

**The National Council of Women of Canada
Le Conseil national des femmes du Canada**



FOUNDED 1893

(INCORPORATED BY AN ACT OF PARLIAMENT)

IN FEDERATION WITH THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN

Annual Brief to the Government of Canada

January 2022

Presented by Patricia Leson, President

On Behalf of the NCWC Board of Directors

And the General Membership of the NCWC



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Preamble

The National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) is pleased to present its new and updated policies in the form of this Brief to the Prime Minister and the Government of Canada.

Founded in 1893, the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) is a non-profit and non-partisan organization representing Canadian women of diverse occupations, languages, origins, and customs and reflecting a cross-section of public opinion.

We were incorporated by an Act of Parliament and have received our own Coat of Arms. The NCWC is a non-governmental organization (NGO) currently composed of Local Councils in cities from Halifax to Vancouver, Provincial Councils in Quebec, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Alberta, and British Columbia, along with several Nationally Organized Societies.

The NCWC is a federate of the International Council of Women (ICW), which was founded in 1888 and composed of National Councils in seventy-four countries. The NCWC holds Consultative Status (General) with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations, enabling us to bring a Canadian perspective to the work of the Commission for the Status of Women. The NCWC also participates as an Observer Non-Governmental Organization with the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States.

The NCWC's local, provincial, and national organizations are closely connected with issues at all levels while also having a firm grasp of international issues and Canada's commitment to them. For this reason, the NCWC is uniquely qualified to approach our Government with suggestions and recommendations which are based on carefully researched and democratically approved policies for improving the quality of life of Canadians.

For the past 129 years, the National Council of Women has worked to improve the quality of life in Canada through education and advocacy. In 2005, the Hon. Stephane Dion announced the unveiling of an Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada plaque commemorating the national historic significance of NCWC in Allan Gardens, Toronto, the site of our first meeting.

We are proud of our work to expand opportunities for all women. We will continue to be the voice for those who have neither the courage nor the strength to do so for themselves. We continue to advocate for women from coast to coast to coast so they can participate in, and influence, our society through political equality and full citizenship. We continue our work with our Federates to press those in leadership positions to weave the strong tapestry of supports and programs necessary to improve the lives and living conditions for women, children, and families in Canada.

All policy for NCWC is generated through resolutions originating with either Local Councils or NCWC Committees. These are circulated to, and then voted on by, the general membership at our Annual General Meeting. This Brief is therefore the united voice of the federated membership of the National Council of Women of Canada.

At our most recent Annual General Meeting held via webinar in 2021, we continued the long history of NCWC's policy development, and we are pleased to introduce these new policies and updates to existing policies. These policies are listed on the following pages.

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Resolutions

2021-01 Regulation of Industrial Mining and Deforestation in the James Bay Lowlands

Whereas #1 in northern Canada the Government of Canada owns undeveloped natural resource rights and is the landlord of oil, mineral and forest companies that enjoy exploration and development rights; and

Whereas#2 mining companies are urging the Government of Ontario to open the “Ring of Fire” area within the James Bay Lowlands to massive industrial mineral extraction and processing; and

Whereas #3 Indigenous First Nation opposition to exploration activities on their territorial lands is based on such concerns as access roads, lack of adequate consultation and respect for previous agreements, and environmental concerns such as pollution and impacts to human life, wildlife, and fish; and

Whereas# 4 this extensive industrial development would require urban infrastructure which would further significantly damage the wetlands and forests, limit fishing and hunting, tourism and recreational activities, community access to potable water, and the environment’s ability to sustain human life; and

Whereas #5 the James Bay Lowlands is part of the planet’s largest intact forest, supports hundreds of plants, mammal, and fish species, is the continent’s main nesting area for nearly 200 migratory birds, and as one of the world’s largest storehouses of carbon, helps keep climate change in check; therefore, be it

Resolved #1 that the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) adopt as policy, that the James Bay Lowlands be closed to any and all industrial extraction and processing, deforestation, and be it further

Resolved #2 that NCWC urge the Government of Canada to work in partnership with Indigenous/ First Nations /Metis Communities and Peoples to protect the James Bay Lowlands from oil and mineral extraction and processing, and from-deforestation.

2021-02 Climate Change and Food Security for Indigenous People in Northern Canada

Whereas #1 Indigenous people in northern Canada experience the highest level of food insecurity in the country; and

Whereas #2 Changes to the climate as seen by rapidly warming temperatures are threatening the availability of traditional food sources in Indigenous communities in northern Canada, and making it difficult to live off the land; and

Whereas #3 many Indigenous people are being forced to supplement their diets with expensive, often unhealthy foods, imported from other parts of Canada, which further exacerbates pre-existing economic and health issues; and

Whereas #4 northern Canada is warming at three times the global rate, and the government has fallen behind in its commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; and

Whereas #5 the Federal Government’s food subsidy program for northern Indigenous peoples has restrictive eligibility criteria, lacks oversight and community consultation, and is totally inadequate to meet the rapidly growing needs of Indigenous people as

they try to adapt to the damaging consequences of the accelerated warming of their northern climate; therefore, be it

Resolved #1 that the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) adopt as policy that Canada's greenhouse gas reduction targets and financial, and technical supports be sufficient to ensure food security for northern Indigenous people; and further be it

Resolved #2 that NCWC urge the Government of Canada to act immediately to meet and to increase its commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to work with Indigenous peoples in northern Canada and provide financial and technical support to ensure that food security programs are accessible, affordable, and adequate.

2021-02 Sexual Assault Forensic Exams - (Rape Kits)

Whereas #1 Sexual assault is a traumatic experience for women and girls physically, emotionally and psychologically, and seeking medical care should be encouraged; and

Whereas #2 DNA evidence from a sexual assault crime can be collected from the person's body, clothes, or other personal belongings; and

Whereas #3 a Sexual Assault Forensic Exam /'rape kit' is a key tool for law enforcement since they can safely collect and preserve DNA evidence of the alleged perpetrator; and

Whereas #4 "rape kits" must be administered by trained medical personnel, but in Canada-delays in administering the rape kits compromises the quality of the evidence collected; and

Whereas #5 in Canada 41 percent of hospitals are not equipped to administer this procedure often necessitating travel to another region; therefore, be it

Resolved #1 that the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) adopt as policy that Sexual Assault Forensic Exams, commonly known as 'rape kits', and that medical personnel are trained to administer this vital tool for law enforcement, and be available in all hospitals and remote clinics in Canada; and further be it

Resolved #2 that the NCWC urge the Government of Canada to introduce legislation in collaboration with the provinces and territories without delay to ensure that Sexual Assault Forensic Exams, commonly known as 'rape kits', and medical personnel be trained to administer this tool vital for law enforcement and be available in all hospitals and remote clinics in Canada; and further be it

Resolved #3 that the NCWC advocate with the Canadian Hospital Association to make Sexual Assault Forensic Exams - 'rape kits', and medical personnel training, a part of Accreditation Canada's requirements in all hospitals including remote clinics in Canada; and further be it

Resolved #4 that the NCWC urge its provincial councils and affiliates to advocate locally to have Sexual Assault Forensic Exams – 'rape kits', and medical personnel to administer them, available in all hospitals and remote clinics in their areas

Updates

2021-01 Update to NCWC 2012-01, Early Childhood Development to Maximize Potential: Promoting Early Childhood Education in Canada

Whereas #1 the National Council of Women of Canada has adopted policy on the welfare of children in 1987 and updated this policy in 1992.1PU and 2012.01PU which called for early childhood development objectives across Canada; and

Whereas #2 in 2020 only Ontario, Nova Scotia, Quebec, and the Northwest Territories have provisions for four-year-old kindergarten for all children; and

Whereas #3 neuroscience research underscores the impact of early experiences and environment on childhood development; and

Whereas #4 Canada ranks lower than many other countries in the OECD where only 54% of our children are enrolled in early childhood education at 5 years, where others average 70%, leaving a significant number of children at all levels of society deprived of the critical learning experiences that are necessary for optimal brain development; and

Whereas #5 the 2020 McCain Foundation report entitled Early Years Study has highlights the importance of four-year-old kindergarten; therefore, be it

Resolved #1 that the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) adopt as policy that all preschool children in Canada can attend comprehensive and integrated programs for Early Learning and Child Care based on the principles of quality, universality and accessibility led by qualified early childhood educators and professional teachers; and further be it

Resolved #2 that the NCWC urge the Government of Canada to lead the provinces and territories by funding the operation and maintenance of developmentally appropriate Early Learning and Childcare programs for Indigenous and Métis children on and off reserves; and further be it

Resolved #3 that the NCWC urge the Provincial Councils of women to advocate for comprehensive and integrated plans for Early Learning and Child Care with salaries commensurate with the training required for qualified early childhood educators.

2021-02 Update – Ending Child Marriage

Whereas #1 Early marriage cuts short childhood, education and reduces autonomy, and is associated with an increase in experiencing violence; and

Whereas #2 in Canada girls and boys are legally still children (minors) until the age of majority, which varies by province or territory, and legally cannot give their own consent to enter a contract to marry or divorce until they reach the age of majority; and

Whereas #3 Canada's Civil Marriage Act describes marriage as "free and enlightened consent of two persons", and specifies a minimum age of 16 years; and

Whereas #4 the provinces and territories govern marriage practice, where exceptions allow for children of 16 and 17 years to be married due to parents' cultural and/or religious practices, or a judge's opinion; and

Whereas #5 an early marriage to an older person leaves the minor susceptible to early widowhood, therefore be it

Resolved #1 that the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) adopt policy to restrict minors from marrying before age 18, with no exceptions; and further be it

Resolved #2 that the NCWC urge the Government of Canada work in tandem with the Provincial governments to amend the legislation to restrict marriage to persons of age 18 years or over, with no exceptions; and further be it

Resolved #3 that the NCWC further urge the Government of Canada, working in tandem with the Provincial governments, refuse to recognize marriages performed outside of Canada of persons currently under the age of 18 years; and emigrating to or residing in Canada; and further be it

Resolved #4 that the NCWC further urge the Government of Canada, working in tandem with the Provincial governments, establish special guidelines and eligibility for widow benefits for the minor widow and her children, and be it further

Resolved #5 that the NCWC urge the Government of Canada, working in tandem with the Provincial governments, ensure that the reunification of families does not include an immigrant spouse, or intended spouse, currently under the age of 18 years; and further be it resolved

Resolved #6 that NCWC urge the Government of Canada to present a resolution to the United Nations through appropriate channels to urge its members to adopt practices to prevent the marriage of children younger than 18 years of age.

Emerging Issues

2021-01 URGENT CHANGES TO HEALTH CARE FOR SENIORS, INCLUDING A SENIORS' LONG-TERM CARE ADVOCATE

Whereas #1 seniors -- whose numbers are currently estimated at 5.9 million people in Canada aged 65 and over -- deserve respect, consideration, and proper supports after a lifetime of contributing to the Canadian society and the fabric of our nation; and

Whereas #2 the COVID-19 pandemic has hit senior citizens in Canada, the hardest. While only 20% of seniors live in long-term care facilities, they account for 80% of the overall deaths in all age groups due to the COVID-19 virus; and

Whereas #3 many of these seniors are in unregulated facilities with little/limited access to licensed nurses, clinical educators, recreational therapists, physiotherapists, social workers, and health care aides; and

Whereas #4 the bulk of the work is left to workers who are primarily female, racialized, paid low wages, and precariously employed; many are part-time with few benefits and without adequate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE); this has led to infections among the workers, putting them and their families at high risk for COVID-19.; and

Whereas #5 many of the long-term facilities for seniors are underfunded, unregulated, understaffed at normal times, and are now overwhelmed by COVID-19, all the additional protocols such as cleaning and screening staff and visitors, lack of PPE and lack of full-time work, forcing them to work at multiple senior residences which has increased the infection rate; therefore, be it

Resolved #1 that the NCWC adopt as policy the need to improve care for seniors, their accommodations, and services considering the challenges which surfaced in the COVID-19 pandemic, and be it further

Resolved #2 that the NCWC urge the Government of Canada to appoint a Commission of Inquiry on Aging in Canada to evaluate the state of care, accommodations, and services to seniors in the aftermath of COVID-19 pandemic; and be it further

Resolved #3 that the NCWC urge federal, provincial, and territorial governments to increase investments in community, home, and residential care to our aging population; and be it further

Resolved #4 that the NCWC urge the Government of Canada to work in collaboration with the provinces on elaboration of a comprehensive strategy to ensure a secure and supportive range of services for senior residents in Canada, including, but not limited to establishing a Commissioner on Aging; and be it further

Resolved #5 that the NCWC urge Provincial and Local Councils of Women, and their respective federates to engage with their provincial, territorial, municipal, and Indigenous governments to:

- a) increase investments in community, home, and residential care to our aging population and
- b) establish a provincial Seniors' Advocate mandated by legislation to:
 - (i) monitor, analyse and make recommendations to the government and to stakeholders;
 - (ii) attend to the quality of care, accommodations and services provided to seniors.

2021-02 SECURITY OF HEALTH CARE WORKERS IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Whereas #1 COVID-19 is a new virus which erupted on the planet in 2019, a virus noted for its characteristic for high transmission and for doing serious harm to various organs, which increases the risk of creating incapacitating long-term health consequences; and

Whereas #2 the COVID-19 pandemic has uncovered challenges and laid bare numerous incidents of lack of protocols or inadequate protocols in various settings resulting in high levels of unnecessary transmission, illness, and deaths, especially in settings where vulnerable residents living with co-morbid health challenges reside in congregate accommodations; and

Whereas #3 many Health Care Workers providing community care services are expected to travel from site to site, some juggling several part-time contracts to provide for themselves and their families, which puts them and their family members as well as their clients at higher risk of contracting COVID-19; and

Whereas #4 administrators of care systems were unprepared for the measures required to keep their staff, residents, and visitors safe such as: access to an adequate supply of appropriate Protective Personal Equipment (PPE), social distancing protocols, separate isolation entrances and floors, tracking protocols, and changes to air circulation and ventilation systems, and

Whereas #5 private for-profit institutions have higher rates of transmission and deaths than non-profit establishments; therefore, be it

Resolved #1 that the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) adopt as policy the need to improve the management of a pandemic in congregate settings through a Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) lens to inform administrators of best practices to protect patients/residents, staff, visitors, and community; and be it further

Resolved #2 that the NCWC urge the Government of Canada to initiate a thorough analysis of the management of the Covid-19 pandemic in congregate settings through a GBA+ lens, to inform administrators of best practices to protect patients/residents, staff, visitors, and community; and be it further

Resolved #3 that researchers and policy makers be urged to identify improvements including more efficient human resources strategies to reduce/limit the travel between residences as well as the number of residents/patients assigned per worker; and by providing health care providers with full-time shifts, competitive wages, and benefits to

reduce staff turnover and to enhance efficiencies and reduce cross-transmission; and be it further

Resolved #4 that the NCWC urge the Provincial and Local Councils of Women and their respective federates encourage their respective governments -- provincial, territorial, local, and Indigenous -- to collaborate in the evaluation of the service delivery policies and protocols in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic in the respective jurisdictions using a GBA+ lens.

2021-03 Women and COVID-19

Whereas #1 all of society has been impacted by COVID-19 socially, economically, psychologically, some communities and socio-economic groups have suffered more negative impacts; and

Whereas #2 women have reportedly suffered greater impact than men because women earn generally 80 cents for every dollar that men earn, which in and of itself is unfair; and

Whereas #3 women often work in precarious employment with few or no benefits, including sick leave -- hence they cannot afford to take time off from work; and

Whereas #4 more women are likely to suffer reduced hours/shifts; are laid off due to the business lockdowns or quit their jobs due to household and child and elder-care responsibilities; and

Whereas #5 women are more likely to provide direct, hands-on services and essential services, whether as clerks, cleaners, teachers, early childcare educators, paramedics, nursing care, and as such are placed at higher risk of exposure to COVID-19 contamination to themselves or to close family members in their household; therefore, be it

Resolved #1 that the NCWC adopt as policy the need to use Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) in determining deficits in current COVID-19 pandemic management regulations and strategies to improve the conditions for women in the workplace and the home, and be it further

Resolved #2 that the NCWC urge the Government of Canada undertake an evaluation of the management and strategies related to the COVID-19 pandemic with a GBA+ perspective with the goal of identifying the deficits that exist and to improve the socio-economic conditions heretofore; and be it further

Resolved #3 that the NCWC urge the Provincial and Local Councils of Women and other federates to approach and inform their respective levels of governments and territories to ensure they apply a GBA+ lens to their COVID-19 management and strategies; and be it further

Resolved #4 that the NCWC urge the Government of Canada to enforce the enacted

legislation to narrow the gap in pay equity within and beyond the federal jurisdiction.