, how to increase women's participation in the economy and gender-based violence. Many of these issues persist years later. Women still struggle worldwide for equality in social, political, cultural and economic environments. And women still face many forms of violence and abuse.

The last three years of pandemic lockdowns and restrictions have had a disproportionate impact on women, from business owners, mothers and providers to employees and front-line care workers.

To make matters worse, the economic sectors that were hit the hardest were dominated by women. For many, the increased domestic responsibility meant they were, at best, less productive and, at worst, falling out of the workforce in unprecedented numbers, all during a Canada-wide skilled labour shortage.

More than one hundred years after the inaugural Women's Day in 1911, we should be farther along the road to women's equality than we are. In 2023, the rights and roles of Canadian women in many aspects of life are not viewed equally with those of men. This is particularly evident when we see the obstacles women face to progressing at the same speed and altitude as men on their career trajectories. These obstacles become even more significant for women from underrepresented and marginalized groups.

**Why does International Women's Day matter?**

**Because we're not there yet.**

*It's time to accelerate the conversation and action for gender equality.*



IWD is a once-a-year chance to remind governments, businesses and everyone else watching that women aren't going anywhere and that there is unfinished business. Progress has not been equal.

So how do we accelerate both the conversation and action?

Chambers of commerce can play an important role in raising awareness and pressing for gender equality. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce and its **Council for Women's Advocacy** are pleased to share this playbook and support the Canadian Chamber Network as we all celebrate International Women's Day.

Conversations on gender equality should not be limited to March 8, and we hope that this playbook can help inspire some ideas to keep the conversation going. A number of chambers host events on this important day—could additional meaningful events be held throughout the year? Maybe the roundtable format works within your membership? Perhaps you can host local member companies to talk about opportunities and practices that are working to advance women in their operations?

Whatever the format, we know that future discussions need to be more inclusive. Men and women need to be at the table together. The barriers women face have broad implications that affect the social and economic well being of all Canadians. In 2023, the discussions should matter to all of us—this is not a women's-only issue.

As we look to another International Women's Day, our goal is to help spark these ongoing conversations and actions.

Which is why we'd also like to take this opportunity to invite you to join us for our third annual Women in Business Summit where we'll hold engaging discussions about solutions for moving the needle on a more forward-looking, inclusive and prosperous Canada. Please hold June 14, 2023 in your calendar, and watch for details coming your way soon.

Sincerely,

**Perrin Beatty, PC, OC**  
President & Chief Executive Officer

**Candace Laing**  
Chair, Canadian Chamber of Commerce  
Senior Vice President & Chief Human  
Resources Officer, Nutrien

# Background on International Women's Day, March 8



**March 8 is International Women's Day (IWD), a global day to recognize and celebrate women's and girls' social, economic, cultural and political contributions and achievements. This day also marks a call to action to accelerate gender equality.**

UN Women refers to gender equality as “equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities.” In other words, rights, responsibilities and access to opportunities should not be predetermined by someone's gender. Gender inequality affects us all. It's not simply a “women's issue.”

Despite remarkable progress, women and girls in Canada continue to be at a disadvantage regarding economic participation and access to opportunity. The [Canadian Women's Foundation](#) website shows that 10% of women in Canada live on low incomes, that 28% of women-led households are in [core housing need](#) and that the gender pay gap persists with women making 89 cents for every dollar men make. Women continue to be overrepresented in low-paying sectors and jobs and despite making up over half of the population, women continue to be

underrepresented in entrepreneurship and in political and professional leadership positions. The impact of gender inequalities is even greater for women with intersecting marginalized identities. For example, Indigenous, Black, racialized and women with disabilities.

Gender inequalities not only disadvantage women and girls, but they also disadvantage Canada. Prior to COVID-19, a report from the McKinsey Global Institute, [The power of parity: Advancing women's equality in Canada](#) (2017), stated that by accelerating progress on gender equality, Canada could add \$150 billion in incremental GDP in 2026. The COVID-19 pandemic has threatened progress toward gender parity and has had a disproportionate impact on women's workforce participation. Despite signs of recovery, some research suggests that Canada's economic recovery is being experienced as unequally as the initial downturn.

**Let's continue the conversation year-round and keep women, their contributions and participation in social, economic, cultural and political worlds top of mind.**

# Why Does IWD Matter?



**International Women's Day has been commemorated since 1911. Suffragettes fought for the vote and recognition of women's full citizenship. Later iterations of the women's movement fought for a variety of issues pertaining to recognition of equal civil, social, and political rights.**

March 8 is an opportunity to take the time to think about past struggles and achievements and also to take the necessary steps towards a future with greater equality for women, men and people of all gender identities and expressions.

Despite our progress, the pandemic has demonstrated that work is still needed to ensure women's equal and full economic participation and prosperity in 2023. It's time to continue and accelerate progress with respect to gender equality.

Through your events and participation in International Women's Day 2023, you are helping to remind Canadians that more action is needed to achieve gender equality. March 8 is an opportunity.

**The conversation needs to continue and needs to include everyone—not just women!**





# How Can We Work Together to Ensure the Conversation Continues?



**We recognize that many in the Canadian Chamber Network have already planned and are executing their own IWD events and opportunities. We applaud you for all that you are doing to raise awareness of gender equality, diversity and inclusion. Our wish is that your events are a catalyst for future dialogue in your community.**

This playbook is intended to be a shareable resource to help those that may not already have content or events in place recognize IWD 2023 or those that may wish to further the impact of their events.



# What to Consider as You Think about IWD and Gender Equality



**Regardless of the theme you choose to highlight on March 8, it's important to remember that raising awareness and advocating for gender equality should not be limited to one day per year, nor is it only a women's issue. Without losing the focus on women, take the opportunity to engage and include people of all genders in the conversation.**

## So, What Are the Themes for This Year's International Women's Day?

Every year, different themes recognize International Women's Day. The most used in Canada are the global theme created by the International Women's Day organization and the theme created by Women and Gender Equality Canada. United Nations Women also releases its own theme every year.

Below are the themes and sub-themes that will mark International Women's Day 2023. Incorporating one of the themes into your IWD 2023 events and communications will help provide focus and increase the impact of calls to action, whether they're specific to Canada or global in scale.



## International Women's Day - Embrace Equity

- Understanding and embracing equity as a prerequisite to achieving gender equality.
- Challenging gender stereotypes and biases.
- Calling out gender discrimination and working towards inclusion.

## Government of Canada - Every Woman Counts

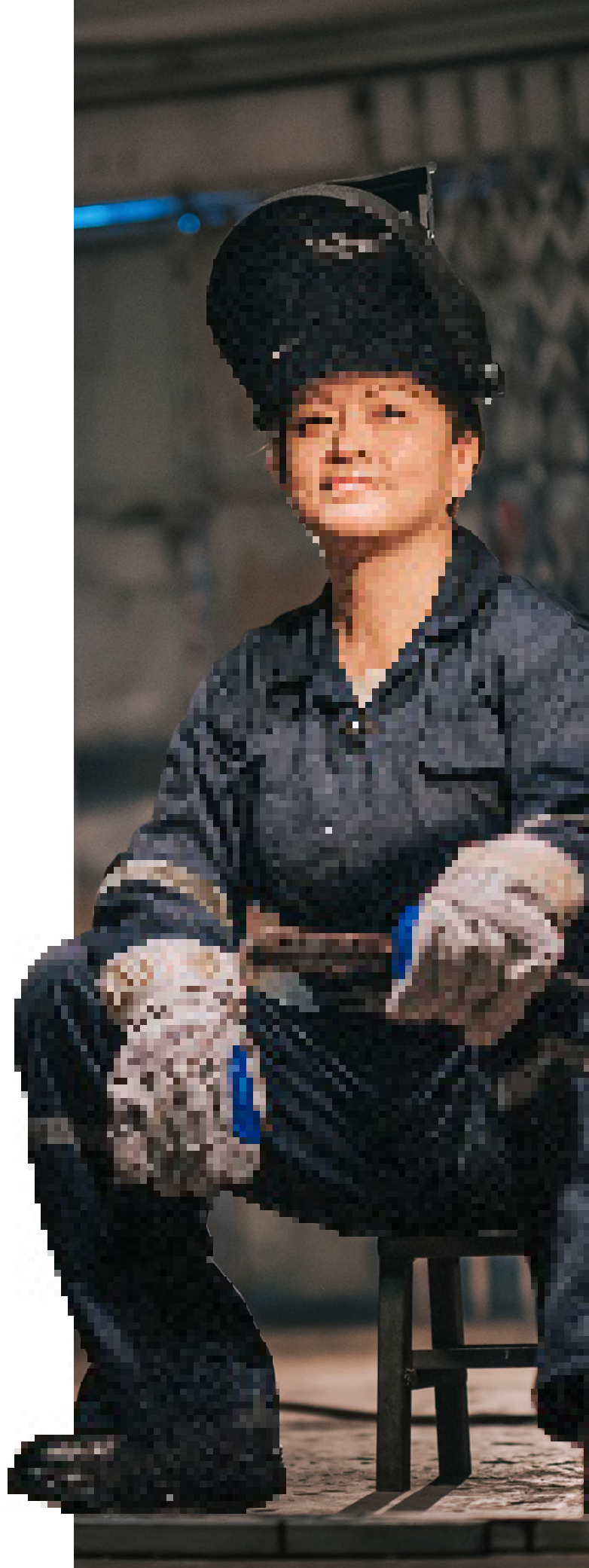
The Government of Canada's theme for International Women's Day (IWD) 2023 is Every Woman Counts.

It's a reminder that all women, from all ages and walks of life, have a place in every aspect of Canadian society, including in the economic, social and democratic spheres.

Let's celebrate the successful women around us, reminding today's youth and girls that their dream is within reach.

## UN Women - DigitALL: Innovation and Technology for Gender Equality

- Recognizing and celebrating the women and girls who are championing the advancement of transformative technology and digital education.
- Exploring the impact of the digital gender gap on widening economic and social inequalities.
- Protecting the rights of women and girls in digital spaces and addressing the problem of online violence.



# Get the Discussion Going: Reflect and Act for Gender Equality



Chambers across the country have been celebrating and commemorating International Women's Day for years. Whether you are hosting a webinar, a networking event, a panel discussion, an awards ceremony, a social media campaign or anything else to mark the day, reflecting on the challenges women currently face accessing opportunities and fully participating and thriving in the Canadian economy could be especially meaningful.

*If companies don't take action, they won't just lose their women leaders; they risk losing the next generation of women leaders, too.*

Women in the Workplace 2022, p.5

## Thinking about Women in the Workplace

### Helpful Discussion Points



**Women remain significantly underrepresented in leadership positions**

A recent [article](#) in the Globe and Mail states that only 70% of companies listed on the Toronto Stock Exchange (TSX) report having at least one women executive officer, just 24% of corporate board seats in Canada are occupied by women and only 5% of TSX issuers had a female CEO in 2022.

### Discussion Starters

- What is the percentage of women business leaders in your business community?
- What have local businesses done to increase the number of women in leadership roles within their own organizations?
- Is there a role that the chamber can play in increasing awareness of women in leadership as part of a larger DEI awareness-building strategy?



### The talent pipeline needs to be extended across sectors

Canada has an uneven distribution of men and women in sectors and occupations. Women are overrepresented in lower-wage and lower-growth industries (e.g., retail trade, hospitality and community services) and underrepresented in high-growth sectors and high-income jobs (e.g., technology, manufacturing). As the economy and the nature of work change, we need to adopt a future-looking view and ensure women are properly equipped to have access to opportunity and successful work transitions.

#### Discussion Starters

- How can Canada help transition more women into high-growth sectors?
- Has your business/chamber encouraged women to enter non-traditional areas with targeted mentoring? Scholarships? Other initiatives?



### Not many workplaces are working for women

A recent McKinsey [report](#) on Women in the Workplace states that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected women's demands of their companies. Some of these demands include increased access to opportunities and a prioritization of flexibility, employee well-being and diversity, equity and inclusion. This report asserts that we are in the midst of a "great break-up," and as women want more from work, "they are leaving their companies in unprecedented numbers to get it."

#### Discussion Starters

- What has your workplace done to increase flexibility day-to-day?
- If you have made adjustments to your work environment to accommodate flexibility, DEI and employee well-being, is it working for your employees?

*Canada is home to 1.5 million women entrepreneurs who own and operate enterprises that produce \$150 billion in economic activity each year.*

The State of Women's Entrepreneurship in Canada 2022, p.12





## Here Are Some Ideas That Can Contribute to Better Outcomes for Women in the Workplace

### Reflect!

- How can we improve women's representation in leadership positions?
- What needs to be done to better support women's access to opportunities and development in high-growth sectors and jobs? How can we close the gender-skills gap in STEM?
- What needs to be done to improve the workplace experience for women?

### Act!

- Track metrics and set specific goals for gender equality
- Review your organizational practices, policies and procedures to ensure they contribute to fostering truly diverse, equitable and inclusive workplaces
- Adopt flexible working arrangements and invest in employee well-being

## Thinking about Women Entrepreneurs

**Beyond IWD, the Canadian Chamber Network can be a catalyst for ongoing information sharing. We encourage you to share some of the following data points on IWD and beyond. Challenges faced by women do not start or end with International Women's Day. We need to continue raising awareness of ongoing barriers and taking action to change outcomes.**

- Despite making up nearly half the workforce, women in Canada are underrepresented in entrepreneurship (both among those identifying as self-employed and as owners of SMEs).
- Approximately 17% of SMEs are majority-owned by women. Most of these businesses concentrate in the services sector. Women-owned businesses are underrepresented in high-growth sectors like technology or manufacturing.
- Women entrepreneurs face multiple barriers and challenges in their entrepreneurial journey. Some of the most common include fewer financial resources, access to capital, gender bias in lending practices, less experience, smaller networks, family and caregiving demands, lack of role models, mentors and quality networking and issues with confidence and a growth mindset shaped by stereotypes and gender roles.

## How Can We All Contribute to Better Outcomes for Women Entrepreneurs

### Reflect!

- What can be done to inspire and increase the likelihood of more Canadian women choosing to become entrepreneurs?
- What can we do to ensure women entrepreneurs have equal opportunity to succeed in high-growth sectors?
- How can our chamber better support and invest in women entrepreneurs?

### Act!

- Challenge gender bias and stereotypes that have a negative impact on women entrepreneurs.
- Support and buy from women-owned businesses.
- Profile and share stories of women entrepreneurs in your community.

“

*Women's entrepreneurship is often overlooked because of stereotypes that plague the entrepreneurial field. In reality, women entrepreneurs contribute greatly to economic and social development, and their positive impacts could be further amplified if they were better supported in their entrepreneurial journeys.*

*The State of Women's Entrepreneurship in Canada 2022, p.7*

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## Social Media Messages and Graphics

### Share with Us

Tag us on social media and let us know how you are celebrating and commemorating International Women's Day. Let us know how you are participating in the dialogue.

Whether you are celebrating women's achievements, challenging bias and stereotypes, raising awareness or advocating for specific issues, we want to hear from you!

If you are posting on social media add your #IWD2023 #CanadianChamberNetwork hashtags to your posts.

### Spread the Word

On March 8, the Canadian Chamber will use its social media channels to showcase promising best practices to advance gender equality in the workplace. We encourage you to share and amplify the conversation!

### Hashtags and Handles

**#IWD2023**  
**#EveryWomanCounts**  
**#EmbraceEquity**  
**#AdvancingWomen**  
**#WomenInBusiness**  
**@CdnChamberofCom**

## General Graphic

[Download image](#)





# Checklist



Circle March 8 in your calendar and determine how you/your team will further the discussion about women in your community. It may be that March 8 is just the starting point for your community to dig deeper into this topic.



Join the national and global conversations taking place on March 8 and beyond. If your chamber is hosting an event for the day, you may want to consider incorporating one or more of this year's IWD themes.



Show support and pledge action to accelerate gender equality by posting a photo on social media.



Share with us!

# Additional Resources



## Reports

- The State of Women's Entrepreneurship in Canada 2022. Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub.
- Women in the Workplace 2022. McKinsey & Company and Lean In.

## Websites

- International Women's Day Organization
- UN Women
- Women and Gender Equality Canada – International Women's Day

## Other

- Allyship at Work
- Championing Women in Business in Canada: A toolkit to help employers recruit, retain, and promote more women and bring them onto boards.
- See it. Be it. Women entrepreneurs beyond the stereotypes. Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub.
- 50 Ways to Fight Bias

## Contact

While we have been active for IWD at the Canadian Chamber for many years, if you would like to discuss any ideas or have any suggestions for how we can improve this International Women's Day playbook, please contact:



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