

YWCA Toronto Policy Priorities 2022/2023



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Our Policy Buckets

YWCA Toronto works within three broad public policy areas:

- Gender equity
- Poverty reduction
- Racial justice

The Context of Our Work

YWCA Toronto is committed to a radical transformation of society where all women, girls and gender diverse people can thrive. Our advocacy agenda is driven by the experiences and needs of the communities we serve and the expertise of our frontline staff. It is also shaped by our strategic plan, the political climate, what our partners are calling for, our programmatic needs, and past policy positions.

We work closely with community and coalition partners, including a coalition of YWCA Member Associations across Ontario, to advance substantive gender equity, poverty reduction and racial justice in our city, province and country. Our policy work is driven by these priorities and shaped through internal consultations with staff and program participants, our Advocacy Advisory Committee, and external consultations with community partners/organizations with shared principles and goals.

As our strategic plan outlines, we work to bring our considerable programmatic experiences and expertise to public policy and cross-sectoral tables. We seek to open opportunities for greater collaboration with community and governmental partners, while strengthening the advocacy capacity of our sector and our Association. We are a charity and therefore our work must be nonpartisan.

To engage in advocacy work at YWCA Toronto means amplifying the voices of the community members we serve, drawing attention to their issues and barriers facing them, and pushing for progressive policy solutions. It is important for us to recognize who is disproportionately facing systemic barriers, which can include discrimination, poverty, and other forms of oppression and injustice – much of which is caused or exacerbated by inadequate government policies, labour market practices, and cultural norms. Recognizing that Indigenous women, Black women, racialized women, immigrants, people living with disabilities, seniors, trans people, and youth are impacted by policy choices and systems of power differently, we strive to incorporate an intersectional gender equity lens in all of our work as we broadly advocate for gender equity, racial justice and poverty reduction.

Our commitment to reconciliation

YWCA Toronto operates on the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat and Petun First Nations, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. As one of the city's largest nonprofits for women

and gender diverse people, a multi-service organization, and a prominent advocate for gender equity, we recognize we have an important role to play in addressing ongoing systems of colonialism, racism and oppression. YWCA Toronto is committed to advancing meaningful acts of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples and Nations.

Addressing anti-Black racism

As an organization committed to gender equity and racial justice, we denounce the persistent and systemic anti-Black racism that undermines the safety and wellbeing of Black communities. Many of the communities we work with are racialized, as is our staff and leadership. In our work, we see the implications of anti-Black racism on a daily basis, in particular the way Black communities face heightened barriers to accessing support, career and educational opportunities and adequate health services. Black communities continue to be criminalized and overpoliced and face a disproportionate level of poverty, incarceration and violence.

YWCA Toronto is committed to working with staff, community partners, donors and government stakeholders to advocate for racial justice. We recognize that meaningfully addressing anti-Black racism and changing systemic and institutional barriers requires sustained efforts, including but not limited to advocacy efforts.

Advocacy Efforts

We operationalize our advocacy through four main pillars:

1. Amplification and priority setting – internal consultations with staff, YWCA Toronto leaders, and program participants/residents
2. Policy analysis – research, reports, submissions, deputations and op-eds
3. Community – coalition work, YWCA movement, community partners, program participants
4. Influence – government, media, stakeholders, the public via subject matter expertise and thought leadership.

Policy Priorities – Themes

Our policy priorities and advocacy agenda are driven by our three pillars, gender equity, poverty reduction and racial justice. Our advocacy work considers these three pillars when determining public stances, policy recommendations, strategic advocacy approaches, and more.

Income Security

For women living in low-income households, there are often few supports to rely upon. Disparities in income, health and social wellbeing are particularly pronounced for women and girls living with disabilities, Indigenous women, racialized women and newcomers. Women face multiple barriers to accessing education, employment, health and reproductive rights and are at greater risk of experiencing gender-based violence. Women are often underrepresented or excluded from spaces of power and decision-making as well. In Canada, women living with disabilities, single-mothers, newcomers, trans, racialized and/or Indigenous women are more likely to live in poverty than white, able bodied women,

straight women and women living in two-income households. It is important to note that socioeconomic distinctions within racialized communities also exist.

Policy statement: YWCA Toronto believes that all women, girls and gender diverse people must have access to adequate income, shelter, food, transportation and personal necessities. We advocate for adequate social assistance rates that ensure the health and dignity of women and gender diverse people on low and fixed incomes – rates that can protect and support families. We recognize that our society and our economy are built on the unpaid care work of women and that this unpaid labour is a source of poverty for women. We urge political parties to develop, publicize and commit to more responsive and equity-based social assistance programs that are tailored to the real needs of recipients.¹

Advocacy asks of the municipal government:

- Implement lower TTC fares, including fully funding the Fair Pass discount for low-wage workers, lengthening the two-hour fare window, and expanding free public transit to people receiving social assistance and high school students²
- Provide deeply subsidized internet and technology packages to all low and moderate-income people³
- Establish a municipal broadband network and provide free public wi-fi⁴

Advocacy asks of the provincial government:

- Immediately double Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rates and index to inflation annually
- Increase the Ontario Child Benefit and remove all immigration status-based barriers preventing access to provincial child benefits⁵
- Remove immigration status barriers from eligibility to income support so that all people in Ontario can access income security measures⁶
- Improve government policies to support caregivers, either by putting money directly in their pocket and/or by providing greater caregiver support so that women can enter the paid labour market⁷

Advocacy asks of the federal government:

- Adopt Bill C-22, the Canada disability benefit (CDB) quickly to support people living with disabilities meaningfully, and include the disability community in the development and decision-making of regulations for the CDB
- Implement the MMIWG2S+ National Inquiry Report call for a guaranteed annual livable income program⁸
- Modernize and expand Employment Insurance (EI) and ensure all workers in Canada have access to EI regardless of immigration status, sector of work, or hours of work⁹
- Immediately grant CERB Amnesty for mothers, children and anyone living with low or moderate incomes¹⁰

- Implement a repayment amnesty for all people who received CERB/CRB whose incomes are below or just above the poverty line and for all youth aging out of care¹¹

Partners:

- [Defend Disability Coalition](#)
- [Ontario For All](#)
- [Daily Bread Food Bank Toronto](#)
- [TTCriders](#)
- [Income Security Advocacy Centre](#)
- [Campaign 2000](#)

Decent Work

The economic inequity exacerbated by the pandemic was felt most deeply by women – in particular, racialized, Indigenous, trans and newcomer women, women living with disabilities and caregivers. The care economy is a feminized industry that is chronically underfunded and underpaid. We believe decent work offers a path out of poverty for women. Women working in the healthcare sector are feeling the brunt of precarious work more deeply than ever before. While a growing healthcare crisis continues to emerge with new COVID-19 variants, and respiratory viruses in children are forcing hospitals to reach capacity, nurses have had their salaries capped at one per cent.

Policy statement: YWCA Toronto advocates for meaningful action to address gender and racial pay disparities and investments that ensure care work, a feminized industry, is decent work. We advocate for enhanced wages and better working conditions for frontline and nonprofit workers, a largely feminized and racialized segment of the workforce. We believe *good* jobs can offer a path out of poverty for women who are able to work – not all jobs are created equally. We also recognize some people will not be able to engage in paid work for various legitimate reasons. People who are unable to engage in paid work are deserving of lives free from violence, poverty and discrimination. YWCA Toronto is proud to champion the decent work movement.

Advocacy asks of the municipal government:

- Ensure all infrastructure investments are attached to community benefits agreements that create decent work opportunities for women, racialized communities and people living with disabilities¹²

Advocacy asks of the provincial government:

- Repeal Bill 124, which disproportionately impacts women-concentrated fields that support women, girls and gender diverse people, such as transitional housing and shelter employees, child care workers and nurses¹³

- Raise Ontario's employment standards to a decent work floor for care workers and all workers, including a minimum wage that reflects a living wage and adequate, permanently paid sick days¹⁴
- Ensure all workers in the province, including seasonal workers, have access to minimum employment standards
- Modify Employment Ontario to include women as a priority category in order to ensure clear gender targets in funding allocations
- Take meaningful action to address gender and racial pay disparities and ensure care work is decent work by enhancing public expenditures in the public and nonprofit care economy¹⁵

Advocacy asks of the federal government:

- Foster greater full-time employment opportunities for newcomers and social assistance recipients (who are able to work), and strengthen labour laws to protect minimum wage workers¹⁶

Partners:

- [Workers' Action Centre](#)
- [Ontario Equal Pay Coalition](#)
- [Ontario Nonprofit Network](#)

Employment and Training

The pandemic brought on the first-ever global she-cession, which saw a significant drop in women's labour market participation. Current gender-specific employment programs simply cannot evolve and strengthen on single or two-year funding. We need better funding for women-focused employment and training programs, and more comprehensive government action to improve employment and labour standards, particularly for the care economy and other feminized industries.

Policy Statement: YWCA Toronto advocates for the implementation of decent work conditions for women. We call for dedicated funding towards gender-inclusive upskilling and other employment programs focused on the diverse needs of women and gender diverse people. We call on all orders of government to invest in women-focused employment and training programs that are funded on a multi-year or permanent basis.

Advocacy asks of the provincial government:

- Invest in multi-year funding for employment, training and upskilling programs for women and ensure programs are offered by women-focused organizations¹⁷
- Invest \$75 million in new money towards women's upskilling programs for women impacted by COVID and to support low-income women's access to the labour market¹⁸
- Funding dollars in skilled trades and development should have clear gender targets to guarantee flow to women's organizations

- Recognize women as a specialized demographic within the transformation framework of the Employment Ontario program¹⁹
- Take meaningful action to address gender and racial pay disparities²⁰
- Invest in women-specific employment and training programs by women-centered nonprofits
- Offer more training opportunities for women over 30 years of age; and create more partnerships with the business sector to create job opportunities for women who experience poverty, houselessness and other forms of hardship²¹
- Make education and skills training opportunities widely accessible for social assistance recipients²²
- Offer greater financial allowance for training opportunities to help women on social assistance find paid work²³
- Invest in education and training opportunities for women on social assistance to upgrade their skills

Advocacy asks of the federal government:

- Foster greater full-time employment opportunities for newcomers and social assistance recipients (who are able to work), and strengthen labour laws to protect minimum wage workers²⁴
- Invest in women-specific employment and skill readiness programs²⁵

Partners:

- Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) Women’s Caucus
- Employment Ontario Networks
- Local Immigration Partnerships such as the Toronto East Quadrant Local Immigration Partnership

Child Care

Ontario’s signing of the federal child care agreement was a historic win for gender equality. However, advocates have been clear that in order for the plan to succeed, it must include a workforce strategy to recruit and retain child care workers. Child care workers deserve decent work and fair wages.

Policy Statement: YWCA Toronto believes in the value of a high-quality, accessible and affordable national child care plan. We believe that access to child care is foundational to women’s labour market participation, and universal child care is a key tenet of gender equality. We have always believed that no woman should be forced to choose between a career or having a family. And, that no child care worker should be paid an inadequate wage.²⁶

Advocacy asks of the municipal government:

- Hiring of child care workers and other workers should be limited to direct hire and not through Temporary Help Agencies to ensure adequate quality of service and pay²⁷

- Create a comprehensive workforce strategy for the child care sector and support child care budgets that provide decent and comprehensive wages and benefits to ECEs and other child care workers²⁸

Advocacy asks of the provincial government:

- Address the shortage of early childhood educators and improve the long-term affordability and accessibility of child care by implementing a workforce strategy that includes a salary scale starting at \$25 per hour for all child care workers and \$30 per hour for Registered Early Childhood Educators²⁹
- Reinstate the cost control and financial accountability measures that were first set out in the child care plan³⁰
- Reassess the Provincial Wage Enhancement Grant that all child care providers are required to apply to as it is currently inequitable³¹

Partners:

- [Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care](#)
- [Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario](#)
- [Child Care Now](#)
- [Toronto Community for Better Child Care](#)
- [B2C2 Building Blocks for Child Care](#)

Basic Income

Too many women fall through the cracks of existing support programs. In a society where work is increasingly decoupled from economic security and provincial social assistance programs are chronically inadequate, the federal government has an opportunity to play a leadership role to ensure no one lives in poverty by implementing a basic income system. Society is built on the unpaid care work of women, yet this work is often a source of economic insecurity for women.³² Many YWCA Toronto shelter residents and employment program clients have identified the idea of a universal guaranteed income as a potential solution to poverty.³³ For women fleeing gender-based violence, having access to a guaranteed income can make the difference between fleeing an abusive relationship or not.

Policy Statement: Several [YWCA Toronto submissions](#) have pointed to the need for basic income. We advocate to keep women, girls and gender diverse people out of poverty and believe that a strong basic income scheme could remedy some entrenched gender disparities rooted in the devaluation of women’s care work.³⁴ We believe there is a compelling feminist argument to be made in favour of a guaranteed livable income scheme for all residents of Canada. Social assistance programs can be stigmatizing and, as such, a guaranteed income would remove the stigma of means-tested programs.

Advocacy asks of the provincial government:

- Prioritize income security so that everyone in Canada, regardless of immigration status, sector of employment, age or ability to engage in paid work, has access to a guaranteed livable basic income

Advocacy ask of the federal government:

- Provide a basic income to alleviate financial barriers³⁵
- Explore the implementation of a guaranteed livable income program that is gender-responsive³⁶
- Implement a basic income program as captured in the Calls to Justice from the MMIWG2S+ National Inquiry Report

Affordable and Supportive Housing

Access to safe, affordable and permanent housing transforms lives. Racialized women, single-women parents, women with substance use and mental health issues, survivors of gender-based violence, Indigenous women, and/or trans communities face specific forms of housing instability and require access to specialized housing services. This is particularly true for women, gender diverse and Two-Spirit Indigenous community members. We need greater funding for deeply affordable housing, with special investments in housing programs with wrap-around supports for women-led families, particularly those fleeing violence, and/or women experiencing mental health and substance use disorders.

Policy Statement: YWCA Toronto advocates for a continuum of housing options for women and gender diverse people – including safe, affordable housing, emergency shelters, and transitional and supportive programs.³⁷ We believe that the human right to housing must be upheld by the federal government and that every order of government has an important role to play in ensuring accessible, affordable, safe and adequate housing for women, girls and gender diverse people. We urge all orders of government to recognize access to housing that is affordable and dignified as a critical pillar of poverty reduction and to find innovative ways to accommodate the countless women and girls living in shelters.

Advocacy asks of the municipal government:

- Create a Toronto Housing Commissioner’s Office³⁸
- Increase funding to the Toronto Tenant Support Program (TTSP), expand the program to include ‘renovictions’ and ‘demovictions’ and increase tenant hotline service hours of operation³⁹
- Create a new process to document and eliminate housing discrimination towards newcomers, racialized, Indigenous and Black Torontonians, residents on fixed incomes, and/or people living with disabilities
- To address overcrowding, implement the enhanced new shelter model with its focus on housing, and its complimentary shelter and health framework first announced five years ago⁴⁰
- Increase access to social housing for low-income families
- Expand year-round access to critical amenities in public parks as places of respite, such as washrooms and water fountains across the city

Advocacy asks of the provincial government:

- Invest in a range of supportive housing for specific communities of women including Indigenous women and Two-Spirit People, senior women, and trans communities
- Invest in culturally-responsive housing supports to ensure women, particularly survivors of violence, and women with experiences of chronic houselessness, institutionalization and substance abuse, can maintain housing⁴¹
- Invest in portable relief measures that tenants can easily access and can help maintain and stabilize housing during times of increased poverty, food insecurity and labour market disruptions⁴²
- Address systemic discrimination in the rental market against social assistance recipients and racialized communities
- Deploy as much as possible of the \$1.4 billion funding for rent payment support under the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit and double Ontario's contribution of \$700 million⁴³
- Immediately deploy Ontario's share of federal funding under the \$1 billion Rapid Housing Initiative to acquire, develop and maintain affordable housing⁴⁴

Advocacy asks of the federal government:

- Commit to increased funding under the National Housing Strategy for a grants-based system to fund shelters, transitional housing and permanent affordable housing specifically dedicated to women and gender diverse people, including wrap-around services and supports
- Stabilize housing for tenants across Canada by expanding the Canada Housing Benefit and require provincial and territorial governments to provide the benefit as additional income support for recipients rather than an option to pick from among various social assistance supports⁴⁵
- Invest in deeply affordable and supportive housing specific for Indigenous communities and women-led families⁴⁶
- Create a comprehensive Residential Tenant Support Benefit such as the one proposed by the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation (CERA)⁴⁷
- Develop and implement a federal acquisition program that will support municipal and regional governments to preserve at-risk rental housing that maintains affordability levels, keeps tenants housed and increases the supply of deeply affordable homes⁴⁸
- Ensure a range of housing options exists in Canada, including supportive housing options; permanent, affordable housing; transition housing; and shelters for women and trans people fleeing violence⁴⁹
- Fund research into the housing needs of women living with disabilities, racialized women and trans people fleeing violence⁵⁰

Partners:

- [Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses](#)
- [Toronto Shelter Network](#)
- [The Neighbourhood Group](#)
- [Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness](#)

- [Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association](#)

Reproductive Justice

Reproductive justice is vital to achieving gender justice. Though abortion is legal in Canada, many barriers to accessing abortion exist. Access to abortion is greatly impacted by geography, with rural areas having fewer reproductive and abortion services. Indigenous people who can get pregnant, in particular those living with a disability, have also faced a history of forced sterilization in Canada⁵¹ – a practice that has persisted in some areas. After witnessing the erosion of abortion rights south of the border in the United States, YWCA Toronto recognizes that it is important to continue advocating for reproductive justice and supporting organizations that advocate for women and gender diverse people and their rights.

Policy Statement: YWCA Toronto is a pro-choice organization. We believe women and gender diverse people have the right to make their own reproductive health decisions – to decide what happens to their bodies and when. Access to free, safe, timely and quality abortion care is a healthcare necessity and should be protected at all costs.

Advocacy asks of all levels of government:

- Federal and regional leaders must ensure all people who can get pregnant have access to the sexual and reproductive health expertise, care, education and supports they need⁵²
- Provide enough funding to provide and expand abortion services outside of hospitals⁵³

Advocacy acts of the federal government:

- Implement a universal pharmacare program that includes full coverage for contraception for those who would like to access and use contraception⁵⁴
- End forced sterilization and discrimination in the healthcare system in Canada⁵⁵

Partners:

- [Planned Parenthood Toronto](#)
- [Women’s Legal Education and Action Fund](#)
- [Canadian Women’s Foundation](#)

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Violence against women and gender diverse people is persistent, life-threatening and on the rise. Significant and coordinated government action is needed to end gender-based violence. YWCA Toronto believes that all women, girls and gender diverse people deserve and have the right to live a life free from violence. No one should be forced to stay in a violent situation because of a lack of income, affordable housing or adequate support services. Indigenous women and girls and trans communities also face much higher rates of GBV than other women so it is particularly important that this issue is addressed by all orders of government.

Policy Statement: YWCA Toronto advocates for a world free from gender-based violence. We know that ending GBV requires deep systemic changes. We demand more than piecemeal investments in preventing and responding to this type of violence.

Advocacy asks of the municipal government:

- Adequately resource Toronto's Gender Equity Strategy and ensure priorities identified by resident and expert organizations are reflected in the strategy⁵⁶
- Create a specific fund that provides cash payments to survivors of violence to help rebuild lives in safety⁵⁷
- Rapidly increase funding and implementation of programs that eliminate the reliance on police to address mental health, houselessness, gender-based violence and gun violence
- Demand the TTC develop a strategy to ensure riders, particularly women and gender diverse people, are free from violence and harassment, including hiring specific, trauma-informed support staff and increasing TTC service levels outside of peak hours and at night

Advocacy asks of the provincial government:

- Support permanent, multi-year operating funding for organizations providing support to women and gender diverse people, including Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters, transitional housing, child care, girls' programs, violence prevention and education work and employment programs
- To address overcrowding, implement the enhanced new shelter model with its focus on housing, and its complimentary shelter and health framework⁵⁸
- Create and implement a coordinated province-wide strategy to eliminate gender-based violence alongside organizations doing VAW work, those who have experienced GBV, and allies

Advocacy asks of the federal government:

- Spend billions, not just millions, on ending gender-based violence⁵⁹
- Fully fund the National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence that centers on Black, Indigenous, racialized, newcomer, immigrant, and refugee women, women living without status, and women living with disabilities
- Ensure the National Action Plan addresses the extreme levels of violence against Indigenous women, girls and Two-Spirit people, including the implementation of the Calls to Justice from the MMIWG2S+ National Inquiry Report and regular progress reports⁶⁰
- Ensure programs and services offered to survivors are made widely available, providing federal investment in culturally appropriate supports that are available in multiple languages. These programs and services include but are not limited to legal support, crisis resources, violence against women programs and wrap-around support services⁶¹
- Prioritize funding research initiatives on the impacts of domestic and intimate partner violence to ensure more up-to-date information. Updated research would aid prevention efforts⁶²

- Create, deliver and fund community-led public education campaigns on gender-based violence, that highlight intimate partner and domestic violence. Ensure these education efforts are multilingual and are paired with culturally appropriate support⁶³
- Offer emergency funding and interest-free loans for women and gender diverse people fleeing violence⁶⁴
- Develop domestic violence legal information agencies that offer free legal support, decriminalize reporting incidents of violence and explore alternative justice models for survivors of sexual or gender-based violence⁶⁵

Partners:

- [Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses](#)
- [WomanACT](#)
- [Barbara Schlifer Commemorative Clinic](#)
- [Oasis Centre des Femmes](#)
- Violence Against Women Network

Gun Violence and Harm Reduction

Gun violence is ever-present and impactful. Coverage of the issue tends to sensationalize violence and focuses on gang activity. Within the discussions of gangs and guns, what is often missing are the perspectives of mothers, women and girls impacted by gun violence – the forgotten victims of gun violence. The lack of intersectional gender analysis has minimized and rendered invisible the very tangible and destructive ways gun violence impacts communities.

Greater steps need to be taken to address the ongoing and increasing violence and harm taking place within Toronto. Consistent, sustained and significant funding from all orders of government is needed to help women and girls heal after violent loss and to address the root causes of community violence such as poverty, housing instability, and a lack of recreational and counselling opportunities for youth.

Policy Statement: As a founding member of the Coalition for Gun Control, YWCA Toronto has a long-standing history of advocacy for greater gun restrictions on firearms. In more recent years, we have worked to address the intersectional impacts of gun violence on a very local level – the impact on mothers, women and girls in Toronto. Gun violence is an important social issue with gendered dimensions. We believe communities need deeper investment in affordable housing, youth programming, social assistance programs, and decent work and pay. A permanent government funding stream is urgently needed for programs that support women and girl co-victims of violence. In particular, this funding needs to prioritize the needs of Black women, girls and youth who are disproportionately impacted by gun and community violence.

Advocacy asks of the municipal government:

- Rapidly increase funding and implementation of programs that eliminate the reliance on police to address mental health, houselessness, gender-based violence and gun violence

- Recommit to Toronto’s drug strategy and increase funding to expand and resources programming and services for harm reduction
- Expand the City of Toronto’s Crisis Prevention Program to support people who have been impacted by violence or harm for a longer period of time following an incident⁶⁶
- Provide funding to support permanent support services that operate from an anti-racist, anti-oppressive and trauma-informed lens⁶⁷

Advocacy asks of the provincial government:

- Expand the public health care system to include mental health and provide increased funding for trauma-informed, community-led therapy programs
- Provide funding to support permanent support services that operate from an anti-racist, anti-oppressive and trauma-informed lens⁶⁸
- Ensure counselling services for survivors of gun violence are covered by OHIP and have all Boards of Health develop programs and services that aim to reduce gun violence and assist those affected – including community and hospital-based intervention programs⁶⁹

Advocacy asks of the federal government:

- Provide funding to support permanent support services that operate from an anti-racist, anti-oppressive and trauma-informed lens⁷⁰
- Permanently ban all handguns and assault rifles⁷¹

Partners:

- [Zero Gun Violence Movement](#)
- [Regent Park Mothers of Peace](#)
- HOPE in the Six
- [Communities for Zero Violence](#)
- [One by One](#)
- [Develop Me Youth Centre](#)
- [Coalition for Gun Control](#)

Mental Health

Income is a social determinant of health. Poverty is linked to poor mental health outcomes. The stress of survival can produce anxiety, depression and may aggravate existing conditions such as schizophrenia. However, limited mental health services exist for people on fixed incomes and the working poor.⁷²

Women who have experienced gender-based violence or lost a loved one to gun violence are susceptible to mental health decline. Self-isolation caused by COVID-19 has also led to increased mental health concerns. And, more and more youth are seeking access to mental health support services.

Policy Statement: We must expand the public health care system to include a range of culturally-responsive, accessible and intersectional mental health services.

Advocacy asks of the municipal government:

- Create affordable, accessible and diverse counseling and mental health support for women and gender diverse people that are culturally-appropriate and specific

Advocacy asks of the provincial government:

- Invest in creating 30,000 new supportive housing units over the next 10 years to meet the needs of individuals living with mental health issues and to make significant progress in alleviating chronic homelessness across the province, as urged by the Canadian Mental Health Association of Ontario⁷³

Advocacy asks of the federal government:

- Increase funding to ensure free, intersectional and trauma-informed mental health supports for survivors of violence and their families, and to ensure the elimination of waitlists and irregular therapeutic supports⁷⁴

Girls'/Youth Programming

YWCA Toronto offers a Girls' Centre in Scarborough dedicated to helping girls and youth learn leadership skills, build their self-esteem, collaborate with other young girls and gender diverse youth, and learn about the challenges of life in a safe environment. However, there is no government funding, at any order, for our girls' programs. YWCA Toronto is also home to [Camp Tapawingo](#) which offers carefully developed programming in a relaxed camp setting for girls and gender diverse youth as they develop leadership skills, gain confidence, and embark on new experiences. We believe it is critical for girls and gender diverse youth to have access to therapeutic, supportive and feminist spaces.

Policy Statement: YWCA Toronto believes that investing in the future begins with investing in our youth. Supporting youth who face poverty, marginalization and other systemic inequities will ensure that, in the long run, youth who do experience challenges today are given the opportunity to become successful, happy and healthy adults. We lobby all orders of government to invest in youth programming, specifically in programs for girls and gender diverse youth.

Advocacy asks of the municipal government:

- Fund specific recreation programs for girls and gender diverse youth
- Create greater access to free recreation programs across the city for girls and youth, including food programs
- Ensure geographic equity for community centres across the city and prioritize the building of new community centres in racialized neighbourhoods⁷⁵

Advocacy asks of the provincial government:

- Invest \$30 million to create a dedicated girls'-focused youth fund that women's organizations – and other organizations with emerging and established girls' programs – can access⁷⁶

- Provide specific funding to help girls from low-income households access STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) programs⁷⁷

Advocacy asks of the federal government:

- Invest in recreational activities for youth, including funding for girls'-focused programming⁷⁸

Advancing the Nonprofit Sector

Nonprofits play a critical role in our society and are a major contributor to the economy. At least 800,000 of Ontario's million nonprofit workers are women. Many workers are also racialized. As a woman-majority sector performing essential services, investment in our sector allows us to support our feminized workforce and to ensure better pay equity with other industries. The unit cost for supporting YWCA Toronto program participants has also stagnated for the last 10 years. As salaries, rent and other operational costs have increased, programs are forced to take funds from administrative costs in order to continue to offer services.

Policy statement: YWCA Toronto is a proud member of the nonprofit workforce. We recognize the nonprofit sector as a critical pillar of society, an important part of our economy, and a protector of democracy. We believe nonprofit organizations need to be funded adequately by all orders of government to ensure we are stable enough to operate our programs, even in times of economic downturn, and to respond to growing and emerging community needs. We believe nonprofits need a home in government, both federally and provincially.

Advocacy asks of the government:

- Provide stabilization funding for nonprofits to withstand the significant disruptions to our revenue and operations so we can continue to serve our communities and local economies⁷⁹
- Create a home-in-government for the nonprofit sector⁸⁰
- Support solutions for the staff and volunteer crisis in the nonprofit sector⁸¹
- Repeal Bill 124 which prevents certain nonprofit organizations from providing decent work and pay to their employees⁸²
- Fund community services at least at the rate of inflation⁸³
- Commit to using global funding budgets to manage costs rather than wage controls that constrain provincially funded nonprofits in our ability to attract and retain talent⁸⁴
- Establish simplified immigration pathways for care workers
- Provide nonrepayable grants for nonprofits to continue to operate services
- Invest in nonprofit organizations serving equity-deserving communities, in particular, Indigenous, Black and other racialized communities, women, people living with disabilities, 2SLGBTQ+ communities, and newcomers⁸⁵
- Provide permanent, multi-year funding to nonprofit organizations supporting survivors of sexual and gender-based violence⁸⁶

Partners:

- [Ontario Nonprofit Network](#)
- [Imagine Canada](#)
- [The United Way of Greater Toronto](#)

Migrant Rights and Precarious Status

Precarious status further marginalizes women, children and gender diverse people who are new residents of the country. The risk of experiencing gender-based violence, houselessness and employment insecurity is heightened for this community – which COVID-19 has only exacerbated. Without legal status, many women are not able to access *good* paying jobs with decent working conditions, nor are they able to access provincial or federal social assistance programs or other benefits. These women face multiple and heightened forms of marginalization rooted in poverty and a lack of recognition of their human rights. Women with precarious status are predominately racialized, thus structural and systemic racism further entrenches their exclusion and disadvantage.

Policy Statement: YWCA Toronto believes in ending Canada’s two-tiered society and providing permanent status for all those living and working here. We recognize the dignity and intrinsic rights of all human beings. We believe that no one should have to live in fear of being detained and deported – or lack legal recourse if workplace discrimination/harassment or housing discrimination/harassment occurs and/or legal rights are transgressed. Precarious immigration status leaves women particularly vulnerable to intimate partner violence, sexual trafficking, and economic exploitation. We believe the Canadian government should recognize that all people living in Canada have social capital and contribute to the social and economic tapestry of our society, and, as such, should create ongoing and flexible pathways to regularize those in Canada with precarious or no status.

Asks for the provincial government:

- Ensure all 500,000 undocumented people in Canada and their families (without exclusions of any kind) are given permanent residency
- Allow all undocumented people to apply for permanent residence and be issued work and study authorizations as they await processing of their permanent residency applications
- Immediately stop detentions and deportations so that migrants are not deported before they can apply; and have free and accessible applications
- Ensure ongoing regularization so that those who become undocumented in the future can get permanent resident status⁸⁷

Asks for the federal government:

- Develop and distribute information about violence against women and services available at points of entry for new residents such as airports⁸⁸
- End all discriminatory social assistance requirements that prevent women with precarious status from being able to attain housing and social assistance, including child benefits⁸⁹
- Recognize the value of the labour contributed by newcomers at all levels, and admit those workers required by the labour market on a permanent – not temporary – basis⁹⁰

- Follow the recommendations for regularization established by the Canadian Council for Refugees in its proposal <https://ccrweb.ca/sites/ccrweb.ca/files/ccr-regularization-submission-april-2022.pdf>

Partners:

- [Migrants Rights Network](#)
- [Migrant Workers Alliance for Change](#)
- [Workers' Action Centre](#)
- [Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants](#)
- [FCJ Refugee Centre](#)

Concluding Thoughts

YWCA Toronto takes public positions on a range of social issues as they emerge. The Chief Executive Officer and the Director of Advocacy and Communications can exercise a broad latitude of discretion when it comes to social and political matters – so long as they broadly map onto our three main pillars and follow our advocacy and communications policies.

We continue to be active participants in community and coalition knowledge sharing. We seek out new ways to influence public policy with an anti-oppressive, intersectional, and gender-focused lens. When opportunities to write letters and prepare government submissions or deputations arise, we strive to centre our core values, policy priorities, and the voices of our community members.

This Policy Priorities document will be updated on an annual basis.

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