

Women in the Workforce Plan (Phase 1):

Economic Security is Safety



 **Alexa Gilmour**
Official Opposition Shadow
Minister,
Women's Social and
Economic Opportunity



November 25 is the **International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls**.

It is a day that calls for urgent action. Instead, the Government of Ontario is spending millions on studying how to build a tunnel under the 401.

We need more than tunnel vision. The reality is appalling: 44% of Canadian women will experience some form of intimate partner violence (IPV) over their lifetime. The rates are staggeringly higher for 2SLGBTQ+ women (67%), Indigenous women (61%), women living in poverty (57%), and women with disabilities (55%).¹

And the risk is growing. While the causes of gender-based violence (GBV) are complex, we know that **women's economic security and safety are deeply connected**. Research shows that domestic violence often increases during economic downturns.² Economic insecurity marginalizes women, putting them at greater risk of violence. Financial dependency creates a major barrier to leaving abusive relationships, especially as chronic underinvestment in shelter services, affordable childcare and other essential supports leaves women with nowhere to turn.

The Conservative government's neglect and ongoing cuts to social services and social assistance rates have left families with few options. The deep gender pay gap, particularly for women working in these front-line care services, persists. A growing jobs crisis and a growing made-in-Ontario care sector crisis means access to supports will get worse. With over 700,000 Ontarians out of work and the full effects of U.S. tariffs still to come, there is no time to waste.

We must act now to prevent the preventable, and reduce violence against women and girls. The Official Opposition is creating a Women in the Workforce Plan that

- ensures women's access to good jobs with decent working conditions, and
- invests in the social programs women rely on.

We are calling on the government of Ontario to address the crisis in the care economy, a crisis entirely of the government's own making after eight years in office. We are calling on the government to fully fund and implement shelters, community public services and \$10-a-day child care in every part of the province.

The Conservative government's chronic underfunding of these aspects of the care economy has dangerously eroded access to essential services for people who most need them. It's leaving women with few choices and dangerous, even deadly consequences. It's making the jobs disaster worse, weakening job security in the fields where women work. This has to change.

This is the **first plank in the Official Opposition's Women in the Workforce Plan, a broader strategy to fully fund the care economy and ensure equal pay for work of equal value**, in line with calls from OPSEU/SEFPO, CUPE Ontario, the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (OCBCC), the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO), the Equal Pay Coalition, WomanACT, Seeds of Possibility, and provincial advocates for the prevention of GBV. It's a long overdue step towards strengthening Ontario and its economy with the jobs, opportunities and security Ontario women and families deserve.

We're taking action. You should ask why your government isn't.

¹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/women-gender-equality/gender-based-violence/facts-stats.html>

² <https://thepearsoncentre.ca/the-hidden-cost-of-economic-downturns-she-cessions-and-the-surge-in-intimate-partner-violence/>



Fund Community Public Services

Well-funded community and social services are critical in combatting and preventing GBV.

They provide crucial wrap-around supports for victims and survivors of GBV, and help reduce poverty and other inequities that put women at risk. During times of economic instability, community and social services act as an automatic stabilizer, helping families reduce financial stressors linked to an increase in domestic violence.

Funding community public services *also* means investing in good jobs and greater economic security for the tens of thousands of women and gender diverse workers within the sector. **75% of Ontario's community public service workers are women.** As part of the broader care economy, their frontline work in areas like community health care, mental health and addictions, child welfare, and developmental services for families throughout the province is key to maintaining economic stability, and ensuring the health and well-being of all Ontarians.

Yet instead of investing in the jobs and services women count on, Ford Conservatives are draining them of resources. Since 2018, deliberate cuts and chronic underfunding have resulted in a 16% decrease in funding for social services per person in Ontario at a time when our province's cost-of-living crisis has people turning to them more than ever.

For years, Ontario has seen the lowest per capita spending on social programs of all provinces.³ Under the current Conservative government, there have been massive cuts. According to the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario, spending projections for the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services over the next three years are \$7 billion below the funding needed *just to maintain current service levels*.

This essential sector is now on the brink, facing program closures, layoffs, and an erosion of frontline services Ontario women count on.

Workers in the sector have also seen their wages depressed by ongoing wage theft. Unlike workers in other public sectors, they did *not* receive 6.5% retroactive wage increases when Bill 124 (the Conservative government's wage suppression bill) was found unconstitutional. It's led to a staffing and retention crisis, as workers are significantly underpaid compared to their counterparts.

Workers' livelihoods are on the line—their ability to keep a roof over their heads, food on the table and to ensure safety for themselves and their families. We know it is much harder for women to escape violence without economic security, and without community and social services to provide a safety net.

We must act now to fund Ontario's community public services and protect jobs, our economy and women's safety.

³ <https://fao-on.org/en/report/interprovincial-comparison-2024/>

Our Plan

Reverse cuts to community public services

- Invest \$3.9 billion in social services funding to restore the 16% funding per person cut since 2018

Pay community and social services workers what they're owed

- Deliver remedy for Bill 124 by funding a 6.5% retroactive wage increase over the 3-year moderation period, in line with what other public sector workers have received
- Ensure wages are pay equity compliant
- Enforce the Employment Standards Act (ESA) to compensate workers for the damage caused by wage theft and stop future violations

Invest in social infrastructure

- Provide sustainable funding, indexed to inflation, for community and social services women count on, including frontline community agencies, developmental services, community health care, and mental health and addictions services



Fund and Implement \$10-a-day Child Care

Lack of access to affordable child care is one of the most common barriers to escaping GBV. This is especially true in today's cost-of-living crisis. **With rent and grocery prices skyrocketing, women often cannot earn enough income to support themselves and their kids without reliable child care.**

It's a problem for workers in Ontario's women-dominated child care sector as well. Low pay means many are struggling to feed their own families, even as they're caring for others.

In 2023, the FAO found that the high cost of child care and shortage of available child care spaces can significantly impede Ontario mothers' ability to participate in the labour force.⁴ Compared to men, women are much more likely to leave the workforce against their will because of personal and family responsibilities, such as giving birth. In 2022, Ontario mothers with young children had a labour participation rate 14.1 points lower than fathers. This gender gap is more than four times that of workers without young children.

Ontario mothers also commonly pay a "motherhood penalty" that depresses their wages for years after giving birth.

To bolster Ontario women's economic security, we must create an affordable child care system that supports all families and values educators.

Thanks to the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) program (the \$10-a-day program), Ontario has taken important steps towards this goal. It has allowed many Ontario women to re-enter the workforce. Yet, it has still not reached all families, and the program's long-term future remains uncertain.

While the provincial government's recent 1-year renewal of the Canada-Ontario child care agreement is encouraging, it keeps fees at the current average of \$19-a-day throughout the coming year. **This means Ontario families will not get \$10-a-day child care by the 2026 target date.** It's one more target missed among many, and must not be the start of backtracking on the government's \$10-a-day promise.

Inadequate funding and Conservatives' poor implementation of CWELCC has already left far too many Ontario families without access to affordable child care. A recent Auditor General's report and a study of Toronto child care by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives found slow expansion of spaces and barriers to equitable access for low-income families.⁵ The province is currently not on track to meet its target of creating 86,000 new spaces by December 2026. In addition, school-age child care falls outside of the CWELCC system and thus fees are still high for school-age families, and school-age child care spaces have declined.

Ontario's child care sector is also facing a staffing crisis. According to the Auditor General, the province is in need of 10,000 more registered early childhood educators (RECEs) by 2026. Yet, workers in this women-dominated sector are significantly underpaid, making it difficult to recruit and retain talented educators. For the sake of Ontario's women, families and economy, we need a child care system with affordable fees, decent work and fair wages (pay equity compliant), and a space for every family. We must commit to securing \$10-a-day child care throughout our province.

⁴ <https://fao-on.org/en/report/wilma/>

⁵ <https://www.auditor.on.ca/>





Our Plan

Secure the future of \$10-a-day child care in Ontario

- Negotiate a stronger federal–provincial agreement that fully funds a high-quality, accessible, and equitable child care system
- Provide a fair share of provincial funding to the CWELCC
- Reduce fees for before and after school child care and negotiate with the federal government to expand \$10-a-day child care to school age children

Expand child care spaces to meet demand

- Develop an ambitious system plan to expand public and not-for-profit child care spaces, including increasing capital funding, creating and using an inventory or publicly available lands for expansion
- Remove the rules limiting municipalities in creating their own child care spaces and bring operators and service system managers together to create more child care spots

Make jobs in child care good careers

- Recruit and retain talented Early Childhood Educators (ECEs), early years staff and child care providers by developing and implementing a wage grid and decent work standards: including benefits and a pension, daily on-site paid planning, paid sick days, paid professional development and programming time and a strategy to help workers upgrade their qualifications
 - Institute a wage grid starting at \$35-\$45 per hour for Registered ECEs (RECEs) and at least \$28 per hour for non-RECE staff
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