

Community Matters

Gender (In)equity



March 2022

Edmonton Social Plannning Council



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Community Matters

Welcome to our new publication, Community Matters!

In our efforts to continually find new ways to inform the community about social issues that impact citizens, the Edmonton Social Planning Council will produce a quarterly report to connect the dots between social issues, evidence, and policy.

This new publication, Community Matters, combines elements of our two legacy publications, The fACTivist and Research Update. These publications kept readers apprised of ESPC activities and projects as well as educated them on a wide range of social issues and perspectives for positive social change. The new endeavor will build on this work, giving voice to local agencies, ESPC volunteer writers, and staff members alike.

Each edition will spotlight a specific social issue and demonstrate the intersectional nature and impact on equality. Our goal is to use evidence as we continue to inform on the issues affecting individuals and families.

We will collect and share a diverse range of facts, experiences, and challenges framed by a particular theme. This edition focuses on gender (in)equity and the various ways that women and gender-diverse individuals are impacted by issues such as:

- Income and employment,
- Food (in)security,
- Social inclusion,
- Mental health, and
- Housing.

While gender equality aims to ensure equal treatment for people of all genders, gender equity goes a step further, aiming to provide equal treatment according to an individual's unique needs. Equality guarantees that a person's rights, responsibilities, and opportunities are not impacted by their gender. Equity offers the means to get there, which may be experienced as "treatment that is different but considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations, and opportunities" (UNESCO, 2000).

We chose this topic as our first theme in part to highlight that the month of March is Women's History Month and celebrates International Women's Day (March 8), but also in recognition that the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected women and exacerbated existing inequities. Women and gender diverse people face high rates of poverty, unemployment, gender-based violence, and poor health. As we emerge to new social and economic realities, we must ensure that policies address these inequities—to support women and gender diverse individuals as fully engaged members of society.

- Susan Morrissey, Executive Director





Newcomers Fleeing Violence

Written by WIN House

WIN House has been supporting the Edmonton Metropolitan Area and beyond since 1968. Our roots were born out of the need to support and provide services to homeless women coming into the city. At the downtown Greyhound station, Daisy Wilson first noticed the growing number of transient women in Edmonton. Within a few months, she brought together 28 organizations to help solve what was believed to be a growing issue. Initially, a storefront provided places to rest and receive information about other social assistance organizations. There were no beds, but women would sleep upright on a stool within the safety of the office. Skipping through history, Edmonton Women's Shelter established our first residence in 1978. The transition to providing a haven came through conversations and identifying that, for most of the women and children, they had at one time experienced some form of abuse.

WIN House provides emergency services for women and children fleeing violence; throughout the year, it is not uncommon for us to have housed individuals from all provinces and territories. As a haven, we do what we can to support individuals, provide system navigation, and a listening ear within our allowable 21-day stay. Women leave abusive situations with courage, strength, and determination, only to enter a system that is not structured to prevent

them from becoming entrenched into poverty and homelessness, alternatively returning to the situation they left, because at least "at home" they know what to expect. The women must choose between "the devil they know, or the one they don't."

At WIN House, in 2020, 26% of the people staying in the shelter were born outside of Canada. WIN House currently has 60 emergency shelter beds available. Additionally, we have another 10 beds set up as a second stage shelter for those fleeing violence or who have precarious immigration status. The need for expansion of accessibility of this type of housing is evident through our vacancy rate. Since the opening of our second stage shelter in 2010, all the bedrooms have remained at capacity with only a few hours of vacancy from move out to move in.

Women who are newcomers to Canada face additional structural barriers that exploit their vulnerability in a new country. Most Canadians and service providers are unaware of newcomers' complexities. From a mere acculturation standpoint, there are significant differences in simple situations, like how many cultures view family togetherness and speaking of violence within a family unit results in isolation from their community of origin. [1] This

creates a power imbalance in Canada due to fear, stigma, and shame, and ultimately, newcomers are easily isolated from Canada's social services. Most Canadians do not know that when a person immigrates to Canada, they cannot access government assistance programs such as income support or employment. [1] Depending on their immigration status, the power imbalance can lead to further exploitation. For individuals who are sponsored, their migration status is leveraged by their sponsor. This relationship allows the sponsor to control and threaten deportation or removal of custody of children.

In Alberta, Income Support is accessible by a sponsored newcomer only if:

- their sponsor has abandoned the immigrant and the worker is satisfied the immigrant has made reasonable efforts to secure financial support from the sponsor;
- the applicant has been neglected or abused by the sponsor; or
- the sponsor has been proven unable to provide financial support. [2]

Anecdotally, the experience is rather traumatic for women trying to flee violence while needing to sufficiently prove that they can no longer receive support from their sponsor due to violence. It is even harder when there is no physical sign of abuse, and, as our statistics reports indicate, physical, emotional, psychological, and financial abuse aren't always visible. Emotional and psychological abuse are common (totaling 61% of our reports) and just as damaging as physical abuse. The structure is meant to support individuals but can create significant barriers to achieving autonomy. [3] Often, an assumption is made that those residing in the same household share resources equally or that relations are consensual. [3] Left with few options, women often resort to survival sex or domestic roles to earn money to feed themselves and their children.

The amount given through the Income Support Core Shelter benefit in Alberta covers approximately one-eighth of housing costs. [4]

The recent cutbacks to Income Support have a disproportionate impact on women; 57% of single-family homes headed by women are poor. [3] The cuts "are a significant factor [in] shaping women's vulnerability to homelessness and ability to access housing once homeless." [3]

Core Shelter for private housing covers the following items:

- Payments for rent or payments under a mortgage or agreement for sale
- Utilities (except telephone)
- Heating fuel
- Damage deposit
- Lot rental for a mobile home
- Municipal taxes, house or tenant insurance, and, if applicable, condominium fees
- Homeowner's maintenance

Maximum Monthly Core Shelter Payment Table-Private Housing

Household Composition	Amount
Single adult	\$330
Single adult, 1 child	\$558
Single adult, 2 children	\$578
Single adult, 3 children	\$599
Single adult, 4 children	\$619
Single adult, 5 children	\$640
Single adult, 6 children	\$660
Each additional child	\$21
Couple, no children	\$446
Couple, 1 child	\$588
Couple, 2 children	\$608
Couple, 3 children	\$618
Couple, 4 children	\$639
Couple, 5 children	\$659
Couple, 6 children	\$679
Each additional child	\$21

Edmonton citizens and service providers need a deeper understanding and education of the system our vulnerable citizens have to navigate across the city and province to receive any support, on top of trauma experienced within the home that threw them into peril in the first place. We need compassion for other people's circumstances.

To learn more:

https://www.edmonton.ca/programs_services/for_family_individuals/family-violence-prevention-team

<http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/AWOnline/3824.html>

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If you are in danger or in need of immediate assistance please contact call their helpline at 780-479-0058.





Women, Gender Equity, and Food Security

Written by Brett Lambert

If there is one thing that is abundantly clear with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is that existing inequities among various marginalized groups have only been further exposed and exacerbated. This has certainly been true when it comes to food security.

The issue of food security within Canada is intrinsically linked to income security, and job losses linked to the pandemic disproportionately affected those who were employed in various low-wage, part-time positions. [1] These positions were also disproportionately held by women of colour. [2]

The state of precarious work, set against a backdrop of a rising cost of living (especially the price of groceries), is likely to make an already difficult situation that much more challenging. [3,4] The Edmonton Food Bank's recent publication, *Beyond Food Revisited Survey 2021*, paints an illuminating picture of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on those experiencing food insecurity. [5]

The survey—conducted with the Edmonton Social Planning Council's assistance in the collation and analysis of results—is the third one of its kind (the others were published in 2015 and 2018). More than 500 surveys were completed with food bank clients during the summer of 2021, which sought

to better understand their current situation and what would be needed to improve the quality of their lives.

Consistent with previous surveys, close to 60% of respondents were female, almost half were single, and a third were married or common law. The largest age groups among the survey respondents were aged 26 to 40 years (33%) and 41 to 55 years (33.5%). Differing from previous surveys, a quarter (25.5%) of respondents identified as Indigenous, compared to 37% and 34% in 2018 and 2015, respectively (factors for this difference could be attributed to some Indigenous families returning to home communities to be closer to family during the pandemic and Indigenous governments and organizations receiving federal pandemic funding that assisted Indigenous individuals and families). [5]

The pandemic had a big impact on those accessing the food bank, with more than two-thirds (68.5%) losing work because of COVID-19. [5] Further, those who were accessing the food bank were having to make difficult decisions on which bills to pay and how to otherwise make ends meet. After housing, child care was cited as the highest monthly household expense, followed by utilities. [5]

For families with children, 17% of respondents admitted that there were children in the household who missed meals. However, half of survey respondents did not respond to the question, likely due to the stigma and sensitivity of acknowledging this experience. [5]

The toll on mental health in relation to experiencing food insecurity is evident in the survey results, with more than half (59%) of respondents experiencing higher stress levels compared to the previous year. Nevertheless, a slightly lower proportion of respondents reported their physical health was fair or poor, compared to previous surveys. [5]

While emergency food assistance fulfills an immediate and important need, it is not a long-term solution. An increase in income (whether from employment wages, income support, or benefit programs) would go a long way towards resolving the bulk of food insecurity. Since the income and wealth gap is gendered, in addition to being racialized, boosts to income need to reach women (especially racialized women) in order to make a significant dent in food insecurity.

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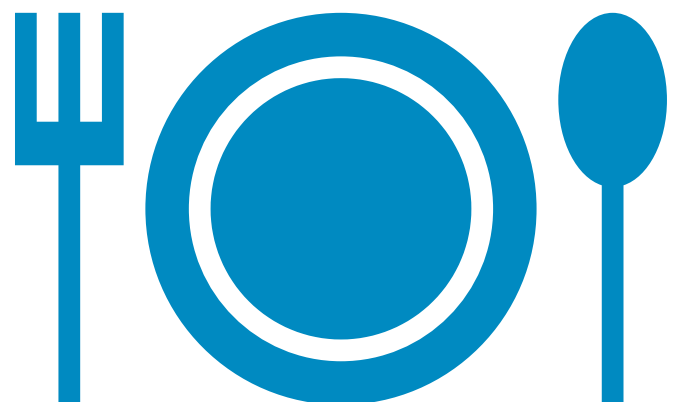
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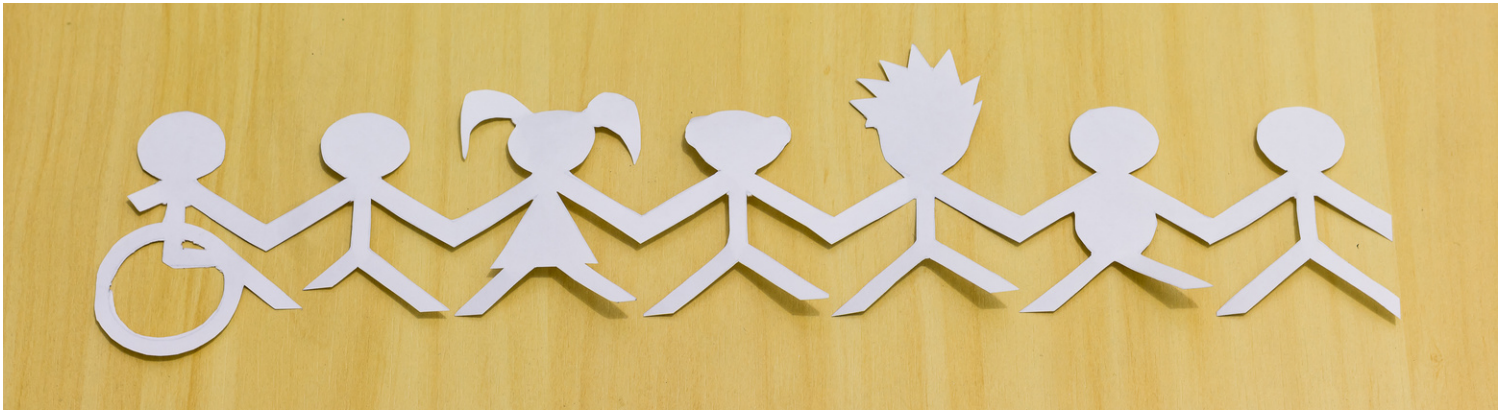
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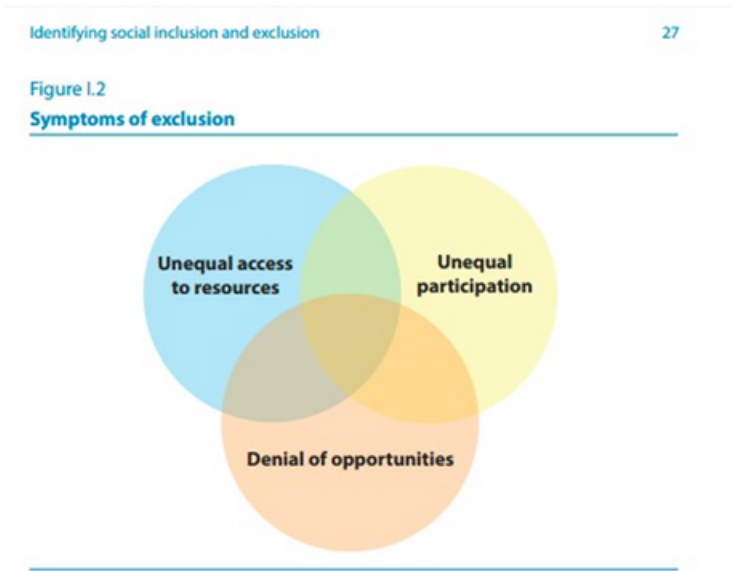


Are We There Yet?: Social Inclusion Toward Gender Equity in Canada

Written by Jayme Wong

Social exclusion refers to the inequities faced by individuals to access basic material resources (such as income, employment, and housing) and services (such as education and health care). It describes the state in which individuals are excluded from full participation in society, leading to a decreased quality of life. According to the United Nations’ (UN) report *Leaving No One Behind: The Imperative of Inclusive Development*, the symptoms of social exclusion include unequal access to resources, unequal participation, and denial of opportunities (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: United Nations, 2016



Individuals can be socially excluded based on factors such as age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, religion, migration status, socio-economic status, place of residence, sexual orientation, and gender identity. While there are laws protecting individuals against social exclusion in Canada—such as the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982—there are still many steps to take towards social inclusion, particularly around gender, as we will discuss.

The UN defines social inclusion as “the process of improving the terms of participation in society for people who are disadvantaged on the basis of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status, through enhanced opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect for rights.” (1) In this sense, social inclusion is considered both “a process and a goal” (1)—an ideal state that is achieved through policies and actions.

The UN report notes, “With regard to gender inequality ... the World Bank (2015) reported that, of 173 countries and areas examined, more than 150 have at least one law that discriminates against women.” (1) These laws perpetuate social exclusion. Canadian laws exist



that are supposed to discourage social exclusion—but not necessarily on the basis of gender. Section 15(1) of the Charter states that, “Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.” (2) Similarly, Section 27 notes, “Notwithstanding anything in this Charter, the rights and freedoms referred to in it are guaranteed equally to male and female persons.” (2) Note the lack of reference to gender, gender identity, or gender expression in either section.

While one may note that there are other laws that exist that protect individuals against gender-based social exclusion, the Charter acts as Canada’s foundational basis for human rights and legal interpretation. Without reference to gender in either 1867 or 1982 iterations of The Constitution Act, these documents point to areas that contribute to social exclusion based on gender and barriers to overall progress made towards social inclusion. As a result, this exclusion manifests through inequities in education and skills development, economic participation, prosperity, and representation in leadership roles, as well as through gender-based violence, health, well-being, and poverty.

For example, in 2021, Statistics Canada reported that the average hourly rate for employed populations aged 15 and over was \$31.79 for men and \$28.20 for women.[1] (3) While there were more women who finished high school (80.8%) compared to men (77.7%) in 2016, only 35.6% of women were in management level positions as of 2021. (3) Similarly, only 60.6% of women were represented in the labour participation rate in 2021 compared to 69.6% of men.

[1] Note that sex, gender, and sexual orientation data published by Statistics Canada only include findings for “male-” and “female-”identifying individuals. There is no similar data available for non-binary and other-identifying individuals.

(3) In other words, women are more statistically likely to hold the qualifications needed to enter the workforce, but gender disparity exists in the labour participation rate, particularly in high-level, decision-making positions, that point to underlying factors that prevent women from participating fully or as equals.

More jarring disparities include the proportion of populations in core housing need by economic family type in 2016: 11.4% were women compared to 9.8% of men. (3) Similarly, only 67.0% of adult women reported having high psychological well-being between 2017–2018 compared to 71.9% of men. (3) While these statistics have been collected from various reports in the past decade, the numbers paint a rather worrying picture: that Canada’s gender inclusion progress is severely limited and significant actions need to be taken to overcome such significant gender-based gaps in societal participation. Furthermore, these numbers suggest that it is not enough to have policies discouraging social exclusion, but more steps must be taken towards social inclusion.

Jayme is a volunteer with ESPC. She has a BA in English and philosophy from the University of Lethbridge and an MA in English and film studies from the University of Alberta. She currently lives in Edmonton with her partner and their cat.

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Addressing the Gendered Mental Health Gap: The Role of Social and Economic Factors

Written by Samina Rashiq

Gender inequity refers to unfair differences between genders in the context of wealth, employment, power, and health. (1) For women this may look like socio-economic disadvantages, lower salaries for similar work, increased likelihood of gender-based violence and sexual assault, and higher levels of chronic stress. (2) These are all considered gender-based risk factors for mental health problems. Globally, gender inequity is associated with mental health outcomes for women and people of other marginalized genders that are poorer than men's. (3) These impacts may occur as a result of direct factors such as gender-based violence and trauma, or indirect factors like socio-economic status, social power, and gender roles and responsibilities. Gender inequity begins in childhood, when discrimination on the basis of gender is common. This discrimination often prioritizes and privileges boys and men over girls, women, and people of marginalized genders. Sexism is the root cause of gender inequity, which must be addressed in order to achieve fair treatment of people of all genders. Addressing gender inequity should reduce the disproportionate risk of mental illness that people of marginalized genders face.

Gender inequity is important to discuss in the context of mental health because of the severe impact it has on women. Gender-based differences can be attributed to high rates of depression, anxiety disorders, low self-esteem, and eating disorders. (3) These inequities are concerning because they are upheld by socially determined gender roles and responsibilities that are deeply ingrained in most societies. These roles and responsibilities often put women in situations where they have less control over their own bodies, relationships, and employment status, which is associated with poor mental health. (3) These concerns are important today because women and girls have been facing disproportionate social and economic impacts as a result of COVID-19. (4) These impacts are even greater for women who are Indigenous, racialized, or disabled. (5)

A recent study of Canadians during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that females are more likely than males to report worse mental health, a difference that also existed before the pandemic. (6) These findings were even more significant for gender-diverse participants, who reported rates of generalized anxiety disorder double that of female participants and triple

that of male participants. Most concerning is that the study found that the pandemic contributed to increased likelihood of job loss and inadequate financial resources for gender-diverse participants, which are both risk factors for mental health problems.

These issues hit close to home, with women in Alberta facing the largest employment gender gap of any province, greater rates of poverty, and overrepresentation in lower paying and minimum wage jobs. (5) Despite having higher levels of education than women in other provinces, Albertan women make only 63% of what men earn. (5) The social determinants of mental health suggest that people of marginalized genders in Edmonton and Alberta are generally at a greater risk for developing mental health disorders than men. Today, social policies do not yet seem to have adequately addressed the issue of gender inequity and mental health in Canada, but progress is being made.

The federal government has committed to taking action to ensure that Canadian women can overcome the economic inequities that have only been amplified by COVID-19. (4) From 2015–2020, Canada moved up 11 places in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report. (4) In Alberta however, as of November 2021, the wage gap is still significantly higher than it is in any other province. (7) It is clear that new social policies that resolve the differences in socio-economic status between men and people of marginalized genders are necessary to address this major determinant of mental health.

One organization that is working to fight systemic barriers that Edmontonians face is Women's Initiative Edmonton, which aims to fight for gender justice for all within Edmonton by bringing women's issues to city council. Bringing these issues to the forefront and to the agendas of elected officials is one way to fight against gender inequity in Edmonton, and improve mental health for all of citizens.

Samina Rashiq is a fourth year sciences student at the University of Alberta. She is passionate about research and the power that it has to inform social change and create more equitable communities. After graduation she hopes to pursue a career in public health.

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Gender Equity and the Workforce

Written by Sydney Sheloff and Brett Lambert

Introduction

Gender inequity for women in the workforce has been a persistent problem. Women experience low labour force participation rates, and when they do work, their jobs tend to be precarious and low wage. While progress has been made, women continue to face worse labour market outcomes than men.

The COVID-19 pandemic has both highlighted and exacerbated the issues. Industries led by women were hit the hardest by lockdowns and restrictions, and parents often had to sacrifice work to take care of children in the face of school and daycare closures. Statistics have shown that women's labour market outcomes are recovering, but women may still be in low-quality work and parents still have to make tough decisions between work and child care. [1]

This article will take a dive into data regarding women's economic well-being, the impacts on women's lives, and the policies that would improve this situation.

What does the data show?

There are several different angles one can use to look at the economic well-being of women. The first is employment rates. Women actually have a lower unemployment rate than men. In 2021 men

experienced an unemployment rate of 9.2% and women, 8.7%. [2] There are a couple different explanations for this trend. First of all, men are more likely to be in professions, such as construction and resources, that are more vulnerable to economic ups and downs. Another reason may be that many women are not in the labour force at all. The unemployment rate refers to people who are not currently working but are available for work and/or looking for work. Women may not be working or looking for work and are therefore not included in unemployment statistics. In fact, in 2021, women had a labour force participation rate of 65.7% and men had a rate of 75.2%. [2]

The second angle is the income women bring in when they do work. The gender pay gap continues to exist. In 2019, women reported 70.7% of the income that men did. [3] Women are more likely to be earning low wages. Between July 2019 and June 2020, 60% of workers earning minimum wage were women. [4]

The third angle is poverty rates. Using the Market Basket Measure—Canada's official poverty line—74,000 women in Edmonton lived in poverty in 2019. That is 10.4% of all Edmontonian women. By contrast, 9.9% of men in Edmonton lived under the poverty line. [5]

Women are not a homogenous group, and some women are more likely to experience poverty than others. On a national level, non-racialized women earn 67 cents for every dollar non-racialized men make, but racialized women make 59 cents for every dollar non-racialized men make. [6] Poverty rates vary dramatically for women from different racial and ethnic groups. The 2016 census reports that 19.7% of Indigenous women [7] and 14.0% of women designated as visible minorities [8] were living in low-income in Edmonton. Within these groups there is a lot of diversity. In 2016, 26.7% of First Nations women, [7] 24.1% of Black women, 32.4% of Arab women, and 24.2% of West Asian women [8] lived in low-income.

What does this mean for women?

Income is one of the most important social determinants of health and well-being. Decent food, housing, higher education and training, child care, and non-covered health care all cost money. Level of income determines access to and shapes the quality of the other determinants of well-being, and, as such, also shapes one's living conditions. [9] Women living in poverty face food insecurity and poor nutrition, insufficient housing, and lack access to some medical care. At the same time, they lack access to the resources that can help alleviate their poverty and increase well-being—such as education, training, and child care. Living in low-income also creates barriers to participation in one's community and leads to social exclusion. [9]

Solutions to these issues lie in policy. It is not enough to tell women to “find a job,” as the jobs available to them are precarious and offer low wages. In the face of exorbitantly high child care costs, choosing not to work is a rational choice for some women. However, the recent \$10/day child care agreement between the provincial and federal governments, if implemented in an equitable way, will give families better access to high-quality child care, and will give more women the opportunity to work. If policies are giving women these opportunities, decision-makers

need to ensure the work available is stable and well paying. Employers that implement living wage policies will enable women to earn enough income to live in dignity and support their families. In addition, robust government transfers can supplement employment income to ensure all women can support themselves and their families.

Many existing policy solutions focus on families—if women have children then they have access to child care subsidies and government transfers (such as child benefits) to support the costs of raising children. Single women do not have access to many supports, and, as such, do not receive support to get out of poverty. Living wage policies are essential so that single women, much like with families, can earn enough income to support themselves. Better government transfers to people not living in a family unit would also go a long way to support single women.

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About the Edmonton Social Planning Council

The Edmonton Social Planning Council is an independent, non-profit, non-partisan social research organization, with registered charitable status. Our focus is social research, particularly in the areas of low-income and poverty. ESPC is a source of knowledge and expertise on social issues within our community.

We are dedicated to encouraging the adoption of equitable social policy, supporting the work of other organizations who are striving to improve the lives of Edmontonians, and educating the public regarding the social issues that impact them on a daily basis.

Our Vision: A community in which all people are full and valued participants.

Our Mission: Through rigorous research, detailed analysis, and community engagement, we deepen community understanding of social planning issues, influence policy, and spark collaborative actions that lead to positive social change.

We thank you for your continued support.

Contact

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