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# CANADA'S GENDER PANDEMIC RESPONSE

Did it measure up?

Katherine Scott

# Canada's gender pandemic response

## Did it measure up?

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CANADA'S FEDERAL RESPONSE TO gendered impacts of the pandemic was on par with other high-income countries. Roughly 30 per cent of programs introduced between March 2020 and June 2021 were "gender-sensitive" defined as measures that addressed, in full or in part, gendered risks and challenges associated with the pandemic including increased violence, low income and precarity, and heightened care demands.

But its particular policy mix stands out with a greater emphasis on measures that supported women's economic security needs and unpaid care compared to other peer countries. In total, gender-sensitive programs represented approximately \$42.6 billion (or 11.6 per cent) of total federal pandemic expenditures.

Roughly 30 per cent of pandemic programming introduced by Canada's 10 provincial governments also addressed the gendered impact of the pandemic, but their financial contribution was considerably smaller. Net provincial spending (excluding federal transfers) totalled \$13.6 billion—one-quarter of combined federal and provincial spending (\$57.5 billion)—on gender-sensitive programs.

The scale and strength of the different provincial policy responses varied widely. Provinces, on average, spent \$357 per person on gender-sensitive measures compared to \$1,155 per person by the federal government. But eight of the 10 provinces fell below this benchmark; six of the 10 provinces delivered very weak responses, spending less than \$100 per capita on gender-sensitive measures.

The level of net provincial spending ranged from a very low \$50 per capita in Alberta to \$844 per capita in British Columbia, which was more than twice the provincial average.

Level of income played a key role shaping and constraining gender-sensitive responses to the pandemic. In Canada, it was the federal government that stepped forward to finance the bulk of Canada's pandemic response.

But Alberta, the wealthiest province in Canada, spent only 1.2 per cent of its GDP on its pandemic response and a scant 0.1 per cent on gender-sensitive programming. Likewise, Ontario and Saskatchewan delivered anemic pandemic responses given the scale of the challenge and the resources at their disposal.

Had it not been for federal transfers tied to specific goals, such as the provision of child care or services for vulnerable populations, the number of provincial programs qualifying as gender-sensitive would have been much smaller, indeed potentially non-existent.

Such as it was, there were significant policy gaps that neither provincial nor federal programming addressed. The COVID-19 crisis has definitively illustrated what's possible with strong public leadership. The imperative now is to apply the lessons of COVID-19 in service of a more sustainable, resilient and gender-just future, ensuring that those who bore the brunt of the pandemic are not again left behind.

# INTRODUCTION

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS taken a huge toll on women.<sup>1</sup> Millions of women were working in public-facing jobs that were most affected by necessary public health closures. Millions more laboured on the front lines, sustaining our communities while juggling an enormous increase in unpaid labour and care at home. Significant gaps in our market-oriented care infrastructure and the failure of governments to take effective action further amplified the pandemic's impacts—and resulting stresses—on women and marginalized communities, including increased violence, greater isolation, ill health and learning loss, heightened economic insecurity, and loss of access to vital community supports.<sup>2</sup>

Canada's experience has not been unique. Feminist researchers, community advocates and progressive movements from around the world have documented the myriad of ways in which the crisis has impacted women's lives and further undermined the position of marginalized communities that are already affected by institutionalized poverty, racism, ableism and other forms of discrimination. They have also documented the ways in which established systems of support—from health care to employment standards to income security—failed to support those who bore the brunt of the pandemic.

At the beginning of the pandemic, all countries took steps to respond to the health crisis and mitigate the ensuing economic and societal shocks. These efforts included measures to lessen the negative impacts of the pandemic on individuals, businesses and community services. Yet, as UN Women has documented, very few put in place a “holistic gender response”<sup>3</sup> to the unfolding crisis and the erosion of women's rights and well-being. Fewer still considered the unique position or experiences of marginalized women or gender-diverse people in their recovery programs.

This report takes stock of Canada's response to the pandemic—covering the period from March 2020 to June 2021. Guided by the UNDP-UN Women's Global Gender Response Tracker,<sup>4</sup> it examines whether published plans incorporated a gender-inclusive lens and the type and mix of gender-sensitive pandemic programming introduced. What kind of measures did federal and provincial governments put in place to mitigate the negative impacts of the pandemic on women? How did these efforts compare—to each other and to other peer countries? What factors potentially account for the similarities and differences between different jurisdictions? The last part of the report provides an overview of the findings and presents six policy take-aways for moving a gender-just recovery forward.

Canada provides an important case study because it has been held up as a global leader in the pursuit of gender equality, one of the comparatively few countries that has actively pursued gender mainstreaming through the introduction of gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) in federal policy processes, including gender budgeting legislation in 2018, and investment in disaggregated data collection. However, as evidence gathered for this report shows, these actions, while necessary, were not enough to deliver on the promise of gender-justice—certainly not in a country where the response to the pandemic hinged on subnational levels of government, many of which were wholly silent on the pandemic's gendered impacts. Our findings are consistent with the critique developed by feminist scholars<sup>5</sup> about the limits of GBA+, and gender mainstreaming more broadly, as gender-transformative policy within the context of a neoliberal policy paradigm that prioritizes "participation in the formal economy, technical 'solutions,' and narrow definitions of gender."<sup>6</sup>

There are clear limitations to an analysis that focuses on the number and stated objectives of pandemic programs captured from a review of budget documents and government announcements on the public record. There will inevitably be gaps due to a lack of available information, underreporting or overreporting of measures, or a lack of data altogether—especially about the intersectional dimensions of existing measures.<sup>7</sup> This is true of most policy trackers, including the Global Gender Response Tracker used in this analysis. Moreover, a bird's eye policy analysis of this type further compounds this problem by glossing over the lived experiences of women facing overlapping forms of discrimination, focusing on the policies themselves and not their individual or community-level impacts.<sup>8</sup> It does not fully address critical differences between women by Indigenous status, age, class, race, or

disability status that are vital to our understanding of women's inequality and systemic disparities, as well as the workings of the state itself as a source of oppression.<sup>9</sup> The primary focus on women also tends to obscure consideration of gender-diverse people and their experiences.

Evidence on pandemic impacts is now slowly emerging, but much remains to be done. What a tool like the Global Gender Response Tracker and our comparative analysis can offer, however, is insight into common themes, significant gaps, and potential policy drivers important to the discussion of policy lessons and missteps, and thoughts about how to leverage pandemic innovation to much greater effect.

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*Canada's gender pandemic response: Did it measure up?* is part of a larger project called Beyond Recovery, which is working to support and advance a gender-just recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The project's goals are to document and analyze women's experiences, with a particular focus on those of marginalized women in hard-hit sectors, and to provide evidence-based policy proposals to ensure those who are most impacted in this pandemic are front and centre in Canada's post-pandemic future. Please find the Beyond Recovery's *Bumpy Ride Labour Market Updates* at the CCPA's [www.monitormag.ca](http://www.monitormag.ca). Additional research and sector case studies will be published in 2024 and posted on the forthcoming Beyond Recovery website.

# EXAMINING CANADA'S GENDER PANDEMIC RESPONSE

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## Feminist recovery plans

As the scope and scale of pandemic impacts emerged, feminist organizations around the world led the call for a feminist recovery that would both respond to immediate needs and advance structural reform, ensuring a gender-just recovery for everyone.

Here in Canada, B.C.-based Feminists Deliver was one of the first groups to release a feminist recovery plan in July 2020.<sup>10</sup> Other groups included the YWCA Canada, in collaboration with the Institute for Gender and the Economy at the University of Toronto,<sup>11</sup> Oxfam Canada,<sup>12</sup> West Coast LEAF,<sup>13</sup> and the City for All Women Initiative in Ottawa<sup>14</sup>—all of whom presented intersectional plans for an inclusive recovery. Some initiatives focused on the unique situation of particular groups. The Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA) and Dr. Pamela Palmater worked together to document the experiences of Indigenous women and the failure of the Canadian state to uphold Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination in their response to the pandemic.<sup>15</sup>

These, and other feminist recovery plans, stressed the imperative of centring the perspectives and needs of the most marginalized at the



heart of the policy process and facilitating people's active participation in decision-making. As the Hawai'i State Commission on the Status of Women's plan, *Building Bridges, Not Walking on Backs*, stated, "[t]he road to economic recovery should not be across women's backs." Rather, a recovery plan must address the issues of exclusion head on and set the stage for deep cultural change. "These problems can be overcome, but we must first admit that they exist. When those providing aid are held to task by the community to address existing power relations, reaching everyone according to their need is perfectly possible."<sup>16</sup>

The call for a feminist recovery was also taken up within the academic community<sup>17</sup> and among international agencies, such as UN Women,<sup>18</sup> ILO,<sup>19</sup> OECD,<sup>20</sup> and the European Parliament.<sup>21</sup> Feminist leaders and researchers in these organizations quickly mobilized to both amplify community voices and provide guidance for developing, tracking and evaluating the impact/efficacy of gender-inclusive pandemic policy and tackling associated policy gaps and systemic barriers confronting marginalized communities.<sup>22</sup>

This research collectively stressed the importance of continued monitoring of the pandemic's differentiated impacts on women, men and gender-diverse people, supported by the collection of disaggregated data and the application of a truly intersectional lens to ensure all policy is informed by the best available evidence.<sup>23</sup> It also argued for a combination of "proactive and targeted" measures to address specific challenges faced by different women (e.g., gender-based violence, lack of supports for caregiving) as well as concrete strategies to better integrate "gender-inclusive considerations" into broader policy-making processes and recovery strategies.<sup>24</sup>

How did governments respond to these challenges? What was the experience in Canada?

An analysis of federal and provincial pandemic announcements and related government budgets predictably reveals large variation with respect to the degree to which different governments 1) took into account the disproportionate impact of the crisis on marginalized people, and 2) pursued gender-sensitive programming.

The federal government, for its part, clearly acknowledged of the gendered character of the COVID-19 crisis in its policy statements. It was one of a small group of countries, as reported by the OECD, that explicitly undertook gender impact assessments in the design and delivery of its pandemic and recovery response.<sup>25</sup> It applied a gender lens to its pandemic response and recovery efforts—as stressed by the finance minister and evidenced by the establishment of a Women and

the Economy Task Force,<sup>26</sup> the completion of Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) analyses<sup>27</sup> of main government policies, including its *Fall 2020 Economic Statement* and its 2021 budget,<sup>28,29</sup> and a historic investment for the development of a Canada-wide early learning and child care system.<sup>30</sup> In February 2021, it established a Feminist Response and Recovery Fund in support of community organizations and researchers working to tackle systemic barriers facing marginalized or underrepresented women.<sup>31</sup> These efforts were supported by Statistics Canada, which had been tasked with developing and producing disaggregated data for the purposes of gender budgeting and reporting on Canada's Sustainable Development Goals, housed in a newly created Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Statistics portal.<sup>32</sup> Under these initiatives, Statistics Canada is expanding the sources of information available on Indigenous Peoples, racialized communities, people with disabilities and other marginalized groups.

The federal government also took steps to ensure women's representation in decision-making bodies that were overseeing the response to the pandemic. Of the six task forces that were established to manage the public health crisis, including the COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force and the Cabinet Committee on the Federal Response to the Coronavirus Disease, over half of all members were women (54%), considerably above the global benchmark (24%). Four of the six committees had male/female co-leads (there were no female-only leads).<sup>33</sup> Research has shown the importance of including diverse voices of all kinds in decision-making, to bring different lived experiences to the table and different leadership styles and methods of work.<sup>34</sup> This proved true in response to the pandemic itself: Several women-led countries quickly emerged as the most successful at containing the spread of the coronavirus.<sup>35</sup>

The application of a gendered lens to recovery efforts was considerably more varied among the provinces that coordinated the community-level service response to the pandemic and recovery.

Quebec was the only province to publish a *Plan d'action pour contrer les impacts sur les femmes en context de pandémie* in advance of its 2021 budget (see Box 1).<sup>36</sup> Another three provinces formally undertook a GBA+ review of their proposed recovery plans (New Brunswick, British Columbia and Newfoundland and Labrador<sup>37</sup>), one indicated their intent to do so (Prince Edward Island), while the rest made no mention of the need for such an analysis in their public documentation and announcements—including Ontario, Nova Scotia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta.<sup>38</sup>

Looking at the 10 provincial 2021 budgets, the discussion of the impact of the pandemic on women or other marginalized groups varied (see Table 1). A count of the use of the word “women” or “gender” ranged from no mentions at all in Saskatchewan and Prince Edward Island to 83 mentions of the word “femmes” in Quebec’s 2021 budget and 215 in its gender recovery plan. The considerably longer federal 2021 budget mentions “women” 669 times and the word “gender” 757 times. This is a simple but telling metric: the differential impact of the pandemic was not a theme, much less a funding or policy priority, in many provinces.

There were two other related policy initiatives of note. In Budget 2021, the Ontario government struck a Task Force on Women and the Economy to address “the unique and disproportionate economic barriers women face, particularly in an economy that will look different after COVID-19.”<sup>39</sup> Comprised largely of representatives of the business community, the task force hosted a series of roundtable discussions with stakeholders in the summer of 2021, touching on entrepreneurship, women’s underrepresentation in STEM fields, and supports to assist with entering or re-entering the workforce. Recommendations were prepared for the Ontario minister of finance and the associate minister of children and women’s issues. No public summary or analysis was released, nor was there any indication that the exercise had a meaningful impact on Ontario’s recovery programming. (The federal Task Force on Women and the Economy was also quietly disbanded a year after its announcement).

The Alberta government commissioned a study in spring 2021 from the Premier’s Council on Charities and Civil Society to provide advice on how civil society organizations (CSOs) could “help address challenges facing women in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.” Its report was released in April 2022.<sup>40</sup> However, the government did not release its own plan or strategy as to what it might or could do likewise to “help address challenges facing women in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.” There has been no formal response to the premier’s council report. The 2020 *Alberta Recovery Plan*<sup>41</sup> was roundly criticized for its singular focus on male-dominated industries and corporate tax cuts as well as its neglect of hard-hit female majority sectors, including care.<sup>42</sup>

These differences in the application of a gender lens across Canadian jurisdictions is consistent with experiences across OECD countries. A 2020 survey of member countries found that efforts to apply a gender lens to “emergency and exit responses” were “uneven.” Only 11 of the 26 countries surveyed (less than half) reported that they explicitly used assessments of the different impacts of policies on men and women to inform the design and/or delivery of pandemic policy responses and

**Table 1 Reference to “women” and “gender” in federal and provincial 2021 budgets**

	Budget documents	Mentions of “women” / “gender”
Federal	Budget 2021: A Recovery Plan for Jobs, Growth, and Resilience	669 women / 757 gender
Quebec	Plan budgétaire 2021-22	83 femmes
	Plan d'action pour contrer les impacts sur les femmes en contexte de pandémie	215 femmes
Ontario	2021 Ontario Budget—Ontario's Action Plan: Protecting People's Health and Our Economy	27 women / 1 gender
British Columbia	Budget 2021: A Stronger BC, for Everyone	19 women / 4 gender
New Brunswick	2021-22 Budget: Reinventing New Brunswick Together	0 women / 0 gender
New Brunswick	Gender Impact Statement	18 women / 28 gender
Newfoundland and Labrador	Newfoundland and Labrador: Budget 2021 (Highlights)	8 women / 0 gender
Manitoba	Budget 2021: Protecting Manitobans Advancing Manitoba	8 women / 0 gender
Nova Scotia	Nova Scotia Budget 2021-22	2 women / 0 gender
Alberta	2021-22 Budget (Fiscal plan 2021-24)	19* women / 1 gender
Prince Edward Island	2021-22 Provincial Budget (Highlights)	0 women / 0 gender
Saskatchewan	Budget 2021	0 women / 0 gender

\* The word “women” appears mainly in the title of the Ministry of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women, listed in revenue and expenditure tables

measures.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, the inclusion of gender equality in the European Union’s financial program to support pandemic recovery in EU countries, *Recovery and Resiliency Facility* (RRF), fell far short of expectations. Despite policy guidance and a performance framework, most plans submitted for RRF funding failed to include any “dedicated reforms or investments explicitly addressing gender-related challenges or indicating women as specific beneficiaries.”<sup>44</sup> The narrow focus of priority policy areas in the RRF program itself (e.g., green economy; digital economy), as well as the measures selected to monitor pandemic impacts on women, also worked to undermine the program’s potential to advance gender equality.<sup>45</sup>

The governments that were most successful in applying a gender lens to their pandemic responses were those able to rely on well-established “gender mainstreaming” structures and processes.<sup>46</sup> In particular, the OECD noted the pivotal role played by well-resourced central gender equality agencies and the inclusion of women in senior decision-making roles to help “push gender perspectives and the needs of women and girls to the forefront.”<sup>47</sup> By contrast, poorly resourced, marginalized gender equality agencies and the absence of readily available disaggregated data were identified as key challenges by a majority of OECD respondents in their use of gender impact assessment tools as part of government pandemic planning. One in five countries (22%) stated the gender issues were simply not a priority for their governments.<sup>48</sup>

There is an ongoing debate with respect to the usefulness of “gender mainstreaming” initiatives or gender budgeting activism as strategies for transformative change, both of which walk a fine line between contesting and reinforcing established western economic epistemologies and socio-economic disparities.<sup>49</sup> The experience of the pandemic—here in Canada and elsewhere—suggests that existing feminist policy architecture helped to shine a light on the gendered impacts of the pandemic through the application of GBA+ in the budget process or the publication of gender action plans. Certainly, access to disaggregated intersectional data was critical as governments and public health agencies scrambled to track real-time impacts.<sup>50</sup> But even well-resourced feminist policy agencies and processes were not enough to guarantee a comprehensive, intersectional response of the type that leading feminist organizations, researchers and community advocates were calling for—or, most importantly, to produce the desired results and protections for marginalized women, as the Canadian case study shows.

### **Responding to the crisis: Quebec’s action plan**

Quebec was the only government in Canada to release a separate action plan. Prepared by the Secrétariat à la condition féminine and released in March 2021, it allocated \$23.1 million in support of five overarching objectives and 24 related action strategies and committed the government to raising awareness about the gendered impacts of the pandemic across government and with the general public.<sup>51</sup> The plan placed particular emphasis on supporting female workers and business owners cope with pandemic-related challenges, targeting women’s employability in male-dominated fields such as construction and STEM, and modestly expanding community supports for vulnerable women (e.g., those fleeing violence or experiencing heightened isolation and distress). These initiatives were in addition to several other larger pandemic investments in essential workers, emergency child care and hard-hit sectors like tourism—discussed in further detail below.

Feminist groups acknowledged the importance of the plan, given the severity of the pandemic and the considerable challenges that marginalized women were facing, but called out its narrow focus: “La portée de ce plan nous apparaît bien faible face à l’urgence d’agir. Il manque de mordant, puisque ses actions visent essentiellement à sensibiliser. Les mesures structurantes brillent par leur absence; le

gouvernement mise plutôt sur la transformation des comportements individuels.”<sup>52</sup> While Quebec’s investments in family policy—notably its low-cost child care network—provided an effective bulwark against the considerable economic shock of the pandemic, its pandemic policy announcements did not appear to be inspired by concerns about gender equality but, rather, the desire to stabilize labour markets and ease the burden for families now juggling employment loss and increased care responsibilities.<sup>53</sup> The government was not averse to subsidizing lower quality commercial child care centres or pursuing temporary foreign workers to fill the gaps in long-term care facilities and hospitals, in keeping with its nationalist economic policy,<sup>54</sup> effectively undercutting the wages and working conditions of care workers in these workplaces.

Eve-Lyne Couturier and Julia Posca, in their study of the gendered impacts of the pandemic in Quebec, highlight the disconnect that exists between the feminist policy capacity of the Quebec government and its policy output and impact, particularly for marginalized women.<sup>55</sup> “Actuellement, la question des inégalités hommes-femmes est dans l’angle mort du gouvernement Legault. Le Secrétariat à l’indépendance et l’expertise pour évaluer si le plan de relance défavorise les femmes et identifier les moyens pour y remédier. Il est temps que le gouvernement se dote d’indicateurs pour valider les impacts de ses décisions sur l’égalité entre les femmes et les hommes.”<sup>56</sup> Even in jurisdictions with strong feminist policy capacity, transformative change is not guaranteed.

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## Feminist recovery programs

Policy statements are important—they signal government priorities. The question is: Did governments follow through and deliver on their early pandemic policy statements? A good deal of the commentary and analysis, to date, has focused on policy prescriptions. We are now in a better position to empirically assess the outcomes of pandemic policies. Were the differences evident in the application of an equity or gender lens to policy also evident in proposed programming? How did the type and scale of gender-sensitive pandemic responses vary across the country? What do the similarities and differences in response tell us about policy drivers for change?



The analysis below explores Canadian pandemic programming, using the UNDP-UN Women’s Global Gender Response Tracker (GGRT) as inspiration and as a guide,<sup>57</sup> and a dataset compiled by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives of the 920 policy and programs introduced by federal and provincial governments between March 2020 and June 2021.<sup>58</sup> Specifically, it examines the number and type of gender-sensitive (GS) measures introduced—measures that were directed toward addressing in whole or in part gendered risks and challenges caused by the COVID-19 crisis, including violence against women and girls, women’s economic security, and unpaid care work<sup>59</sup> (see Appendix 1: Methodology).

Predictably, the jurisdictions that proactively applied a gender and intersectional lens to their pandemic responses and recovery plans had comparatively stronger gendered responses to the pandemic as measured by the number of gender-sensitive programs that were introduced, and the dollars attached to those programs. But there were important differences in the policy mix and policy drivers at play that speak to the challenges that confound feminist policy advocacy in Canada. Below, we look at the federal and provincial responses in turn, highlighting differences and similarities within Canada and between Canada and its country peers.

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## The federal pandemic response

Through the first waves of the pandemic, the federal government introduced approximately 150 different measures, covering health, income security, loan guarantees for private business, measures to sustain the liquidity of financial markets, and more. The provinces and territories, discussed below, concentrated on coordinating the immense health systems response to the crisis and, in some instances, providing targeted income supports to households, businesses and non-profits, boosting service funding for vulnerable communities (e.g., homeless shelters), providing supports to Indigenous communities and municipalities, and extending protections for renters, workers and selected business sectors.

Together, these programs played a vital role in supporting individuals and households in the face of mass unemployment and the sizable pre-existing gaps in Canada’s health and social safety net. They also shored up employment and sustained economic activity in communities across the country throughout the crisis. Canada stands out from other peer countries in the scale and focus of its COVID-19 response, providing

nearly 19 per cent of GDP in total support to keep Canadians and businesses afloat<sup>60</sup> and directing an above-average share of funding to households.<sup>61</sup> The lion's share of direct spending—\$366 billion of \$423 billion, or 86 per cent—came from the federal government.<sup>62</sup>

Looking at measures that directly impacted households, excluding investments in health, physical infrastructure/housing programs and federal government operations (consistent with the Global Gender Response Tracker methodology), 15 of 79 federal programs (19%) met the criteria for being gender-sensitive—including three programs to address the increase in violence against women and girls (Indigenous and non-Indigenous), 11 programs that funded care services such as long-term care and/or provided financial assistance to households undertaking COVID-19 related care (e.g., Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit), and additional funding for the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy.

Another nine programs can also be considered gender-sensitive as they directed significant benefit to women and other marginalized groups. These included two labour market programs that provided training dollars to marginalized groups and those in sectors hardest hit by the pandemic, such as marginalized and racialized women, Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities and recent newcomers to Canada.<sup>63</sup> Funding for charities and non-profits serving vulnerable people was made available, supporting hundreds of thousands of women and their families and sustaining the work of these organizations and their female-majority workforces,<sup>64</sup> which experienced a large drop in their revenues and operational challenges throughout this period.<sup>65</sup> Women also directly benefited from the one-off transfer payments to seniors, people with disabilities, families with children, and low-income residents—making up the majority of beneficiaries of these respective groups<sup>66</sup> (see Appendix 2 for a list of gender-sensitive federal programs).

Taking these nine programs into account, 24 gender-sensitive programs<sup>67</sup> were introduced out of the 79 federal programs providing direct support to households and businesses, that is: 30.4 per cent—representing \$42.6 billion (approximately 12%) of total federal pandemic expenditures.<sup>68,69</sup> This figure is in line with the UNDP-UN Women global average (32% of the 226 countries surveyed) and the scores of other high-income countries such as the United States (29%) but eight percentage points below top-performing countries Iceland and the Netherlands (both at 38%).

While the size of Canada's gender-sensitive response (as measured by the number of programs introduced) was similar to that of many other countries, its particular pandemic policy mix stands out. Violence against



**Table 2 Gender-sensitive measures by type**

Percentage distribution

	Global total	High income countries	Canada	Provincial average
Address unpaid care	14%	28%	46%	39%
Address women's economic security	33%	15%	42%	59%
Address violence against women	53%	56%	13%	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Note** Under the Global Gender Response Tracker typology, "addressing unpaid care" includes programs grouped under social protection (caregiving benefits and services) and labour market measures and "addressing women's economic security" includes measures grouped under social protection (income security), labour market measures and business supports. See Appendix 1: Methodology.

**Source** UN Women and UNDP: Global Gender Response Tracker. Data for Canada revised and 6 provincial programs removed. Based on program inventory compiled by David Macdonald (2021), Still picking up the tab: Federal and provincial government COVID-19 spending, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

women (VAW) was the primary focus of gender-sensitive pandemic programming in most regions of the world, including among high-income countries.<sup>70</sup> Not so in Canada, where there was a much greater emphasis on addressing women's economic security and unpaid care needs. Canada's comparatively smaller emphasis on VAW does not so much reflect a lack of attention on gender-based violence per se, but the broader range of measures introduced here.

Forty-two per cent of the gender-sensitive measures introduced by the federal government addressed women's economic security needs, including income assistance, as well as supports for emergency community services and provincial and territorial job training efforts in hard-hit sectors of the economy, which was more than twice the share of other high-income countries (15%) (see Table 2). In total, \$16.1 billion (38% of federal gender-sensitive spending) was spent on programs that helped women and other marginalized communities cope with the economic fallout of the pandemic.

Of these programs, emergency benefits and targeted one-time payments to individuals and families had the largest price tag (\$13.2 billion) and the greatest immediate impact in terms of reach. Recent data from the 2021 census found that nearly three-quarters (74.8%) of women received income from one or more relief programs, while 61.6 per cent of men did so.<sup>71</sup> In particular, the one-time payments to seniors, low-income households, people with disabilities and, notably, families with children, directed a large share of their support to women. Likewise, changes to the eligibility rules for Employment Insurance (EI) increased the number of female workers covered. In January 2021, to pick one month, nearly half (48.3%) of the 1.5 million workers receiving regular EI benefits were women, five times the number in January 2020 and an increase

of 12 percentage points in their share of recipients over this time.<sup>72</sup> This increase reflected both the scale of the economic crisis and the impact of EI rules changes to ensure greater coverage.

Another 46 per cent of federal gender-sensitive measures targeted care needs, more than three times the global average (14%) and one-and-a-half times the average among high-income countries (28%). This included pandemic-related family leave provisions, cash benefits to help compensate parents for reduced working hours or lost earnings due to care responsibilities, and funds to expand and strengthen care services. In total, the federal government allocated \$26.4 billion to address care needs, two-thirds of which (\$17.8 billion) was directed to women and families via Canada Emergency Response Benefit (March 15–September 26, 2020), the Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit (available after September 27, 2020) and expanded access to EI special benefits.<sup>73</sup>

The government also channelled \$8.6 billion to bolster care services through several federal-provincial-territorial agreements, including targeted funding to address critical labour shortages and catastrophic service failures in long-term care<sup>74</sup> and to stabilize service delivery in the child care sector.<sup>75</sup> In addition, an Essential Workers Support Fund was created to boost the incomes of largely female, racialized, low-wage staff working on the frontlines of the pandemic. And in the 2021 budget, the government announced its intention to finance the creation of “a high-quality, affordable and accessible early learning and child care system across Canada” with a historically significant investment of \$30 billion over five years<sup>76</sup>—part of a plan, according to Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland, for “making life more affordable for young families, creating jobs, increasing women’s participation in the workforce and giving every child the best possible start in life—no matter where they live.”<sup>77</sup>

Finally, 12.5 per cent of gender-sensitive measures addressed violence against women (VAW), including programs for Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, totally \$131 million (or 0.3% of federal gender-sensitive spending) in our period of study. Emergency funds were vital to GBV organizations responding to the rise in the incidence and severity of violence associated with the pandemic—experienced most acutely by Indigenous women, women with disabilities, rural women and newcomers. Many organizations and shelters would not have been able to keep their doors open or reorient their programming without emergency aid.<sup>78</sup> Additional funds were announced in the 2021 and 2022 budgets in support new gender-based violence (GBV) programming over five years to help “accelerate” work on a National Action Plan against Gender-Based Violence and in response to the Calls for Justice presented

in the 2019 *Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*.<sup>79,80</sup>

Federally funded VAW programs (and a few provincially funded initiatives, as we see below), made up a much smaller share of pandemic programming in Canada compared to other countries. One hundred and sixty-three of the 226 countries reviewed in the Global Gender Response Tracker introduced a total of 856 VAW measures—making up over half (53%) of all gender-sensitive programming documented globally. Feminist movements and organizations quickly raised the alarm about the growing incidence of violence against women, harnessing established networks to demand action.<sup>81</sup>

Federal investments in GBV programs made a difference. At the same time, there were significant gaps in the response, reflecting both a lack in preparedness and coordination, as well as the fragile state of pre-existing services. The pandemic required a holistic, coordinated, community-driven response to protect women and gender-diverse people against a predictable rise in violence—as documented time and again in emergency situations.<sup>82</sup> In Canada, a momentary reduction in non-intimate partner violence against women in 2020 was offset by the concurrent rise in intimate partner violence. Indeed, overall levels of violence against women surged again in 2021, surpassing 2019 levels.<sup>83</sup> Marginalized women remain at greatest risk of violence, especially Indigenous women, women with disabilities and gender-diverse individuals.<sup>84</sup> A comprehensive, cross-jurisdictional, and intersectional plan is needed to permanently reverse rising levels of violence and to ensure that women can live free from violence, wherever they live. Communities are still waiting such a plan.<sup>85</sup>

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## Provincial governments

Most pandemic assessments have tended to understandably focus on the actions of the federal government, which shouldered the largest share of pandemic costs. But to fully understand and assess the scale and scope of Canada's efforts, it is also essential to look at the interventions of subnational governments. Over our 2020–21 study period, Canada's 10 provincial governments introduced over 700 programs across a range of policy areas, from health to employment standards. In many instances, they participated in federal-provincial cost-sharing agreements, and in others, they created their own programs. In total, net provincial

contributions represented 14 per cent (\$57.5 billion) of total direct pandemic expenditures (\$423 billion) over three fiscal years.<sup>86</sup>

For our analysis, we look at a subset of 465 provincial programs extending direct support to individuals and businesses, again following the Global Gender Response Tracker methodology that excludes expenditures for vaccinations and health services, as well as infrastructure, housing and government operations. We have adopted a broad approach for the designation of gender-sensitive programs, including all long-term care programs and measures explicitly targeted to marginalized communities. We have also included all programming designed to bolster the wages and working conditions of care workers.

In total, 145 provincial measures were identified as gender-sensitive, representing 31.2 per cent of all pandemic initiatives, roughly the same share of GS programming posted by federal government (see Appendix 3 for a list of gender-sensitive provincial measures). Net provincial spending (excluding federal transfers) totalled \$13.6 billion—one-quarter of combined federal and provincial spending (\$57.5 billion)—on gender-sensitive programs.<sup>87</sup> The scale and strength of the different provincial gender-sensitive policy responses, however, widely varied.

As noted earlier, Quebec, distantly trailed by Ontario, British Columbia and New Brunswick, had the largest number of mentions of “gender” in their budget documentation and recovery plans. Quebec also introduced the largest number of gender-sensitive measures, at 30, followed by British Columbia (28), and Ontario (26). Both Nova Scotia and Manitoba introduced 11 GS programs. The remaining five provinces posted the weakest gender responses, with less than 10 measures each, the majority of which were funded through three key federal-provincial agreements to boost the wages of essential workers and to enhance child care and long-term care services.

Looking at province-specific measure density, New Brunswick reported the largest share of gender-sensitive measures, at 47 per cent, followed by Nova Scotia, Quebec and British Columbia (at 37%, 36% and 35%, respectively). Alberta ranked the lowest, at 14 per cent—two times less than the provincial benchmark. In looking at measure density, it is important to note that the total number of programs introduced ranged between a high of about 150 programs in Ontario, followed closely by British Columbia and Quebec, to less than 40 programs in New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador and Saskatchewan. The gender-sensitivity of the pandemic response needs to be understood in relation to the scale of the overall response itself.

**Table 3 Gender-sensitive pandemic spending by level of government**

	# of gender-sensitive (GS) programs	GS programs as % of total programs*	Federal and provincial GS spending per capita	Net provincial GS spending per capita	Net provincial GS spending as % of total GS spending*
Newfoundland and Labrador	7	25.9%	\$1,203	\$77	6.4%
Prince Edward Island	9	28.1%	\$1,197	\$74	6.2%
Nova Scotia	11	36.7%	\$1,182	\$77	6.5%
New Brunswick	8	47.1%	\$1,109	\$81	7.3%
Quebec	30	35.7%	\$1,574	\$425	27.0%
Ontario	26	29.5%	\$1,520	\$317	22.0%
Manitoba	11	30.6%	\$1,465	\$326	22.3%
Saskatchewan	9	33.3%	\$1,161	\$55	4.7%
Alberta	6	13.6%	\$1,244	\$50	4.0%
British Columbia	28	35.0%	\$1,966	\$844	42.9%
<b>Provincial average</b>		<b>31.2%</b>		<b>\$357</b>	<b>23.6%</b>
<b>Federal comparator</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>30.2%</b>		<b>\$1,155</b>	<b>76.4%**</b>

\* Estimates exclude investments in health, physical infrastructure/housing programs and federal government operations. Very small programs have been grouped. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. See Appendix 1 for a discussion of the methodology and Appendix 3 for a list of gender-sensitive pandemic measures by province.

\*\* Federal share of total GS spending including transfers to provinces.

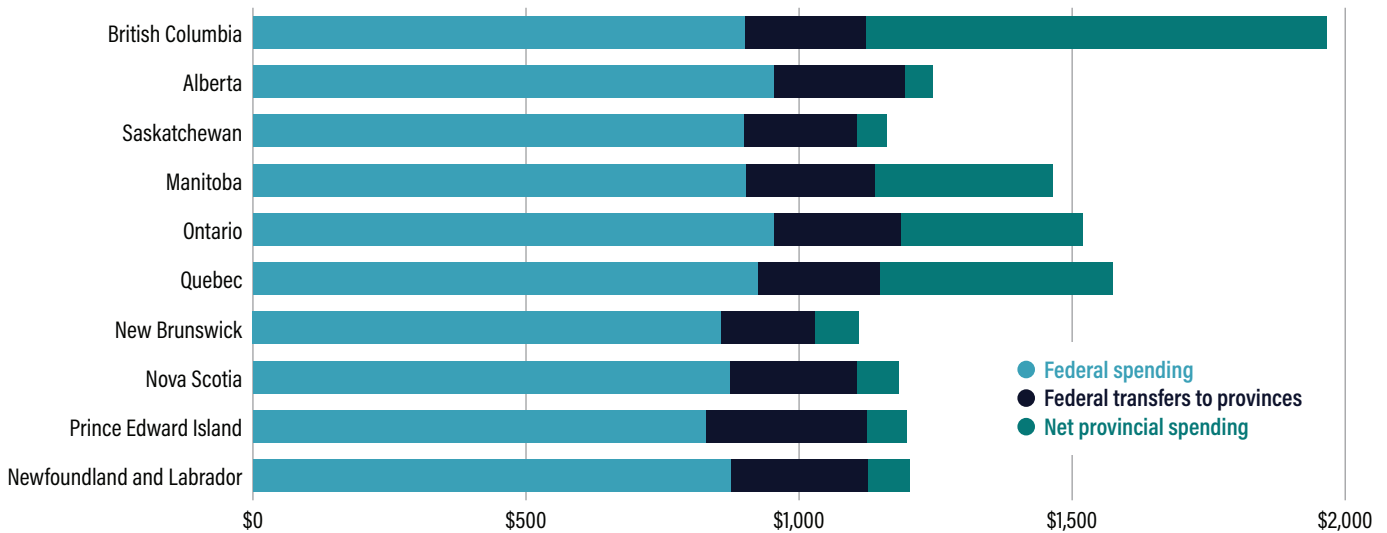
Source Program inventory and data analysis by David Macdonald, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

As Table 3 shows, the number of programs did not always align with the scale of resourcing. Provinces, on average, spent \$357 per person on gender-sensitive measures compared to \$1,155 per person by the federal government. Eight of the 10 provinces, however, fell below this benchmark. Indeed, six of the 10 provinces delivered a very weak response. The level of net provincial spending devoted to gender-sensitive programs ranged from a very low \$50 per capita in Alberta to a high of \$844 per capita in British Columbia, which was more than twice the provincial average.

The expenditure data reveal three groups of provinces: low-spending provinces, including the Atlantic region and Saskatchewan and Alberta; a middle group, including Quebec, Manitoba and Ontario; and British Columbia. British Columbia made the most significant investment in gender-sensitive programs, contributing 43 per cent of all GS funds spent in the province, followed by Quebec, at 27 per cent, and Manitoba and Ontario, both at 22 per cent. Gender-sensitive programs represented a much smaller fraction of net provincial pandemic spending in all of the lowest spending provinces, as shown in Figure 1. These figures provide an important reality check. The number and type of programming, as discussed below, is important to assessing the character and potential impact of gender-sensitive programming. But budgets are critical too.

## Figure 1 Gender-sensitive pandemic response by funding source

\$ per capita, March 2020–June 2021



Source Program inventory and data analysis by David Macdonald, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

These differences speak to the significant variation and limitations in Canada’s gendered pandemic response.

As a group, provinces were much more likely than the federal government and other high-income countries to invest in economic security measures than in programs that addressed unpaid care needs or gender-based violence. An average of 59 per cent of provincial GS programs targeted economic security needs, in the form of income assistance (e.g., B.C.’s Emergency Response Benefit for Workers, Temporary Rental Supplement), labour market programs (e.g., Quebec’s Programme actions concertées pour le maintien en emploi) or supports for business and non-profit organizations in hard-hit sectors (e.g., Ontario’s Social Services Relief Fund). This was a larger proportion than the federal government’s 42 per cent investment and it was significantly larger than the average for high-income countries (15%).

Three provinces, however, accounted for over 60 per cent of the 85 gender-sensitive economic security measures introduced, led by British Columbia (20 measures), Quebec (17 measures) and Ontario (15 measures). And of these three, British Columbia and Quebec stand out for introducing several income security measures targeting low-income individuals and renters. B.C. spent over \$2 billion on income security alone. It was the only province to temporarily increase monthly support to people on social assistance, one of the poorest groups in

**Table 4 Gender-sensitive measures by type**

Measure density and percentage distribution by province

	<i>Gender-sensitive programs</i>		<i>Distribution of gender-sensitive programs</i>		
	# of gender-sensitive (GS) programs	GS programs as % of total*	Addresses unpaid care	Addresses women's economic security	Addresses violence against women
Newfoundland and Labrador	7	26%	29%	71%	0%
Prince Edward Island	9	28%	33%	67%	0%
Nova Scotia	11	37%	45%	55%	0%
New Brunswick	8	47%	50%	50%	0%
Quebec	30	36%	37%	57%	7%
Ontario	26	30%	38%	58%	4%
Manitoba	11	31%	45%	55%	0%
Saskatchewan	9	33%	44%	56%	0%
Alberta	6	14%	67%	17%	17%
British Columbia	28	35%	29%	71%	0%
<b>Provincial average</b>		<b>31%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>3%</b>
<b>Canada</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>13%</b>

\* Excludes investments in health, physical infrastructure/housing programs and federal government operations. Smaller programs have been grouped. See Appendix 1 for a discussion of the methodology.

Source UN Women and UNDP: Global Gender Response Tracker (GGRT). Based on program inventory compiled by David Macdonald (2021), Still Picking up the Tab: Federal and provincial government COVID-19 spending, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

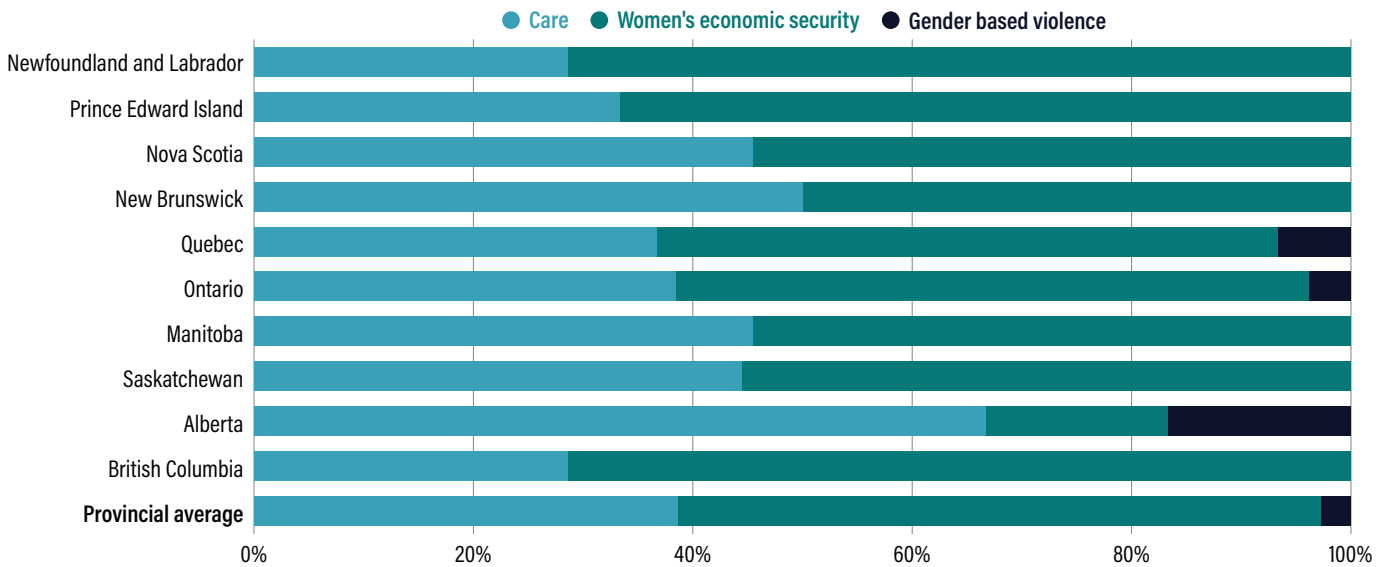
Canada yet widely ignored in the emergency responses at both levels of government.<sup>88</sup> (After considerable community pressure, British Columbia subsequently introduced a permanent boost to welfare rates in April 2021). Prince Edward Island also moved quickly to introduce several small programs for its residents such as a bridging program for self-employed workers in March 2020.<sup>89</sup>

Another 39 per cent of provincial GS measures were designed to address care needs via “cash for care” programs, investments in care services (including essential worker wage top-ups) and changes to employment standards facilitating COVID-19-related leave. Quebec was the most active, with the introduction of 11 new programs of the 56 care measures reported. Quebec, for example, launched its own wage top-up program before the federal government’s funding was announced in April 2020.<sup>90</sup> Another five provinces established “cash for care” programs, including Ontario (with three programs totalling almost \$1 billion), P.E.I., Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. In Alberta, for example, the government provided a one-time payment to families with incomes of \$100,000 or less to help offset child care costs between April and December 2020.



## Figure 2 Provincial pandemic responses: Gender sensitive policy mix

Percentage of gender sensitive programs by issue addressed, by province



Source Program inventory compiled by David Macdonald, CCPA. Data analysis by author.

Some care initiatives under the health care banner in British Columbia should be noted as extending important protections to residents and the largely female, racialized work force in long-term care facilities. B.C. quickly moved in April 2020 to contain the spread of COVID-19 by issuing single-site orders in the long-term care sector. Low wages and the prevalence of part-time work have meant that workers must piece together their income by working at different sites and for different agencies. These conditions led to the rapid spread of COVID-19 among highly vulnerable residents in long-term care homes—and the staff providing care. British Columbia required that all long-term care workers work only at one site, levelling up wages for all workers to the higher public sector collective agreement rates and bringing back many contracted-out support services in house. These steps resulted in large gains for vulnerable female workers and set the bar for the rest of the country. While the single site orders have since been rescinded (as of December 2022), the province has continued to fund the temporary wage increases through standardized contracts between health authorities and employers as part of their Health Human Resources Strategy.<sup>91</sup>

Gender-based violence programs comprised the smallest category of provincial GS measures—just three per cent of the programs introduced. A majority of provinces did not introduce any pandemic-specific



**Table 5 Different provincial and territorial responses to COVID-19 and violence against women across Canada (June 2020)**

	Yes	Partial / it's complicated	No
Are the VAW shelters/transition houses in your province/territory receiving provincial/territorial funds specifically for COVID-19?	2	3	7
Is your provincial/territorial government ensuring shelters have PPE and EPA-standard cleaner?	2	6	4
Are VAW shelters/transition houses considered an essential service in your province/territory?	6	4	2
In your province/territory, are VAW shelters/transition houses receiving priority access for COVID testing?	2	5	5
Has your premier or provincial/territorial government made a public statement about not staying home if home is not safe?	5	4	3

Source: Women's Shelters Canada, Survey of Members, June 2020. Unpublished data. Excludes Nunavut.

programming at all, relying on the federal programs to flow emergency support to shelters and other anti-violence programs. Quebec introduced two GBV programs and was involved in distributing federal financial support to Quebec-based shelters and community services. In Ontario and Alberta, the governments provided assistance to emergency shelters as part of a community relief package for residential service providers. British Columbia provided a one-month wage top-up to workers in transition houses and support for overflow hotel accommodation.<sup>92</sup>

Table 5 provides another snapshot on the diversity of provincial program responses in support of anti-violence organizations in the early days of the pandemic. Only half of the 12 provinces and territories surveyed declared women's shelters and transition houses an essential service. Most governments did not prioritize shelters for receipt of PPE, priority COVID-19 testing or improvements to ventilation. In only five provinces did the premier or the government make a public statement during the lockdown about the importance of fleeing violence if homes were not safe, and that shelters were open and ready to offer assistance. The range of responses reflects, in part, differences in the severity of the pandemic but also differences in interest and capacity to respond to the increase in intimate partner violence that was occurring. It also reflects, more broadly, the differences in interest and capacity in addressing the gendered impacts and systemic inequities that were exacerbated within the context of the pandemic.

# ACCOUNTING FOR POLICY DIFFERENCES

HOW DO WE ACCOUNT for variations in the scope and focus of the different government responses within Canada? What factors enabled or constrained a more effective response from a gender perspective?

A recent UNDP-UN Women study of the pandemic responses across the world explores several potential policy drivers of interest here.<sup>93</sup> Their key take away was that when the crisis hit, governments turned to what was there, scaling up the tools at their disposal, more often than not sacrificing consultation and engagement with community in the quest for speed. Within this context, “[w]hether and how gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities [were] addressed [depended] to a large degree on how well [spaces for gender mainstreaming] were integrated into pre-existing policies and institutions.”<sup>94</sup> Countries with poorly developed feminist policy capacity—or where it was absent altogether—had the weakest gender responses, even after taking into account national income and the severity of the pandemic. Similarly, countries that had invested in universal social protection systems and labour market institutions—including care infrastructure—were better able to respond to the shock. In short, gendered pandemic responses were “heavily path-dependent.”<sup>95</sup>

Institutional factors such as these were important in the Canadian context as well. Jurisdictions with more developed feminist policy architecture and greater state-community engagement also delivered stronger gender-responsive programming in reaction to the crisis, as articulated in their recovery plans and the number of programs

introduced. On this score, the federal government and the province of Quebec stood out. The resources and staffing available to Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) Canada and, to a much lesser extent, the Secrétariat à la condition féminine were considerably larger than those available to their other provincial and territorial counterparts. These governments were able to rely on established policy and budgeting processes to highlight and respond to the gendered impacts of the pandemic. They were also able to quickly deliver much-needed financial support to communities, leveraging established relationships with women's sector organizations and, in the case of Quebec, the presence of long-standing provincial and regional feminist service and advocacy networks. In Saskatchewan, by contrast, there was effectively no gender response from the government or its tiny Status of Women Office.

Women's representation in parliament was another key policy driver identified in the UNDP-UN Women study. Countries with higher levels of women's representation adopted 4.5 times more gender-sensitive measures compared with those with lower levels of women's representation.<sup>96</sup> Here in Canada, Quebec and British Columbia ranked first and second with respect to their share of female legislators in 2020 and with respect to the number of gender-sensitive programs introduced. Alberta, with a below-average share of female legislators and an even lower share of female cabinet members (27%), introduced only six gender-sensitive programs (see Table 6). The top decision-making bodies in British Columbia and Quebec were gender-balanced at the time, or close to it in the case of Quebec (at 46%). Female leaders like Finance Minister Carole James in British Columbia (since retired) played a key role in developing their provincial pandemic responses to ensure they were attuned to the differential impacts of the pandemic.<sup>97</sup>

At the same time, women's representation in the federal parliament was only 29 per cent in 2020<sup>98</sup>—placing Canada at 59<sup>th</sup> in 2020 in international rankings.<sup>99</sup> There was strong female representation on pandemic decision-making bodies, including around the cabinet table, but Canada has struggled to make substantive gains in women's representation in the House of Commons.<sup>100</sup> Other policy drivers, in addition to established feminist policy capacity, were clearly at play in shaping the federal (and provincial) responses to the pandemic—including the level of parliamentary support,<sup>101</sup> political orientation of the governing party, and available financial resources. With regard to the former, the federal Liberal party returned to government after the 2019 election as a minority government with only 157 of the available 338 seats. It required the support of other partners, notably the New Democratic

**Table 6 Potential policy drivers: Canada and the provinces (2020–21)**

	<i>Severity of pandemic: Death per 100,000 population</i>	<i>Provincial income: GDP/capita (2019)</i>	<i>Female leadership: % female legislators (2020)</i>	<i>Political affiliation: Party in power 2020</i>	<i>Type of government: Majority/minority status (2020)</i>
Newfoundland and Labrador	14	\$71,527	23%	Liberal	minority
Prince Edward Island	10	\$48,039	26%	PCP	minority*
Nova Scotia	21	\$47,837	31%	Liberal	majority
New Brunswick	40	\$49,218	29%	PCP	minority**
Quebec	164	\$54,149	44%	CAQ	majority
Ontario	85	\$61,315	40%	PCP	majority
Manitoba	123	\$53,897	26%	PCP	majority
Saskatchewan	96	\$70,730	28%	SK Party	majority
Alberta	90	\$80,905	30%	UCP	majority
British Columbia	56	\$60,707	43%	NDP	minority***
<b>Provincial average</b>			<b>35%</b>		
<b>Canada</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>\$61,466</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>Liberal</b>	<b>minority</b>

**Legend** PCP=Progressive Conservative Party (right of centre); CAQ=Coalition Avenir Quebec (nationalist, right of centre); SK Party=Saskatchewan Party (right of centre); UCP=United Conservative Party (right of centre); NDP=New Democratic Party (social democratic, left of centre); Liberal (centrist)

\* With a by-election win in November 2020, PCP secured a majority

\*\* After a snap September 2020 election, the minority PCP government returned with a majority

\*\*\* Likewise, after a September 2020 election, the minority NDP government returned with a majority of seats.

Party, to pass its pandemic agenda in the face of opposition from the Conservative Party and Bloc Québécois. Liberal-NDP cooperation has been instrumental in moving gender-sensitive pandemic programming forward.<sup>102</sup>

The federal case also highlights the importance of the political orientation of government with respect to pandemic management and recovery planning. There were notable differences between the approaches of right-of-centre governments, such as Alberta and Saskatchewan, and progressive-centre governments, such as British Columbia.<sup>103</sup> In Alberta, for example, the government was reluctant to introduce restrictions following the initial period of lockdowns in 2020. Instead, it emphasized an alternative strategy of personal responsibility and accountability. It was the first province to fully lift restrictions (on July 1, 2021), with its premier declaring that Alberta was “open for summer”, only to reintroduce restrictions in September as surging cases placed an untenable strain on hospitals.<sup>104</sup> By contrast, the scope and scale of British Columbia’s pandemic aid package, under the leadership of the New Democratic Party, was larger and more broadly oriented around investments in health and safety, supports to people and businesses, and

preparing the province for “a more sustainable, inclusive and equitable future.”<sup>105</sup> This was consistent with its 2020 electoral platform, its 2021 budget and with NDP beliefs in the positive role of the state as a tool for progressive change.<sup>106</sup>

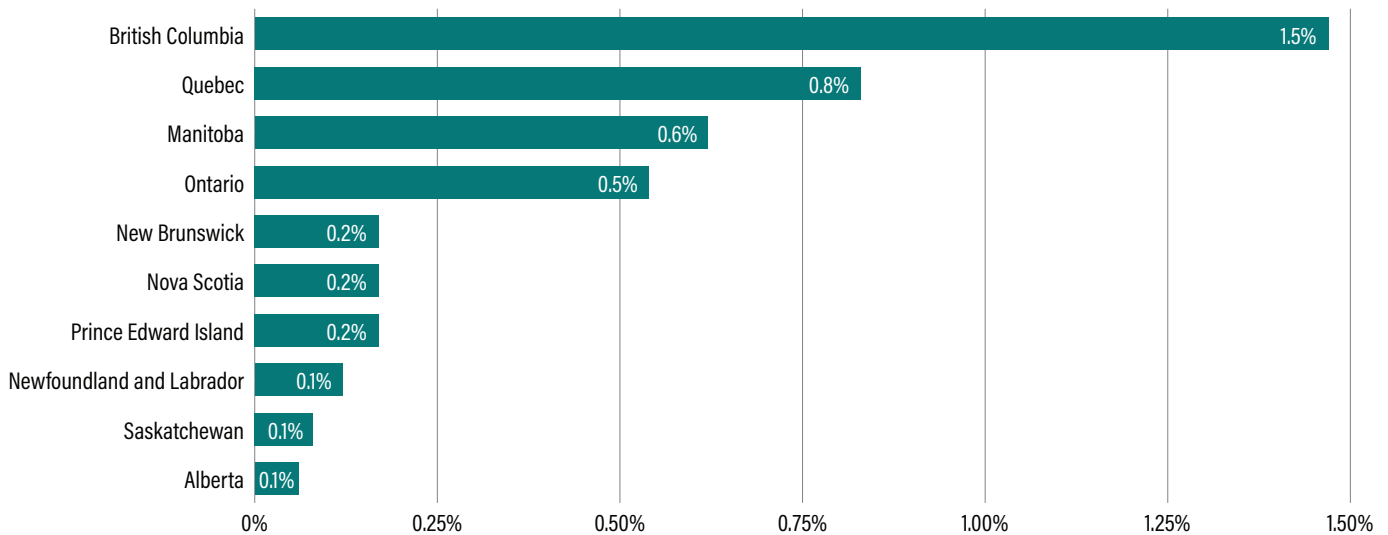
The impact of political orientation was also evident in the different provincial approaches to the care crisis. Some provinces prioritized public investment in the care economy (e.g., B.C.’s investment in child care) while others extended support directly to families (e.g., Ontario and Alberta)—a “cash for care” strategy reflective of a private responsibility, “hands off” approach to social policy, often designed to reward the “traditional” nuclear family,<sup>107</sup> and historic resistance to feminist claims for gender equality.<sup>108</sup> In Manitoba, the Progressive Conservative government dedicated modest funds to expanding child care spaces for under-served families, but handed the funds over to the Manitoba and Winnipeg chambers of commerce to distribute, with the goal of expanding for-profit services.<sup>109</sup>

Quebec’s right-of-centre government, by contrast, made important investments in care services—to public, non-profit and for-profit providers—as part of its pandemic response, for instance, supplementing federal transfers for essential worker wage top-ups. Those investments set Quebec apart from the policies of other right-of-centre conservative parties, but it was in keeping with Quebec’s long tradition of state activism dating back to the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>110</sup>

Last, but certainly not least, national income was an important factor shaping and constraining gender-sensitive responses to the pandemic. Globally, high-income and middle-income countries were more likely to introduce stronger and more holistic gender-sensitive responses compared to low-income countries.<sup>111</sup> Likewise in Canada, it was the federal government that stepped forward to finance the bulk of Canada’s pandemic response, drawing on its considerable financial resources and spending powers to do so. Its gender response was certainly the largest—as measured in direct spending and the millions of people impacted. Over the period of study, total federal pandemic spending represented 16.4 per cent of Canada’s GDP—the equivalent of \$9,618 per capita. It spent \$1,513 per capita, approximately 16 per cent, on gender-sensitive transfers and services.

Wealthier provinces also had more bandwidth than lower-income provinces to respond to the pandemic and its gendered impacts. But it was British Columbia (the 5<sup>th</sup> wealthiest province in Canada), followed by Quebec (the 6<sup>th</sup> wealthiest) and Manitoba (the 7<sup>th</sup> wealthiest) that announced the largest pandemic packages of the 10 provinces (at 3.4%,

Figure 3 Net provincial gender-sensitive pandemic spending compared to GDP  
March 2020–June 2021



Source Program inventory and data analysis by David Macdonald, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

3.4% and 3.3%, respectively). Alberta, the wealthiest province in Canada, spent only 1.2 per cent of its GDP on its pandemic response—despite experiencing comparatively high levels of COVID-19 illness and death throughout late 2020 and 2021. Likewise, Ontario and Saskatchewan delivered anemic pandemic responses given the scale of the challenge and the resources at their disposal.

Figure 3 presents these same calculations but looking at the net provincial investment in gender-sensitive programs by province. We see a similar pattern. British Columbia devoted 1.5 per cent of GDP to gender-sensitive programs, distantly followed by Quebec (0.8% of GDP), and very distantly followed by Newfoundland and Labrador, Saskatchewan and Alberta (at 0.1% of GDP). Most provinces sat back and let the federal government do the heavy lifting, focusing their efforts on health care and support for businesses,<sup>112</sup> giving only a cursory nod to programming to address the pandemic's disproportionate impacts on women and other marginalized communities.

As David Macdonald shows in *Picking up the Tab*, the provincial pandemic response was largely underwritten through a series of federal-provincial-territorial funding agreements, tied to policy goals such as the safe reopening of schools, mass vaccination programs, and the provision of emergency housing. In total, the federal government directed \$29 billion to the provinces in support of provincially delivered programming.

**Table 7 Number and proportion of provincial gender-sensitive programs eligible for full or partial federal emergency funding**

Province	Total GS programs	GS programs eligible for federal support	Proportion (%)	Total care programs	Care programs eligible for federal support	Proportion (%)
Newfoundland and Labrador	7	4	57%	2	2	100%
Prince Edward Island	9	4	44%	3	2	67%
Nova Scotia	11	9	82%	5	5	100%
New Brunswick	8	6	75%	4	4	100%
Quebec	30	19	63%	11	11	100%
Ontario	26	14	54%	10	7	70%
Manitoba	11	6	55%	5	4	80%
Saskatchewan	9	8	89%	4	4	100%
Alberta	6	4	67%	4	3	75%
British Columbia	28	18	64%	8	8	100%
Provincial average	145	92	63%	56	50	89%

Source: Program inventory compiled by David Macdonald, CCPA. Data analysis by author.

This funding played a crucial role in supporting the pandemic response, particularly for smaller and historically poorer provinces, as might be expected. For example, the federal government picked up 98 per cent of COVID-19 expenditures in Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick compared to 84 per cent in Quebec.

As importantly, federal funding also facilitated the introduction and character of the pandemic response, making available support for several key policy priorities crucial to women’s well-being. Roughly two-thirds (63%) of the gender-sensitive programming that was introduced was fully or partially offset by federal emergency funding. The figure was even higher with respect to care services and other programs: 89 per cent. Had these financial transfers not been available or tied to specific goals, such as the provision of child care or services for vulnerable populations, the number of provincial programs qualifying as gender-sensitive would have been considerably smaller (indeed, potentially non-existent), exacerbating the negative impacts of the pandemic on the women and marginalized communities.

The provision of wage top-ups for essential workers is the most notable example. In mid-April, as deaths mounted in long-term care homes, the federal government announced its intention to create a program to support low-wage essential workers who were working in very difficult circumstances at great personal risk.<sup>113</sup> Federal funds were made available to provinces and territories on a cost-shared basis (75%

federal, 25% province) to provide wage top-ups to largely female and racialized frontline workers. The record shows, however, that, in many instances, provinces were reluctant to apply for federal funding, even on the most advantageous terms. Alberta waited nine months before confirming its application, in the face of mounting public pressure.<sup>114</sup> By the spring of 2021, all 10 provinces had applied for federal funding, but five out of 10 provinces chose to leave federal money for essential workers on the table. Saskatchewan, for example, matched only 5.2 per cent of its available funding and chose not to access almost \$50 million in additional support, neglecting the opportunity to invest in Saskatchewan's majority female care workforce.<sup>115</sup>

This example speaks both to the importance of the transfers setting the policy agenda and notable gaps and tensions characterizing Canada's overall response to the gendered impacts of the pandemic.



# OVERVIEW

## POLICY HITS AND MISSES

OUR ANALYSIS SHOWS THAT governments in Canada mobilized a large response to the COVID-19 pandemic, developing and implementing a variety of policies and programs to assist individuals and the broader society navigate many of the negative impacts of the crisis. The proportion of these measures that directly or indirectly addressed gendered risks and challenges caused by the pandemic was just shy of the global average—both for the federal government and for the provinces collectively. But Canada’s response had greater breadth than many other countries, focusing to a larger extent on women’s unpaid care needs and threats to the women’s economic security, especially among low-income households.

The federal government, for its part, used its considerable spending power to support business and individual households, contributing to Canada’s economic recovery. Federal pandemic transfers, for instance, more than offset what would have been a steep rise in poverty<sup>116</sup> and expanded eligibility (at least temporarily) to those providing essential care and schooling to those in need, including children, vulnerable seniors and those living with illness or disabilities. The federal government also underwrote 71 per cent of the \$65 billion spent on pandemic-related health care responses, including the cost of testing, contact tracing and vaccination programs. Sizable new investments in child care announced in 2021 hold out the promise of finally creating a Canada-wide system of early learning and child care that is affordable, inclusive and accessible—and essential for the advance of gender equality in Canada.

The provincial contribution to the pandemic was much smaller by orders of magnitude but, like the federal government, roughly 30 per cent of all measures introduced to combat the pandemic responded to the challenges facing women. Overall, Quebec had the strongest gender response, as measured by the number and breadth of GS measures, while Alberta and Saskatchewan had the weakest, despite the relative severity of the pandemic in each of these jurisdictions and available provincial resources (as shown in Figure 2). But it was British Columbia that led the group in terms of investment, spending \$844 per capita on gender sensitive measures (43% of all GS spending in the province)—17 times the amount spent by Alberta (at \$50 per capita), Canada’s wealthiest province.

The provincial policy mix varied as well. Some provinces—typically those with the larger number of gender-sensitive responses—focused their efforts on economic security. By contrast, federally funded care initiatives made up the largest share of the policy mix in provinces with weaker gender responses. This is not a surprising finding. The availability of federal funding was a key policy driver, as noted earlier, especially in provinces where the gendered impacts of the pandemic were not top of mind. Had it not been for federal support, the health and community service response to the pandemic would have been considerably weaker, coming on the heels of provincial austerity programs in many instances.

There were other individual programming differences too. Quebec expanded labour market programming to assist workers who were struggling with recurring closures. British Columbia and Ontario mounted Indigenous-specific programs while several municipalities worked with marginalized communities to target vaccination efforts and other public health supports.<sup>117</sup> Several provinces took action to keep child care centres open in March 2020 and coordinated child care provision for essential care workers.<sup>118</sup> Newfoundland and Labrador created a Students Supporting Communities program, which supported student outreach to vulnerable residents experiencing social isolation.<sup>119</sup> Most provinces left the responsibility of financially responding to the tragic rise in violence against women to the federal government.

At the same time, there were significant policy gaps that neither provincial nor federal programming addressed. While Canada’s gender response to the pandemic may have been comparable to those of many other high-income countries, it still fell short of adequately responding to the breadth and scale of the pandemic’s social and economic fallout, as documented by groups such as the Disability Justice Network of Ontario,

the Caregivers Action Centre, and the Yellowhead Institute, all reporting on the lived experiences of the marginalized.<sup>120</sup>

Rapid research, community surveys and commentary from community-based organizations and advocates have played a crucial role in exposing the disconnect between the stated goals of programming and community experiences on the ground. As Julia Smith and her colleagues note in their study of British Columbia residents who were negatively impacted by the pandemic, the focus on lived experiences demonstrates “the need to move beyond a focus on policy trackers which, while a necessary step, only indicate if gendered risks and challenges have been considered, not why and how gender is included, and whether inequities are meaningfully addressed.”<sup>121</sup>

Most pandemic-related cash transfers, for instance, were short lived and, by design, excluded many marginalized women, such as migrant and undocumented workers who worked on the frontlines of the crisis<sup>122</sup> and sex workers who did not qualify for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) or other income supports.<sup>123</sup> Women on social assistance, who are among the poorest of the poor in Canada, were left to struggle on incomes substantially below the poverty line in all provinces and territories<sup>124</sup>—more than 1.7 million individuals and families (11% of all households) in 2020.<sup>125</sup> In the absence of mandated paid sick leave, low-income workers chose work over health and safety because they couldn’t afford to do otherwise.<sup>126</sup> Most provinces steadfastly refused to introduce these protections. Hundreds of thousands of workers were left to nurse illnesses with no financial support and many are now being rejected by workers’ compensation programs.<sup>127</sup>

The response to the crisis in care, and its disproportionate impact on women, was hit and miss as well. Initial federal funding to address the crisis in child care was one-quarter of the \$2.5 billion that advocates were calling for to stabilize revenues, curb staff losses and enhance service delivery to meet new safety standards for children and staff.<sup>128</sup> Provincial policy choices in key areas such as funding, eligibility, and requirements also made “a considerable difference in how childcare fared.”<sup>129</sup> Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia, on the one hand, provided centres with their usual funding as well as covering lost parent fee revenue, while Alberta extended only limited support to help navigate the steep decline in income and was reluctant to take up the emergency child care funding on offer by the federal government.<sup>130</sup> Likewise, provinces extended varying levels of support to other community service providers—employment programs, gender-based violence services, attendant care, housing support and legal aid—which were all struggling with similar

pandemic-related pressures.<sup>131</sup> These pressures have become more acute, with many care workers now leaving their jobs, ground down by the lack of recognition, low pay and poor working conditions.<sup>132</sup> Making matters worse, it appears some provinces are poised to usher in a new wave of privatization.<sup>133</sup>

The pandemic graphically revealed the ways in which Canada's economy and care work are fundamentally intertwined and the critical role that the social safety net plays, or fails to play, in times of crisis. The scope and scale of the government response to the care crisis was wholly inadequate to the task, as millions of women stepped forward to take on the expanded care and educational needs of their families in the face of recurring public health shutdowns. Many not only lost income, they also struggled to access necessities and needed family and community supports.<sup>134</sup> Marginalized women faced the greatest barriers, including women with disabilities, lone-parent mothers and precarious workers.<sup>135</sup> Governments effectively "downloaded care responsibilities on to women without corresponding recognition or support."<sup>136</sup>

Canada's overall pandemic response identified and responded to some of the critical challenges facing women and marginalized communities as a result of the pandemic through the application of a gendered (and sometimes intersectional) lens.<sup>137</sup> But while the Canadian pandemic response was "gender aware"—it failed to get at the structural factors at the root of gender inequality, such as the gendered division of labour, the lack of employment protections for low wage workers, or exploitative immigration policies.

Most pandemic programs have now run their course. With the notable exception of new investments in child care and pending, but unspecified, federal reform of EI and disability benefits, provincial and federal social and economic programs continue to respond poorly—as they did in the past—to the systemic barriers that women face, today in a new context of heightened economic uncertainty and rising living costs.

# LEVERAGING LESSONS FROM THE PANDEMIC TO ADVANCE GENDER EQUALITY

THE PANDEMIC CONTINUES TO be a moving target and much of the evidence regarding the impact of pandemic programming is still emerging. There is a good deal yet to learn about the pandemic strategies that worked, in whole or in part, to address diverse women's needs and the factors associated with these successes. Certainly, much more remains to be done to document and analyze the role of national and local feminist organizing, including their role in shaping government responses and sustaining community. "The challenge going forward," the UNDP-UN Women study concludes, "will be to create the conditions for policy innovations to stick and translate into lasting change, while also building on tried and tested solutions that worked for women during the pandemic to lay the foundations for a more sustainable, resilient and gender-just future."<sup>138</sup>

This study offers insight into Canada's varied response to the gendered impacts of the pandemic, both its strengths and its weaknesses. Below are six take-aways for systemic change moving forward.

### **1. Strengthening foundational income supports as well as introducing targeted programs was essential in delivering needed financial aid to millions of women struggling with employment and income losses.**

There is no question that federal emergency and recovery benefits, in combination with the one-time transfers, delivered substantial financial assistance to low- and modest-income households and prevented a devastating rise in poverty. One study early in the pandemic found that without government transfers, most financially vulnerable families would not have had the resources to make ends meet for even one month of joblessness. This was the case for over half of all single mothers (56.3%), roughly half of Indigenous households living off reserve (46.9%) and households headed by a recent immigrant (49.7%).<sup>139</sup> For the large majority of women, pandemic benefits made a huge difference to their total income in 2020.<sup>140</sup> The upshot: Canada experienced a sizable decline in poverty between 2019 and 2020, from 16.4 per cent to 13.3 per cent (to 12.5% among men and 14.1% among women).<sup>141</sup>

These interventions offer important lessons for permanently strengthening income security. One important feature of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit was its emphasis on low-wage workers earning up to \$1,000 per month. Given women's over-representation among low-wage earners, income security programs that target precarious workers and offer a minimum benefit threshold hold the greatest promise for women's enhanced economic security. CERB's program design effectively captured a large group of female and racialized workers in the low-wage labour force, juggling work, care, their own health and life. This group would not have qualified for EI and would not have qualified for \$2,000 per month in benefits. Likewise, expanded coverage for self-employed workers extended vital support to low-wage female workers in sectors like food and accommodation and personal services. Other countries went further by providing support for informal workers.<sup>142</sup>

As it is currently designed, the Canada Workers Benefit does not provide much of a bulwark against poverty.<sup>143</sup> And it does not extend support to the many who must rely on precarious, irregular, or unstable work. The CCPA's Alternative Federal Budget 2023 contains two new proposals to help fill this glaring gap in our safety net: a new Canada Livable Income benefit for adults aged 18 to 62 who do not have children and a proposed design for the new Canada Disability Benefit.<sup>144</sup> These two programs, along with expanded eligibility and a new income floor for Employment Insurance (both regular and special benefits), would

go a considerable way to providing an assured income guarantee for all working-age adults and especially low-wage women.

**2. The federal government explicitly directed support to caregivers through different pandemic programs, acknowledging this vital work and the impact of the unequal burden of care on women.**

Another critical feature of the federal government's plan was a more expansive approach to providing income support to parents and caregivers than previously available. The loss of child care is recognized under the current Employment Insurance program as a legitimate reason for job separation, but there are significant barriers to claiming benefits.<sup>145</sup> Providing ready access to income replacement in the face of recurrent shutdowns of child care and public education via CERB and its successor programs (CRB, CRSB and CRCB)<sup>146</sup> was an important, albeit temporary, improvement to the policy. These programs, in combination with targeted supports for families, such as the top-ups to the Canada Child Benefit, and selected provincial benefits, such as B.C.'s enhancement of social assistance,<sup>147</sup> boosted women's economic security and assisted with the gendered increase in unpaid care work.

These benefits were also directed to individual workers and were not, unlike many other federal benefits, subjected to a family income test. There was an income test attached to the Canada Recovery Benefit, but it was evaluated on an individual basis. This feature ensured that female workers who were impacted by COVID-19 were not excluded from receiving support, particularly women living in couple households where there was a sizeable difference in income between spouses,<sup>148</sup> considerably enhancing the effectiveness of these programs. To be sure, these benefits were only available to those who could demonstrate labour force attachment and claimants had to have lost at least 50 per cent of their average weekly income in order to qualify (and 60% under the CRCB). But it threw open the door to doing things differently.

In provinces where families struggled with prolonged lockdowns and school and child care closures in provinces, such as Ontario, these programs made a huge difference.<sup>149</sup> We saw this in the disproportionate take up of the Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit in Ontario and the western provinces. By contrast, in Quebec, the relative strength of its child care system helped offset the impact of first wave employment losses, facilitating a speedy rebound in employment.<sup>150</sup> The CRCB ended in May 2022. Now is the time to take stock and consider systemic reform of the benefits on offer and related existing employment standards to better support caregiving across the life course.<sup>151</sup>



**3. Time-limited investments in the care economy were not enough to stabilize the system, which had been drained and strained by years of austerity. Moving beyond a fragmented approach of underfunding, privatization and exploitation propped up by systemic discrimination must be an investment priority moving forward at both levels of government.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the many ways in which inequality is baked into our economy and institutions. It revealed the precarity and deadly consequences of our reliance on market-based service in fields like long-term care as well as the negligent and exploitative treatment of care workers, as reflected in their low wages and poor working conditions.<sup>152,153</sup> There was a fleeting moment when care workers were held up as heroes—some receiving pay top-ups to recognize their extraordinary effort and to help stem the exodus of workers from service. But these efforts fell far short of the comprehensive and inclusive approach needed. Today, care workers are leaving their jobs in large numbers, overwhelmed and burnt out after three long years of working under acute stress.

The pandemic highlighted care work as an economic and social necessity and a core pillar of the social contract. Countries with strong, publicly funded child care systems, for instance, did not face bankruptcies or layoffs in the child care sector as Canada did.<sup>154</sup> Recovery planning provides an opportunity to tackle, head on, the gender bias in economic thinking and public policy that has neglected the value of social infrastructure and exploited women's paid and unpaid caring labour. The goal should be to ensure that wealth, work and care responsibilities are more fairly distributed, and that everyone—racialized women, women with disabilities, low-income women, gender-diverse people—can engage in the economy on equitable and just terms, in ways that generate shared prosperity and well-being.

Both levels of government have a vital role to play in elevating the quality of employment in the Canada's care economy through investments in public care infrastructure, sector-specific labour force strategies, and the strengthening of employment standards that guarantee the appropriate valuing of the skill, effort, responsibility, working conditions, and support for equitable, decent working conditions. Federal investments in child care, long-term care and gender-based violence services—announced in the 2021 budget—are important building blocks for creating a stronger care economy and advancing gender equality. Vigilance and additional investments are now needed across the entire range of health and education services, including labour



standards and immigration policy, to ensure care for those in need and decent work for those who provide it.<sup>155</sup>

**4. The new early learning and child care deals have shown that federal-provincial transfer programs with clear objectives, conditions and accountability mechanisms can be effective tools for advancing change across the country. We need the same approach to building out essential public infrastructure – starting with new investments in health care and anti-violence programs.**

Canada has a long history of government transfer programs that flow funding (via cash and tax room) from the federal government to the provinces and territories to ensure fair and equitable access to public services and supports.<sup>156</sup> The Canada Health Transfer and the Canada Social Transfer and Equalization program are the largest, but there have been several other programs targeting specific areas, such as child care, mental health, and employment programs. Funds provided under the CHT, for instance, are subject to the principles set out in the *Canada Health Act*, but, for the most part, provinces and territorial governments can dispense funding as they see fit—and have done so since 1995, when the federal government unilaterally cut transfers to the provinces and reduced their direction and oversight.<sup>157</sup> We have been playing catch up ever since.

The massive disruption in people’s lives occasioned by the pandemic has paved the way for rethinking and rebuilding the status quo. The new early learning and child care deals illustrate, once again, what can be accomplished with an infusion of multi-year federal funding tied to specific goals, measurable outcomes, regular public reporting, and consequences if goals are not met. Pandemic wage top-up programs and training support for personal support workers and child care workers encouraged provincial governments to step up to improve wages and create new recruitment initiatives. As members of the Care Economy Group stated in summer 2022: “We’ve learned over the past year that you can’t buy change unless there’s an explicit agreement about the transformations you’re buying.”<sup>158</sup>

There is no debate about Canada’s sizable social infrastructure deficit and the imperative to scale up public funding to ensure better access to quality health care, education and training, child care, community services and attendant care, affordable transportation, internet services, and housing—experienced most acutely by marginalized communities. Each sector or area demands its own strategy, reflecting its unique history and degree of private market involvement. But entitlement to quality support could be guaranteed if it was backed up by standard setting and

independent monitoring, robust employment protections and regulation, provisions for public management and delivery, and increased funding—even in instances where there is disagreement on policy between the governments involved.

**5. The pandemic has reinforced the need to expand the application of an intersectional lens, invest in the production and use of disaggregated data, and build feminist policy capacity both within and outside of the state.**

Varying levels of state capacity clearly influenced the speed, breadth and reach of gender-sensitive government responses to the pandemic. The UNDP-UN Women’s analysis found that the strength of women’s policy agencies and the depth of feminist policy capacity were key to engendering the pandemic response. Our survey of women’s policy agency in Canada reveals large differences in capacities between the federal government and the provinces and among the provinces themselves. The federal government and the government of Quebec have gone the furthest in “gender mainstreaming”—establishing processes for applying intersectional lens to policy-making, expanding sources of disaggregated data and information, engaging with organizations committed to gender-justice, and (modestly) investing in those same organizations and the critical community work they do. But there’s a long way to go yet in strengthening and building this vital infrastructure out across the country.

It is also critical to examine this challenge as it relates to systemic racism, ableism and other systems of discrimination. We have only begun to unpack the ways in which privilege is reproduced. The need to further expand this work—particularly on the part of governments—is pressing, including improved data collection to better track the well-being and socio-economic status of marginalized groups and the generation of policy alternatives that propel transformational change in our labour markets, community systems of support and foundational relationships with Indigenous Peoples.<sup>159</sup> Such work needs to be directly and continually informed by the experiences and voices of those who are most directly impacted, through a process that supports sustained and meaningful participation.

Evidence gathered for this report (and elsewhere) demonstrates the positive link between feminist policy capacity and other institutional factors, on the one hand, and gender-sensitive pandemic programming, on the other. But this vital infrastructure was not the only, nor even the most important, policy driver in Canada. Nor was it enough to guarantee a comprehensive response attuned to the needs of marginalized women

and communities, as illustrated by inaction on the part of provincial governments with respect to paid sick days and the precipitous reduction in community services, to cite two examples. Political mobilization was essential—both within and outside of government—to move forward pandemic policy wins, such as the investments in child care, emergency housing for the homeless, and expanded virtual access to mental health supports. The remarkable success of emergency benefits in preventing a staggering rise in poverty in 2020 show what can be accomplished when governments leverage available resources—political and financial—to pursue targeted policy goals.

**6. Feminist movements show up. Organizations and coalitions mobilized quickly and effectively to respond to the mounting toll of the pandemic for women and marginalized communities, identifying priorities, demanding accountability, rolling up their sleeves to deliver support. Their work requires long-term, core support.**

The struggles of women and gender equality advocates have transformed the status of women and advanced the acceptance of women's rights and gender equality around the world. Confronted by the pandemic, women's groups and gender equality organizations, labour unions, researchers, journalists, service workers, mutual aid circles and grassroots groups got to work around the world, documenting and communicating the gendered dimensions of the crisis, demanding government action while petitioning for comprehensive supports and needed structural changes. This "groundswell of activism" and "unprecedented level of visibility" did not always succeed in getting governments to respond, authors of the UNDP-UN Women study point out, but feminist agency made a difference. Their analysis shows that countries with the strongest autonomous feminist movements and organizations were much more likely to adopt a stronger gender response than those without.<sup>160</sup>

In Canada, decades of feminist activism, stretching back to World War II, finally opened the door to a historic child care agreement. Last year's budget designated \$30 billion to bring parent fees down to \$10 a day within five years and an additional \$8.3 billion in annual federal spending to sustain the system. The push for action on child care came from unexpected quarters. Big business and bank economists, watching the steep drop in women's employment, lent their support to the cause. But it was the sustained advocacy of the child care movement and its allies that made it happen.<sup>161</sup> And it will be the sustained advocacy of the child care movement and its allies that will protect Canada's nascent system from being hijacked by for-profit provider and big business.<sup>162</sup>

Feminist activism paved the way for a new working relationship between Women and Gender Equality Canada, Women's Shelters Canada and Canadian Women's Foundation—two key civil society partners that stepped up to quickly and effectively channel emergency government funding to shelters and anti-violence organizations.<sup>163</sup> It exposed the exploitation of migrant care workers during the height of the pandemic,<sup>164</sup> won new funding to improve community access to sexual and reproductive health care for vulnerable communities,<sup>165</sup> and mobilized care and support for the most vulnerable through successive lockdowns and economic turmoil.

The capacity of the feminist groups and community organizations to respond to crises and advance change needs to be nurtured. It requires space and resourcing to incubate ideas, meaningfully engage and support members and allies, organize effective campaigns and community resources, as well as do the work necessary to centre the voices and experiences of the most marginalized. Governments at both levels and the philanthropic sector have a critical role to play in supporting this vital work through multi-year, flexible core funding to organizations and movements in pursuit of transformative change.<sup>166</sup>

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The COVID-19 crisis has brought many of Canada's deep-seated and overlapping challenges to the forefront. The institutional and political factors that were in place in 2020, which helped facilitate the creation of gender-sensitive programming and secure crucial investments in child care, gender-based violence services and poverty reduction, have not been successful at sustaining focus on the barriers that continue to confront women and gender-diverse people. Indeed, the backlash against feminist movements has gained momentum, an integral part of the rise of populism and authoritarianism around the world.<sup>167</sup> Meanwhile financial elites and mainstream economists have moved on and are mounting a campaign in pursuit of renewed public sector austerity. The emergency programs that helped protect household incomes and spur economy recovery are now being blamed for higher inflation and rising living costs.<sup>168</sup>

High living costs are indeed negatively impacting low and modest-income households in Canada,<sup>169</sup> whittling away at workers' real wages, even as corporate profits have soared.<sup>170</sup> All talk of "building back better" has been sidelined as a potential recession looms. The COVID-19 crisis definitively illustrated what's possible with strong public leadership. The imperative now is to apply the lessons of COVID-19 in service of a "more sustainable, resilient and gender-just future," ensuring that those who bore the brunt of the pandemic are not again left behind.

# APPENDIX 1

## METHODOLOGY

THIS STUDY PROVIDES AN analysis of pandemic programming in Canada over the 2019–20, 2020–21 and 2021–22 fiscal years. A dataset of approximately 920 federal and provincial pandemic programs was assembled by David Macdonald at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives for an analysis of pandemic spending by level of government. Federal and provincial spending was allocated to each program using a variety of methods, the full details of which are available in the project report, *Picking up the tab*, and its update, *Still picking up the tab*.<sup>171</sup> This data set does not report on actual expenditures and revenue changes. Instead, it is a listing of policy measures that have been announced and/or implemented by governments in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It relies on major budgets and fiscal updates as its primary source of information, supplemented with additional information from press releases and backgrounders. The sources used are recorded in Table 6 of *Picking up the tab*.

The goal of our project was to identify and analyze gender-sensitive pandemic programming. To this end, we used the UNDP-UN Women's Global Gender Response Tracker (GGRT) as inspiration and a guide<sup>172</sup> to identify specific programs. This policy tool provides a description of government responses and available information on the design features of each measure, including policy measure category and type (e.g., social protection, labour market, fiscal policy).

Each measure was assessed for its gender-sensitivity. Gender-sensitive measures were defined as those seeking to directly address the risks and challenges that women, girls, and gender-diverse people faced

during the COVID-19 crisis in three categories: (i) violence against women and girls, (ii) women's economic security, and (iii) unpaid care work. In the GGRT, gender-sensitivity assessment was operationalized in different ways for each policy category:

- Violence against women and girls measures was coded as gender-sensitive by default.
- Social protection and labour market measures were coded as gender-sensitive if they supported women's economic security or addressed unpaid care. Measures that supported women's economic security, for example, were defined as those that targeted or prioritized women or directed resources at occupational groups where women are overrepresented (e.g., personal support workers and other care sector workers). Measures that addressed unpaid care were defined as those that explicitly aimed to provide support for unpaid care, including family leaves, cash-for-care, or care services.
- Economic and business support measures were coded as gender-sensitive if they provided support to female-dominated sectors of the economy.

Figure 4 provides an overview of the GGRT's database structure.<sup>173</sup>

In keeping with the Global Gender Response Tracker methodology, emergency spending on health (including vaccines and vaccination programs, PPE supplies, surge capacity in hospitals), housing and infrastructure, and general government operations were excluded. Likewise, liquidity measures, such as loans, were excluded, with the exception of a few provincial programs offering support to tenants. Our analysis also excludes transfers to Indigenous governments and communities.

In general, we adopted a broader approach to program selection than pursued by the GGRT, by including programs that directed significant benefit to women and other marginalized groups or where women comprised the largest share of the workforce. These included, for example, labour market programs that provided training dollars to marginalized groups, funding programs for charities and non-profits serving vulnerable people, as well as one-off federal transfer payments to seniors, people with disabilities, families with children, and low-income residents. We also emphasized programming designed to improve the wages and working conditions of care workers.

We did not include programs or transfers targeting Kindergarten to Grade 12 education or post-secondary students. Girls and young women

Figure 4 Overview of the Global Gender Response Tracker’s database structure



were significantly impacted by the pandemic, but general programming in support of education and youth employment, like health care, do not “disproportionately” benefit girls and women (recognizing the ways in which these programs are delivered are certainly gendered). However, programs extending support to young female and racialized workers in hard-hit industries, such as food and accommodation, were included.

One of the challenges in a project like this is that there are, invariably, large differences in the ways that different governments, in a country based on a federated model, respond to challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, the scale of the pandemic varied from province to province over the period of study. Expenditures for long-term care, for example, were much higher in Quebec, where the virus first hit, moving through congregate settings with terrifying speed. Quebec responded with multiple programs to shore up its care workforce across various settings, setting it apart from other jurisdictions. Other provinces introduced a single comprehensive long-term care program. Under long-term care, it is also likely that some expenditures were grouped by government with similar health care sector spending. We have cross-

checked programs against funding sources and transfer programs, but some programs may still be misclassified in our typology. In a report that looks at the number of gender-sensitive measures per province, these limitations are important to keep in mind.

To this end, we have attempted to group together very small programs within a single program category (as measured by budget allocations). In instances where additional funding was provided to enhance or continue a pandemic program (e.g., the Canada Child Benefit top-up), we have counted the program only once.

The final list of gender-sensitive programs by level of government is presented in Appendix 2 and Appendix 3. The program titles used here have been taken from budget documents and may not correspond exactly with formal titles used elsewhere. The full list of federal and provincial COVID-19 programs in the *Picking up the Tab* dataset is [available online](#).



# APPENDIX 2

## GENDER-SENSITIVE FEDERAL PANDEMIC MEASURES

**Table 8 Federal pandemic measures**

March 2020–June 2021

Federal measure	Policy measure category	Total federal cost (\$bil)	Notes
<i>Addressing care needs</i>			
Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB)	cash for care	\$11,689	Total funding for CERB \$73,056B. Used 17% as benchmark to estimate portion provided for those applying for caregiving support, comparing uptake of the Canada Recovery Caregiver Benefit (CRCB) to the Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB) as reported in the 2021 census.
Canada Recovery Caregiver Benefit (CRCB)	cash for care	\$3,546	Over 60% of CRCB beneficiaries were women.
Changes to Employment Insurance (EI)—for special benefits	cash for care	\$2,609	Total funding for EI changes \$13,046B. Caregiving benefits averaged about 22% to 26% of total beneficiaries before the pandemic. Conservatively using 20% as benchmark to estimate impact of changes to special benefits, we estimate that \$2,609B of monies spent on temporary EI changes supported caregiving activities. Women represent three-quarters of special benefit beneficiaries.
Employment standards changes to facilitate unpaid leave related to COVID-19	employment leave	\$0	
Child care—Announcement in budget 2021 (first year—2021–22) for provinces and territories	care services	\$3,000	First year of funding of new early learning and child care system. For a summary of action to date and current funding arrangements, see Childcare Resource and Research Unit, A Summary of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreements and Action Plans, November 2022.
'Safe restart' transfer to provinces and territories—child care for returning workers	care services	\$625	Federal portion=100%.
'Safe restart' transfer to provinces and territories—vulnerable populations (LTC)	care services	\$740	Federal portion=100%.
'Safe restart' long-term care fund—transfer to provinces and territories	care services	\$1,009	Federal portion=100%.
Addressing labour shortages in long-term and home care	care services	\$38	
Canadian Armed Forces support aiding LTC	care services	\$291	
Essential Workers Wage Top-up—Cost-shared program with provinces and territories	care services	\$2,861	Cost-shared program, federal portion=75%. \$3 billion was originally allocated. Some funds were not claimed by provincial governments.

Federal measure	Policy measure category	Total federal cost (\$bil)	Notes
<b>Addressing women's economic security</b>			
Job training funds for workers in hard-hit sectors—transfer to provinces and territories	labour market	\$1,500	Federal portion=100%. Women were over-represented in several hard-hit sectors such as food & accommodation; retail; and other services (e.g., hair salons, cleaning services).
Training supports for vulnerable populations	labour market	\$259	
Women Entrepreneurship Strategy—Ecosystem top-up	labour market	\$16	
Emergency Community Support Fund	community services	\$350	These programs provided support to community services. Upwards of 80% of nonprofit, community services are staffed by women, a large proportion of whom are racialized. Women and children also made up a significant share of those in need of support (e.g., lone parent families; women fleeing violence).
Supporting community service organizations	community services	\$400	
Funding for food banks and local food organizations (emergency food security fund)—2 programs	community services	\$340	
Special payment to OAS and GIS recipients	social assistance	\$2,456	Proportion of female beneficiaries: 54%.
Enhanced GST credit	social assistance	\$5,515	Proportion of female beneficiaries: 53%.
Enhanced Canada Child Benefit (two rounds)	social assistance	\$4,352	Proportion of female beneficiaries: 95%.
Special payment to Disability Tax Credit certificate holders	social assistance	\$874	Proportion of female beneficiaries: 58%.
<b>Addressing violence against women (VAW)</b>			
Addressing gender-based violence during COVID-19*	VAW	\$50	
Additional funding for women's shelters and sexual assault centres	VAW	\$50	
Protecting and supporting Indigenous women and girls fleeing violence**	VAW	\$31	
		<b>\$42,601</b>	

\* Another \$200M (over 2 years) was announced in budget 2021 for community organizations under proposed National Action Plan.

\*\* \$2.2B (over 5 years) was also announced in budget 2021 in support of Canada's National Action Plan in response to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls' Calls for Justice and the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. \$223M was allocated for 2021-22.

Source Program inventory compiled by David Macdonald (2021), Still Picking up the Tab, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. A full list of federal and provincial COVID-19 programs and sources is available here: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1RQFb3cudEK1sIAYI6TSM7MaoLtq3pV335jU0IG8OVyQ/edit#gid=815493500>.

# APPENDIX 3

## GENDER-SENSITIVE PROVINCIAL PANDEMIC MEASURES

**Table 9 Provincial pandemic measures**

March 2020–June 2021

Provincial measure	Policy measure category	Total fed & prov cost (\$mil)	Federal cost-sharing program	Notes
<i>Alberta</i>				
Working Parents Benefit	cash for care	\$108.0		
Child Ccare operators	care services	\$100.0	Safe Restart—CC	
Continuing care supports and seniors lodges—LTC	care services	\$128.0	Safe Restart—VP	
Critical worker benefits (4 programs)	care services	\$465.0	Essential Workers Wage Top-up	
Emergency isolation support	social assistance	\$107.0		
Community and social services—support for women's shelters and homelessness	violence against women	\$72.0	Safe Restart—VP	
<i>British Columbia</i>				
B.C. COVID-19 temporary pandemic pay	care services	\$384.0	Essential Workers Wage Top-up	
Child care spaces and safety grants	care services	\$98.8	Safe Restart—CC	
Support for child care providers	care services	\$319.0	Safe Restart—CC	
Public health: Rural, Remote and Indigenous Community Framework	care services	\$58.5	Safe Restart—Health	
LTC: Single site work hours stabilized	care services	\$54.9	Safe Restart—VP	
LTC: Single site wage top-up	care services	\$110.5	Essential Workers Wage Top-up	
LTC: Screening staff and visitors	care services	\$122.4	Safe Restart—VP	
LTC: Additional staff + smaller initiatives	care services	\$128.8	Safe Restart—VP	Smaller programs: \$31.3M. Covered by federal transfers
B.C. Emergency Benefit for Workers—Bridge program	social assistance	\$645.0		
B.C. Hydro COVID-19 Relief Fund	social assistance	na		Cost-shared program with BC Hydro.
B.C. Recovery Benefit	social assistance	\$1,400.0		
B.C. Recovery Supplement	social assistance	\$94.0		

Provincial measure	Policy measure category	Total fed & prov cost (\$mil)	Federal cost-sharing program	Notes
Emergency Relief Support Fund for Children and Youth with Special Needs*	social assistance	\$0.9		
Income and Disability Assistance Crisis Supplement	social assistance	\$624.0		
Indigenous Emergency Assistance Fund*	social assistance	\$1.5		
Student Emergency Financial Assistance*	social assistance	\$3.5		
Temporary rental supplement—target low-income	social assistance	\$129.0	Safe Restart—VP	
Essential services for adults with developmental disabilities, courts, public health, Indigenous services, food security	community services	\$320.0	Safe Restart—VP	
Small- and medium-sized business recovery grant	community services	\$345.0		
Temporary housing, meal and health supports for vulnerable populations	community services	\$427.0	Safe Restart—VP	
Early retirement bridging program	labour market	\$18.0		
Employment supports for people with disabilities and facing barriers	labour market	\$20.0	Training for hard hit sectors	
Health system capacity: Recruitment and training	labour market	\$44.1	Training for hard hit sectors	
Indigenous community skills training and education	labour market	\$15.0	Training for hard hit sectors	
Short-term skills training for in-demand jobs	labour market	\$20.0	Training for hard hit sectors	
Skills training and youth employment initiatives	labour market	\$100.0	Training for hard hit sectors	
Targeted training for health and human services	labour market	\$10.5	Training for hard hit sectors	
Anti-Racism Restart and Recovery	target initiative	\$2.7		
<b>Manitoba</b>				
Caregiver Wage Support Program	cash for care	\$35.6	Essential Workers Wage Top-up	
Assistance for early childhood educators to provide child care in their homes + funds for PPE for families and workers	care services	\$21.0	Safe Restart—CC	
Funding to child care providers to reopen	care services	\$1.5		
Pandemic Staffing Support Benefit	care services	\$10.0	Safe Restart—CC	
Risk Recognition Program	care services	\$121.8	Essential Workers Wage Top-up	
Disability Economic Support Program	social assistance	\$4.6		
Manitoba Job Restart Program	social assistance	\$8.9		
Seniors Economic Recovery Credit	social assistance	\$45.0		
COVID-19 recovery job creation and workforce training	community services	\$70.0	Safe Restart—VP	Smaller programs: \$8M. Learning pilot and isolation units for homeless. Covered by Safe Restart - VP
Manitoba Bridge Grant	community services	\$286.0		
Employment and training supports	labour market	\$32.0	Training for hard hit sectors	
<b>New Brunswick</b>				
Assist nursing homes and other vulnerable populations	care services	\$10.5	Safe Restart—VP	
Essential workers wage top-up	care services	\$60.8	Essential Workers Wage Top-up	
Early learning, child care sector—federal Safe Restart (2 rounds)	care services	\$44.1	Safe Restart—CC	
Incremental long-term care costs	care services	\$17.4	Safe Restart—VP	
Workers Emergency Income Benefit	social assistance	\$27.0		
Community Investment Fund COVID-19 Relief	community services	na		Relief to non-profits in New Brunswick being impacted by COVID-19.
Housing and Child welfare services (shelters)	community services	\$4.9	Safe Restart—VP	
Training for workers in hard-hit sectors	labour market	\$22.0	Training for hard hit sectors	

Provincial measure	Policy measure category	Total fed & prov cost (\$mil)	Federal cost-sharing program	Notes
<b>Newfoundland and Labrador</b>				
Essential Worker Support Program	care services	\$66.3	Essential Workers Wage Top-up	
Financial supports for child care sector	care services	\$17.0	Safe Restart—CC	
One-time customer bill credit*	social assistance	na		A one-time credit on electric bills
Assistance for small businesses and community organizations	community services	\$20.0		
Food insecurity	community services	\$0.6	Safe Restart—VP	
Students Supporting Communities Program	community services	\$0.3		
Workforce Development Agreement	labour market	\$19.3	Training for hard hit sectors	
<b>Nova Scotia</b>				
Essential Health Care Workers Program	care services	\$70.7	Essential Workers Wage Top-up	
Essential LTC Workers Program	care services	\$9.6	Essential Workers Wage Top-up	
Operating support grants to the child care sector	care services	\$27.3	Safe Restart—CC	
Long-term care and home care supports plus four small programs	care services	\$69.2	Safe Restart—VP	Smaller programs: \$33.5M. Covered by federal transfers
Implement findings of Expert Panel on Long-Term Care	care services	\$22.6	Safe Restart—VP	
Income assistance, one-time payment	social assistance	\$2.2	COVID Response Fund	
Worker Emergency Bridge Fund	social assistance	\$8.0		
Disability Support Program and children's emergency placements	community services	\$23.8	Safe Restart—VP	
Emergency support pop-up shelters plus four smaller programs	community services	\$10.4	Safe Restart—VP	Smaller programs: \$8.4M. Covered by federal transfers.
Small Business Reopening and Support Grant	community services	\$20.0		
Workforce Development Agreement	labour market	\$33.9	Training for hard hit sectors	
<b>Ontario</b>				
Enhancement to the CARE Tax Credit for 2021	cash for care	\$85.0		
Supports for families	cash for care	\$378.0		
Support for learners initiative (2 rounds)	cash for care	\$490.0		
Long-term care—prevention and containment measures	care services	\$405.0	Safe Restart—VP	
Long-term care—surge capacity, infection control, screening	care services	\$268.0	Safe Restart—VP	
Personal Support and Hospital Workers Strategy	care services	\$367.0	Safe Restart—VP	
Protecting long-term care residents from COVID-19 (2 rounds) plus 8 smaller programs	care services	\$1,237.0	Safe Restart—VP	Total for additional funds (\$398M) and 8 smaller programs: \$189M. Covered by federal transfers
Temporary pandemic pay for eligible workers—LTC	care services	\$1,553.0	Essential Workers Wage Top-up	
Support for child care	care services	\$235.0	Safe Restart—CC	Split between stabilization funds and essential worker top ups
Stabilization funding for child care centres and emergency care for health care workers	care services	\$228.0	Safe Restart—CC	
Guaranteed Annual Income System payments for seniors	social assistance	\$75.0		
Low-income Energy Assistance Program—emergency expansion	social assistance	\$9.0		
ODSP/OW one-time payments	social assistance	\$60.0		Rough estimate based on count of social assistance cases in 2020 minus approximately 75,000 recipients who were potentially eligible for CERB. Source: Government of Ontario, Social assistance and caseload statistics.
Ontario COVID-19 child benefit	social assistance	\$980.0		

Provincial measure	Policy measure category	Total fed & prov cost (\$mil)	Federal cost-sharing program	Notes
COVID-19 Relief Fund for francophone non-profit organizations (2 rounds)	community services	\$2.0		
COVID-19 supports for Indigenous Peoples and communities	community services	\$4.0	Safe Restart—Health	
Maintaining homelessness supports through the Social Services Relief Fund	community services	\$255.0	Safe Restart—Municipalities	Funding for municipalities to support organizations that administer social services (e.g., food banks, homeless shelters and emergency services).
Support food rescue organizations	community services	\$4.5		
Transitional Housing Support Program	violence against women	\$6.2		
Additional employment and training programs for Ontario workers	labour market	\$194.0	Training for hard hit sectors	
Funding Employment Ontario's range of client services and community development programs	labour market	\$157.2	Training for hard hit sectors	
Remove barriers and offer training opportunities to hardest hit	labour market	\$117.3	Training for hard hit sectors	
Skills Development Fund	labour market	\$85.0	Training for hard hit sectors	
Temporary Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit	labour market	\$260.0		
Increasing investments in the Ontario Black Youth Action Plan	target initiative	\$4.0		
Protecting communities most affected by COVID-19	target initiative	\$50.0	Safe Restart—Health	
<b>Prince Edward Island</b>				
Child care allowance (non-centre care)*	cash for care	na		
Emergency relief to child care centres and essential worker daycare	care services	\$0.5	COVID Response Fund	Funding for emergency child care not specified. Included under education.
Support for essential workers	care services	\$16.7	Essential Workers Wage Top-up	
Income Support Fund	social assistance	\$7.5		
Temporary Rental Assistance Benefit -residential	social assistance	\$1.5		
Emergency income relief for self-employed plus 3 small initiatives	social assistance	\$1.9		Total for 3 smaller programs: \$1.85M
Community organization support	community services	\$1.0		
Grants to NGOs, United Way, food bank, Salvation Army plus 3 other provincially funded initiatives	community services	\$1.1	Safe Restart—VP	Total for 3 smaller programs: \$0.6. Not covered by federal transfers.
Economic support for employers and job seekers	labour market	\$2.6	Training for hard hit sectors	
<b>Quebec</b>				
Enhancing bonuses for patient-care attendants working in public, private and other facilities	care services	\$763.0	Essential Workers Wage Top-up	Two different programs for patient-care attendants are included here working in public, private and nonprofit settings are included here.
Health care worker bonuses for staff in permanent contact with COVID-19 patients & 4% bonus for all other employees	care services	\$960.0	Essential Workers Wage Top-up	
Hiring CHSLD managers (2 rounds)	care services	\$260.0	Safe Restart—VP	
Incentive Program to Retain Essential Workers (PIRTE)	care services	\$182.0	Essential Workers Wage Top-up	
Other tailored support measures to acknowledge the extra efforts of health care workers	care services	\$164.0	Safe Restart—Health	
Remuneration of 10,000 additional patient-care attendants	care services	\$361.0	Safe Restart—VP	
Temporary lump sum payments to encourage full-time work	care services	\$735.0	Essential Workers Wage Top-up	
Training and remuneration of new patient-care attendants	care services	\$546.0	Safe Restart—VP	
Ensure safe subsidized child care	care services	\$50.0	Safe Restart—CC	
Increasing the number of qualified educators	care services	\$14.0	Training for hard hit sectors	

Provincial measure	Policy measure category	Total fed & prov cost (\$mil)	Federal cost-sharing program	Notes
Support for child care services, including day camps	care services	\$109.2	Safe Restart—CC	
Housing assistance measures of the Société d'habitation du Québec	social assistance	\$11.1		
Support measures to help low-income tenants pay their rent	social assistance	\$225.0		
Suspend the repayment of a social assistance or parental insurance debt	social insurance	\$11.0		
Temporary Aid for Workers Program (PATT)	social assistance	\$16.7		
Further support for volunteering	community services	\$30.0		
Increasing support to certain community organizations	community services	\$13.2		
Offer dedicated support to people with disabilities	community services	\$77.0	Training for hard hit sectors	
Other measures in the health and social services sector	community services	\$332.0	COVID Response Fund	
Support the social economy in all the regions	community services	\$15.0		
Stimulating economic development and inclusive and diversified entrepreneurship	business	\$23.4		
Assistance for women who are victims of domestic violence	violence against women	\$2.5		The Quebec government also distributed federal emergency funding to shelters and GBV service providers in Quebec
Support crime victims	violence against women	\$5.0		
Concerted Action Program for Job Retention (PACME)		labour market	\$65.0	Training for hard hit sectors
Financial impact of measures to encourage immigrants to enter the labour market	labour market	\$111.9		
Helping Quebecers get back into the labour market	labour market	\$92.0	Training for hard hit sectors	
Facilitate the requalification of unemployed persons	labour market	\$26.0	Training for hard hit sectors	
Fund other priority initiatives to support workforce training	labour market	\$76.0	Training for hard hit sectors	
Introduce workforce requalification and skills upgrading initiatives	labour market	\$114.6	Training for hard hit sectors	
Promote training in sectors that play a strategic role in the recovery	labour market	\$65.0	Training for hard hit sectors	
<b>Saskatchewan</b>				
Caregiver benefit	cash for care	\$6.2	Safe Restart—VP	
Safe Restart Agreement—child care	care services	\$20.6	Safe Restart—CC	
Safe Restart Agreement—vulnerable populations—LTC	care services	\$19.6	Safe Restart—VP	
Temporary Wage Supplement	care services	\$56.0	Essential Worker Wage Top-Up	
Extend coverage for youth aging out of care	social assistance	\$0.8	Safe Restart—VP	
Self-Isolation Support Program	social assistance	\$2.0		
Social assistance additional benefit	social assistance		Safe Restart—VP	
Aid for shelters	community services	\$0.2	Safe Restart—VP	
Immigration And career training supports	labour market	\$44.3	Training for hard-hit sectors	

**Legend** Safe Restart—Child Care (CC); Safe Restart—Vulnerable Populations (VP); Programs identified with an asterisk (\*) were included in an inventory of pandemic programs published by the Wellesley Institute. See: V. Gunaseelan, et al. (2020), Jurisdictional Scan of COVID-19 Provincial and Territorial Income Transfer Programs in Canada, Wellesley Institute.

**Source** Program inventory compiled by David Macdonald (2021), Still Picking up the Tab, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. See Appendix 1 for a summary of the method used to select gender-sensitive pandemic measures. A full list of federal and provincial COVID-19 programs and sources is available here: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1RQFb3cudEK1sIAY16TSM7Ma0Lq3pV335JU0IG8OVyQ/edit#gid=815493500>.

# NOTES

- 1 This research project uses an inclusive definition of women that embraces women, queer women, trans women and gender-diverse people. Its primary focus is economic programming impacting adult women.
- 2 Katherine Scott, 2021, [Women, Work and COVID-19: Priorities for supporting women and the economy](#), Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives; Katherine Scott, 2022a, [A Bumpy Ride: Tracking women's economic recovery amid the pandemic](#), Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.
- 3 UNDP-UN Women, 2021, [Factsheet: Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand](#), COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker.
- 4 UNDP-UN Women, 2021, [Covid-19 Global Gender Response Tracker](#).
- 5 See: Stephanie Paterson and Francesca Scala, 2020, "Feminist government or governance feminism? Exploring feminist policy analysis in the Trudeau era," In *Turbulent times, transformational possibilities? Gender and politics today and tomorrow*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, p. 50.
- 6 Julia Smith, Alice Mûrage, Ingrid Lui, Rosemary Morgan, 2022, "Integrating Gender-Based Analysis Plus into Policy Responses to COVID-19: Lived Experiences of Lockdown in British Columbia, Canada," *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, August 2022, p. 2. See also: Kate Bezanson, 2018, "Feminism, federalism and families: Canada's mixed social policy architecture," *Journal of Law & Equality*, Vol. 14, 169–97.
- 7 Kimberlé Crenshaw, a leading scholar and lawyer, coined the term intersectionality to refer to the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, "regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage." An intersectional approach takes into account people's overlapping identities and experiences in order to understand the complexity of discrimination or privilege they face. S. Cho, K.W. Crenshaw and L. McCall, 2013, "Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis" *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol 38, No. 4, 785–810.
- 8 For an excellent analysis of British Columbia's pandemic response that integrates a "lived experience approach," see: Julia Smith, Alice Mûrage, Ingrid Lui, Rosemary Morgan, 2022, op. cit.
- 9 Suze Berkhout and Lisa Richardson, 2020, "[Identity, politics, and the pandemic: Why is COVID-19 a disaster for feminism\(s\)?](#)" *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences*, Vol. 42, No. 4, p. 49.
- 10 Feminists Deliver, 2020, "This economic labour hurts the arch of our backs," [A Feminist economic recovery plan for COVID-19](#).
- 11 YWCA Canada and Gender and the Economy Institute, 2020, [A Feminist Economic Recovery Plan for Canada: Making the Economy work for everyone](#).
- 12 Oxfam Canada, 2021, [Feminist Scorecard 2021: Accelerating a feminist COVID-19 Recovery](#).
- 13 West Coast LEAF, 2020, [COVID-19 BC Gender Equality Report Card](#).



- 14 City for All Women Initiative, Ottawa, 2020, [A Municipal Gendered Recovery Plan for All. Making the City of Ottawa work for everyone.](#)
- 15 Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA) and Dr. Pamela Palmater, Chair in Indigenous Governance at Ryerson University, 2020, [Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Indigenous Women and Girls in Canada.](#)
- 16 Hawai'i State Commission on the Status of Women, 2020, [Building Bridges, Not Walking on Backs: A Feminist Economic Recovery Plan for COVID-19.](#)
- 17 [Gender and COVID-19 Research Project](#) is one such example that brings together academics from around the world to identify and document the gendered dynamics of COVID-19 and gaps in preparedness and response. See their list of resources curated by Rosemary Morgan: [google document.](#)
- 18 UN Women, 2021, [Beyond COVID-19: A feminist plan for sustainability and social justice.](#)
- 19 UN Women and ILO, 2021, [How to Assess Fiscal Stimulus Packages from a Gender Equality Perspective](#), Policy Tool.
- 20 OECD, 2021, [Toward Gender-inclusive Recovery.](#)
- 21 European Parliament, 2021, [Gender Equality in the Recovery and Resilience Facility.](#)
- 22 For instance, UN Women and the International Labour Organization partnered to develop policy tools to help countries develop [gender-responsive national employment strategies](#), [embed gender equality concerns in national fiscal stimulus packages](#), and [develop strategies for public investments in the care economy.](#)
- 23 UN Women and International Monetary Fund, 2021, [Gender Equality and COVID-19: Policies and Institutions for Mitigating the Crisis.](#)
- 24 OECD, 2021, op. cit.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Government of Canada, 2021, [Government announces members of new Task Force on Women in the Economy.](#)
- 27 Gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) is a policy tool used to assess the potential impacts of policies, programs and legislation on diverse groups, based on the understanding that many factors—gender, race, ability, etc.—shape one's identity and experiences. See: Status of Women Canada, [What is GBA+.](#)
- 28 This overview is based on a review of the federal [Economic and Fiscal Snapshot 2020](#), [Fall Economic Statement 2020](#) and [Budget 2021.](#)
- 29 See also: Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 2021, [Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Women](#), report, House of Commons, 43rd Parliament—1st session.
- 30 Finance Canada, 2021, [Budget 2021: A Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan.](#)
- 31 Women and Gender Equality Canada, 2021, [Backgrounder: Feminist Response and Recovery Fund.](#)
- 32 Statistics Canada, [Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Statistics.](#)
- 33 UNDP-UN Women, 2021, [Covid-19 Global Gender Response Tracker.](#) The GGRT is not a source of intersectional data, highlighting only the gendered character of decision-making bodies and pandemic policies and not the presence of other marginalized groups or the constraints on participation. For a discussion of pandemic preparedness and response indicators, see, JJulia Smith, et.al., 2022, "[Reconceptualizing successful pandemic preparedness and response: A feminist perspective](#)," *Social Science & Medicine*, Volume 315 (2022) 115511.
- 34 UN Women, 2020, "[COVID-19 and women's leadership: From an effective response to building back better](#)," *Policy Brief*, No. 18.
- 35 Amanda Taub, 2020, "[Why Are Women-led Nations Doing Better with Covid-19? A New Leadership Style Offers Promise for a New Era of Global Threats](#)," *New York Times*, May 18, 2020.

**36** Secrétariat à la condition féminine, 2021, [Plan d'action pour contrer les impacts sur les femmes en contexte de pandémie](#).

**37** New Brunswick formally released a [short gender impact statement](#), while British Columbia and Newfoundland and Labrador stated that GBA+ analysis was used to inform their spending and tax decisions in their 2021 budgets.

**38** The women's policy agencies in Alberta and Manitoba indicate that their mandates include working across government to apply GBA+ to policies, programs and legislation across government. There is no evidence of this review or discussion of the gendered impacts of the pandemic in their recovery plans or budget documents.

**39** Government of Ontario, 2021, [Ontario's Task Force on Women and the Economy](#).

**40** Premier's Council on Charities and Civil Society, 2022, [Supporting Women's Economic Recovery](#), Culture and Status of Women, Alberta.

**41** Government of Alberta, 2020, [Alberta's Recovery Plan](#).

**42** Tom Ndekezi, 2020, [The UCP's economic "he-covery" plan doesn't look like Alberta](#), Edmonton Social Planning Council.

**43** OECD, 2021, [Toward gender-inclusive recovery](#).

**44** European Parliament, 2021, [Gender Equality in the Recovery and Resilience Facility](#), p. 6. The narrow focus of priority policy areas in the RRF program itself (e.g., green economy; digital economy), as well as the measures selected to monitor pandemic impacts on women, also worked to undermine the program's potential to advance gender equality.

**45** Ursula Barry and Ciara Jennings, 2021, [Gender equality: Economic value of care from the perspective of the applicable EU funds](#), study requested by FEMM Committee, European Parliament, p. 73.

**46** Gender mainstreaming refers to the process of integrating a gender equality perspective across all government activities.

**47** There is no single blueprint for the design of these institutions. Arrangements across the OECD include a full ministry dedicated to gender equality, a gender equality unit within ministries responsible for social policy, a gender equality unit with the centre of government, or an independent agency or commission. OECD, 2021, op. cit., p. 10.

**48** OECD, 2020 survey, *Mapping good practices & challenges faced by the National Gender Equality Institutions in tackling the effects of COVID-19*, addressed to the OECD Working Party on Gender Mainstreaming and Governance under the aegis of the Public Governance Committee, April 2020. Cited in OECD, 2021, op. cit., p. 8.

**49** Rosalind Cavanagh, 2020, "The Possibilities and Constraints for Intersectional Practice in Gender Budgeting Activism," *Social Politics*, Vol 27, No. 4.

**50** The communities that were hardest hit were those with the largest share of people from racialized communities, low-income households, the unemployed, and people living in cramped, unsuitable housing with limited access to health and social services. See: Public Health Ontario, 2020, [COVID-19 in Ontario: A focus on diversity](#); Rajendra Subedi, Lawson Greenberg, and Martin Turcotte, 2020, ["COVID-19 mortality in Canada's ethno-cultural neighbourhoods,"](#) *Statistics Canada COVID-19: Data Insights for a Better Canada*, Catalogue no. 45280001.

**51** Budget 2021 notes that funding for the action plan was re-allocated from existing budget lines, p. E30.

**52** "The scope of this plan appears to us to be very weak given the urgency to act. It lacks teeth, since its actions are essentially aimed at raising awareness. Structural measures are conspicuous by their absence; the government is focusing more on the transformation of individual behavior." Table des groupes de femmes de Montréal and partners, 2021, [Quebec's timid plan to counteract the impacts of the pandemic on women misses its mark](#), March 16, 2021.

- 53 Sophie Mathieu, 2021, "[Unpacking the Childcare and Education Policy Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Insights from the Canadian Province of Quebec](#)," *Journal of Childhood Studies*, Vol 46, No. 3, October 2021.
- 54 Peter Graefe and X. Hubert Rioux, 2020, "What Should Be Done with a "House in Order"? An Economic Perspective on Post-Liberal Quebec," *American Review of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 3, 293–308.
- 55 Eve-Lyne Couturier and Julia Posca, 2021, [Inégales dans la tourmente: L'impact des crises sur les femmes](#), L'Institut de recherche et d'informations socioéconomiques (IRIS).
- 56 "Currently, the issue of gender inequality is in the blind spot of the Legault government. The Secretariat has the independence and expertise to assess whether the recovery plan disadvantages women and identify ways to remedy it. It is time for the government to adopt indicators to validate the impact of its decisions on equality between women and men." Communiqué | Relance économique: [le secretariat à la condition féminine doit faire partie de la cellule de crise de François Legault](#), 8 mars 2021.
- 57 UNDP-UN Women, 2021, [Covid-19 Global Gender Response Tracker](#).
- 58 David Macdonald, 2021, [Still Picking up the Tab: Federal and provincial government COVID-19 spending](#), Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.
- 59 Gender-sensitive measures are defined as "those that seek to directly address gendered risks and challenges caused by the COVID-19 crisis. In the current version of the tracker, these risks include: (i) violence against women and girls, (ii) women's economic security, and (iii) unpaid care work." [Covid-19 Global Gender Response Tracker](#).
- 60 Government of Canada, 2020, [Fall Economic Statement](#), p. 68.
- 61 Dominic Richardson, et.al., 2020, [Supporting families and children beyond COVID-19: Social protection in high-income countries](#), Innocenti Research Report, UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti, Florence.
- 62 These figures refer to program spending over three fiscal years: 2019–20, 2020–21 and 2021–22. See David Macdonald, 2021, [Still picking up the tab](#), Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. They represent direct pandemic expenditures and do not include the value of liquidity programs, such as loans or deferral of tax payments, estimated at \$191 billion over this period.
- 63 Women accounted for largest share of employment losses in hard-hit sectors between 2019 and 2021, including 56.8 per cent of losses in accommodation and food; 81.4 per cent of losses in other services; and 65.9 per cent of losses in business services. Men experienced a larger share of losses in construction and agriculture over this period.
- 64 Pamela Uppal, 2018, [Decent work for women—A literature review of women working in Ontario's nonprofit sector](#), Ontario Nonprofit Network (ONN).
- 65 ONN, 2020, [Risk, resilience, and rebuilding communities: The state of Ontario nonprofits three months into the pandemic](#); ONN, 2021, [COVID-19: State of the Ontario nonprofit sector one year later](#).
- 66 Finance Canada, 2020, [Report on Federal Tax Expenditures—Concepts, Estimates and Evaluations 2020: part 10](#).
- 67 A number of other initiatives that don't strictly meet the GGRT definition of "gender sensitive" are not included in this overview but should be acknowledged, including selected programs targeting Indigenous communities as well as those in support of youth/students, impacted by the pandemic's economic fall-out. A major housing program was also introduced as part of the federal pandemic response. Called the Rapid Housing Initiative, 25 per cent of the housing developed through this funding is required to target women's housing needs. An additional \$1.3 billion was provided for Reaching Home to support communities in addressing the needs of people experiencing or at-risk of homelessness in the face of COVID-19.

- 68** *The Global Gender Response Tracker* analysis identifies a mix of 76 measures, largely federal, for their analysis of Canada's response. Their analysis found that only 26 per cent of the emergency measures introduced in Canada since March 2020 were "gender-sensitive." See: <https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/>.
- 69** The federal government's own analysis of its 2021 budget identifies 34 per cent of the measures introduced as directly benefiting women, in particular the funding to establish a Canada-wide early learning and child care system. An additional 48 per cent equally benefit both men and women. Government of Canada, 2021, "Gender, Diversity and Quality of Life Statement," *Budget 2021*, p. 406. See also, Finance Canada, 2021, [Supporting Women: Backgrounder](#).
- 70** UNDP-UN Women, 2022, [Government responses to COVID-19: Lessons on gender equality for a world in turmoil](#), p. 21.
- 71** Statistics Canada, 2022, "[The contribution of pandemic relief benefits to the incomes of Canadians in 2020](#)," *Census in Brief*, Catalogue number 98-200-X, issue 2021005.
- 72** This change was the result of both women's over-representation in hard-hit industries and the easing of eligibility rules. Statistics Canada, Table 14-10-0011-01—Employment insurance beneficiaries (regular benefits) by province and territory, monthly, seasonally adjusted.
- 73** Applicants were able to apply to CERB to offset pandemic income losses related to caregiving obligations. The proportion of CERB funding in support of caregiving was derived by comparing the proportion of CRCB beneficiaries to CRB recipients (17 per cent) and applying this rate to total CERB funding. Twenty per cent of the cost of temporary EI measures was attributed to caregiving. This rate is arguably an undercount as the proportion of caregiving benefits under EI (maternity, parental, caregiver and compassionate care) is typically greater than 20 per cent of total EI beneficiaries in a given year.
- 74** In the first wave, Canada had the highest reported national share of COVID-19 deaths for long-term care residents in the world, with 85 per cent of total COVID-19 deaths occurring in long-term care facilities. Carole Estabrooks, Colleen Flood and Sharon Straus, 2020, "[We must act now to prevent a second wave of long-term care deaths](#)," *The Globe and Mail*, June 10, 2020.
- 75** Martha Friendly, Barry Forer, Rachel Vickerson and Sophia Mohamed, 2021, "COVID-19 and Childcare in Canada: A Tale of Ten Provinces and Three Territories," *Journal of Childhood Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 3, October 2021.
- 76** Finance Canada, 2021, [Budget 2021: A Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan](#). The figure for care services includes established transfers for child care for the 2021–22 fiscal years as well as the first year of new funding announced in Budget 2021.
- 77** Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland, 2022, [\\$10 a day child care for families in Ontario](#), news release, March 28, 2022.
- 78** ONN, 2020, [Risk, resilience, and rebuilding communities](#).
- 79** National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019, [Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report](#).
- 80** Investments announced in Budget 2021 have not been included in this analysis as the majority of these funds were allocated in future years. In Budget 2022, \$539.3 million over five years was set aside for the provinces and territories to enhance their efforts to prevent GBV and support survivors.
- 81** See *Violence against women and girls: Significant yet uneven responses*, in UNDP-UN Women, 2022, op. cit., pp. 32–55.
- 82** Megan O'Donnell, Amber Peterman and Alina Potts, 2020, [A Gender Lens on COVID-19: Pandemics and Violence against Women and Children](#), Center for Global Development.
- 83** Katherine Scott, 2022b, [New national action plan to end gender-based violence falls short](#), Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

**84** Among women with disabilities, numbering in the millions, 57.4 per cent reported being physically or sexually assaulted at least once in 2018. The numbers were even higher among Indigenous women (62.7%) and sexual minority women (66.3%). See: Loanna Heidinger, 2021, [Intimate partner violence: Experiences of First Nations, Métis and Inuit women in Canada, 2018](#); Laura Savage, 2021, [Intimate partner violence: Experiences of women with disabilities in Canada, 2018](#); Brianna Jaffray, 2021, [Intimate partner violence: Experiences of sexual minority women in Canada, 2018](#), Statistics Canada, *Juristat*, Catalogue no. 85-002-X.

**85** In November 2022, the federal government and all provinces and territories released a 10-year [National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence](#)—longed called for by anti-violence organizations and gender equality advocates. The plan falls well short of expectations set out in the [Roadmap for a National Action Plan on violence against women and gender-based violence](#), published by Women's Shelters Canada and their partners last year. Critical questions remain about how the federal government will ensure continuity and consistency of high-quality supports and services across regions and jurisdictions—including Indigenous communities. Key recommendations and national-level actions are missing, while there is no mention of independent oversight, specific action items or sustainable long-term investment. Implementation plans and “more targets and indicators” are to follow. See Women's Shelters Canada's [Joint Statement](#) on the release of the NAP.

**86** See David Macdonald, 2021, *Still Picking up the Tab*. Provincial governments also introduced more than \$38 billion in support of liquidity measures.

**87** Across both levels of government, gender-sensitive programs represented 31.1 per cent of all direct measures, but only 13.6 per cent of pandemic funding allocations.

**88** The Ontario government provided a one-time increase of \$100 to individuals and \$200 to families in receipt of provincial social assistance (Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program) to assist with COVID-19 related expenses. Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia made one-time payments of \$50 to individuals on income assistance.

**89** Many provinces, such as B.C., Alberta and Nova Scotia, brought in small bridging programs when the pandemic hit in March 2020 to tide workers over until federal programming came on stream. The federal government was forced to introduce the Canada Emergency Response Benefit when it was clear that Employment Insurance would not be able to respond to an unemployment crisis of this scale.

**90** Quebec, through different programs, gave a four per cent raise to more than 250,000 public and private sector health and emergency service workers, with another four per cent on top of that for 55,000 workers in areas where they were likely to be exposed to the virus, like intensive care units, all part of an aggressive effort to stabilize staffing and to ensure that recipients would be better off working than taking up the CERB. Ryan Tumilty, 2020, [“Are you an essential worker? In Canada, it depends on where you live,”](#) *National Post*, July 18, 2020.

**91** See Government of British Columbia, 2022, [News Release: Province continues funding fair wages for long-term-care, assisted-living staff](#), December 16, 2022. It should be noted that while several other provinces issued single site orders, they did not guarantee full-time hours for staff at a single site. Even with pandemic wage top-ups, many staff experienced a decline in employment income—a critical factor fuelling the exit of care workers from the long-term care sector.

**92** Information from Women's Shelters Canada, unpublished survey data of members, June 2020.

**93** UNDP-UN Women, 2022, op. cit.

**94** *Ibid.*, p. 124.

**95** *Ibid.*, p. 30.

**96** *Ibid.*, p. 26.

**97** In 2020, five of the 10 provincial ministers of finance were women. Carole James stepped down in November 2020 and was replaced by another woman, Selina Robinson.

- 98** In September 2021, 103 women were elected to parliament, increasing their share to 30.5 per cent. Among members of the House of Commons, 2.4 per cent are publicly out members of LGBTQ2 communities and 3.3 per cent have Indigenous origins.
- 99** IPU Parline: [Global data on national parliaments](#).
- 100** Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 2019, [Elect Her: A Roadmap for Improving the Representation of Women in Canadian Politics](#), report, 42<sup>nd</sup> Parliament, 1<sup>st</sup> session.
- 101** See Francois Petry and Dominic Duval, 2018, "Electoral promises and single party governments: The role of party ideology and budget balance in pledge fulfillment," *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 51, No. 4: 907-927.
- 102** Aaron Wherry, 2020, "[Once again, a weakened Liberal government offers the NDP an opening](#)," *CBC News*, September 1, 2020.
- 103** The post lockdown period has been characterized by a "grab bag of dissimilar approaches"—described here: Paisley Sim, 2021, [COVID-19 Policy Stringency across Provinces](#), MAX Policy. See also: Emily Cameron-Blake, et.al., 2021, [Variation in the Canadian provincial and territorial responses to COVID-19](#), BSG Working Paper Series, BSG-WP-2021/039 and Calista Cheung, et.al., 2021, [The Bank of Canada COVID19 stringency index: Measuring policy response across provinces](#), Staff Analytical Note 2021-1.
- 104** CBC News, 2021, "[Ready to reopen: Alberta set to lift almost all health restrictions by July 1](#)," *CBC News*, June 18, 2021. By September, Alberta had over 20,000 active COVID-19 cases, nearly half of all cases in Canada, straining intensive care units at hospitals to the point that the provincial government asked for military assistance to fly patients thousand of miles to be treated in other provinces.
- 105** Government of British Columbia, 2021, [Budget 2021: Stronger BC for Everyone](#).
- 106** For a discussion of the evolution of different political parties in Canada, see: Alain-G. Gagnon and Brian Tanguay, eds., 2016, *Canadian parties in transition: Recent trends and new paths for research*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- 107** Kate Bezanson, 2018, "Feminism, Federalism and Families: Canada's Mixed Social Policy Architecture."
- 108** Ian Hussey, 2020, [A Feminist Approach to Alberta's COVID-19 Response](#), Parkland Institute. See also Lois Harder, 2003, *State of Struggle: Feminism and politics in Alberta*, University of Alberta Press.
- 109** Government of Manitoba, 2020, [News Release: Provincial investments support choice in child care for Manitoba families](#), August 26, 2020.
- 110** Geoff Russ, 2022, "[Is Québec the most conservative province in Canada?](#)" *The Hub*, September 30, 2022.
- 111** UNDP-UN Women, 2022, op. cit., p. 22.
- 112** Health care and business supports were the top provincial spending priorities, at \$19 billion and \$15 billion respectively. Provincial governments contributed 29 per cent of total pandemic health spending and 9 per cent of total spending in support of businesses—the largest single spending category (\$176.2 billion) of provincial and federal support combined.
- 113** Aaron Wherry, 2020, "[The wages of fear: The pandemic and the future of low-paid 'essential' work](#)," *CBC News*, May 10, 2020.
- 114** Janet French, 2021, "[Alberta, federal governments giving \\$1,200 pandemic danger pay to front-line workers](#)," *CBC News*, February 10, 2021.
- 115** David Macdonald, 2021, [Still Picking up the Tab](#).
- 116** Statistics Canada, 2022, "[Pandemic benefits cushion losses for low income earners and narrow income inequality—after-tax income grows across Canada except in Alberta and Newfoundland and Labrador](#)," *The Daily*, July 13, 2022.



- 117 Nicole Ireland, 2021, "[Here's how community groups are getting COVID-19 vaccinations to Indigenous people in Canada's largest city](#)," *CBC News*, March 14, 2021.
- 118 Martha Friendly, Barry Forer, Rachel Vickerson and Sophia Mohamed, 2021, op. cit.
- 119 Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2020, [Provincial Government Launches Students Supporting Communities Program](#), May 15, 2020.
- 120 See: Disability Justice Network of Ontario, 2022, [Justice means a disability centred response to COVID-19](#); Caregivers Action Centre, 2020, [Behind closed doors: Exposing migrant care worker exploitation during COVID-19](#); Canadian Women's Foundation, Taylor Arnt and Courtney Vaughan, 2022. [Resetting normal: The impacts of COVID-19 on First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth](#); Courtney Skye, 2020, [Colonialism of the Curve: Indigenous Communities & Bad Covid Data](#), Yellowhead Institute.
- 121 Julia Smith, Alice Mûrage, Ingrid Lui, Rosemary Morgan, 2022, op. cit., p. 19.
- 122 Carl Meyer, 2020, "[Migrant and undocumented workers plead for help during COVID-19](#)," *National Observer*, April 17, 2020.
- 123 Jackie Hanson, 2020, "[The rights of sex workers are being ignored in the COVID-19 response](#)," *Human Rights Now*, Amnesty International Blog.
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- 125 Statistics Canada, Income Statistics Division, Table: 11-10-0191-01—Income statistics by economic family type and income source. These figures represent all economic families and persons not in economic families who reported income from social assistance for all or a part of 2020.
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- 127 Stephanie Marotta, 2021, "[When workers comp claims for COVID-19 fall through the cracks, the costs often land on sick employees and taxpayer](#)," *The Globe and Mail*, April 13, 2021.
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- 129 See: Martha Friendly, Barry Forer, Rachel Vickerson, and Sophia S. Mohamed, 2021, op. cit., p. 50. Overall, 38 per cent of centres reported their financial situation to be much worse than before COVID, but this percentage ranged from eight per cent to 68 per cent by jurisdiction, related to the level of support provided by the jurisdiction during the first waves of the crisis.
- 130 Muttart Foundation and Canadian Child Care Federation, 2021, [Early learning and child care in Alberta: Results from a national survey during the COVID-19 pandemic](#).
- 131 ONN, 2020, [Risk, resilience, and rebuilding communities](#).
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- 133 "[Ontario expanding number and range of surgeries offered at for-profit clinics](#)," *CBC News*, January 16, 2023.
- 134 Katherine Scott, 2021, Women, Work and COVID-19, op. cit.
- 135 The Current, 2022, "[Juggling child care and work, single moms were 'off the radar' in pandemic. Some say they're still struggling](#)," *CBC*.
- 136 Julia Smith, 2021, "[From 'nobody's clapping for us' to 'bad moms': COVID-19 and the circle of childcare in Canada](#)," *Gender, Work & Organization*, 1–15.
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- 139** Derek Messacar and René Morissette, 2020, [Work interruptions and financial vulnerability](#), *Statistics Canada COVID-19: Data to insights for a better Canada*, Catalogue no. 45280001.
- 140** Statistics Canada, Table 98-10-0091-01—Changes in income before and after the COVID-19 pandemic by 2019 income rank, age and gender: Canada, provinces.
- 141** Statistics Canada, Center for income and socioeconomic well-being statistics, Annual Income Estimates for Census Families and Individuals (T1 Family File), Custom Tabulation.
- 142** In Canada, CERB was available to those formally residing in Canada and in possession of a Social Insurance Number.
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- 144** See Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2022, [Rising to the Challenge: Alternative Federal Budget 2023](#).
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- 146** Government of Canada, 2020, [Supporting Canadians through the next phase of the economy re-opening: Increased access to EI and recovery benefits](#). Backgrounder.
- 147** Government of British Columbia, 2020, [News Release: New emergency supports for province's most vulnerable](#).
- 148** See Kathleen Lahey, 2016, "Tax units in Canada and gender: Ability to pay, equity or keeping women in their place?" in Jinyan Li, et.al. (eds.), *Income tax at 100 years: Reflections on the Income War Tax Act*, Toronto: Canada Tax Foundation.
- 149** Ji Yoon Han and Charles Breton, 2022, ["Have provinces put schools first during COVID?"](#) *Policy Options*, Institute for Research on Public Policy.
- 150** Quebec's take-up of the Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit was relatively low. For example, in August 2021, women in Quebec accounted for 22.4 per cent of the total female labour force but only 16.1 per cent of CRCB applicants.
- 151** Eric M. Tucker and Leah F. Vosko, 2021, [Designing Paid and Protected Employment Leaves for Short-Term Sickness and Caregiving](#), Institute for Research in Public Policy.
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- 154** Sonja Blum and Ivana Dobrotić, 2021, "Childcare-policy responses in the COVID-19 pandemic: unpacking cross-country variation," *European Societies*, Vol. 23, No. S1, S545-S563.
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- 158** Care Economy Group, 2022, ["Provinces need to have a plan for health-care funding—or they shouldn't get the money."](#) *Toronto Star*, August 13, 2022.



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**164** Caregivers Action Centre, 2020, *Behind closed doors*, op. cit.

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**172** UNDP-UN Women, 2021, [Covid-19 Global Gender Response Tracker](#). A note on the GGRT methodology is available here: <https://data.undp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/COVID-19-Global-Tracker-Methodological-Note-14-8-2022v3.pdf>.

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