



Thank you for the opportunity to express the views of YWCA Toronto, the city's largest multi-service organization by, for and about women and girls, on the impact of recent funding and program cuts at Status of Women Canada (SWC). Since 1873, we have been a turning point in the lives of women and girls who seek change through advocacy, dynamic leadership and a range of unique and essential services that promote personal growth. From shelter, permanent housing, counselling, employment skills, outdoor education and leadership training, to speaking out when a public policy needs redress, our organization acts and advocates on the issues of violence against women, housing and women's economic independence.

YWCA Toronto would like to express our grave concern over recent budget cuts within SWC, the removal of the words "equality," "advocacy" and "action" from the Terms and Conditions of its mandate, and the elimination of virtually all funding for research for women's organizations involved in advocating or lobbying governments. It is our position that these actions will have an enormously negative impact on Canadian women and convey a disturbing message to the country at large.

Based on our unique position as the single largest provider of shelter, and the second largest provider of childcare, we can speak to the absolute necessity for advocacy and research from a direct service position, as they are the underpinnings to the services we provide, ensuring that women and girls have the ability to escape violence and rebuild healthy lives, while offering housing options, employment and skills development, as well as extended social services across the GTA.

Recent changes made to SWC in favour of "streamlining" and "efficiency" prohibit funding for women's groups to advocate and carry out research on behalf of women. Yet research and advocacy are at the core of service provision to women on the frontline - one cannot exist without the other. With over 135 years of direct service, YWCA Toronto helps over 38,000 women and girls annually flee violence and secure housing, obtain support, or develop a skill and find a job. That our services are so vital to so many tells us just how *unequal* women continue to be in this country. As part of our direct service, YWCA Toronto works for social change to improve the lives of the women and girls who look to us for assistance. We cannot perform this essential function without a foundation of advocacy and research. Asking women's organizations which receive funding from the SWC not to educate government officials or policymakers with their findings effectively erases gains made by the women's movement over the past 40 years.

We urge your government, which was elected on a platform of accountability, democracy and evidence-based policy-making, to not only reinstate but strengthen the principles of *equality*, *action* and *advocacy* in the Terms and Conditions and to reverse the cuts to SWC and its regional offices across the country, thereby recommitting itself to the equality and democracy Canadians all cherish.

girls & family programs | employment & skills development | housing & shelter | advocacy