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Social Policy Framework for Nova Scotia

A Workbook

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Summary of Principles

There are 10 Guiding Principles that can be used for transforming social policy in our province. Each of these principles integrates an intersectional and evidence-based lens. The intersectional lens ensures that the principles account for the multiple and interconnecting ways that power and privilege are unevenly shared (for instance, gender, race, ability, sexuality, geographic location). The evidence-based lens ensures that policy solutions are informed by the best available research and data.

A brief outline of the 10 principles

1. Interconnectedness

The idea that policies and issues are interrelated and that people experience policy differently depending on their location in intersecting systems. Improving social well-being relies on working across silos and developing policies that address multiple challenges at once.

2. Decolonization

Re-imagining social policy requires abandoning government paternalism, and addressing the legacy of colonialism. In some cases, this legacy is one of unwelcome intrusion (child welfare), and at other times, willful neglect (housing, drinking water). We point to social policy solutions that can be found in the 94 Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commis¬sion (TRC), including Jordan's Principle, and in the 231 Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

3. Social Inclusion

Ensuring social policy solutions address the deeply-rooted systemic barriers in our policy, programs, and services means they should:

• redress the legacies of colonialism, racism, and slavery

• remove socially-created barriers to access and inclusion for people with disabilities, including invisible disabilities

• challenge gender-based and heteronormative inequality

• support newcomers and people living in the deepest poverty

• work for those in urban and rural locations

Social inclusion must be guaranteed for the users of public services, as well as those who provide those services to us. It requires that we advance both equity and equality.

4. Universality

Programs and services must be accessible to all, regardless of income and paid for through general revenue from income taxes, rather than through user fees or payroll taxes. Access is a right or entitlement of citizenship, and not based on one's ability to purchase in the market. Universality is important for several reasons:

- durability – less vulnerable to gov't cuts

- higher quality of services

- less stigma for users

- social inclusion for users and providers

- cost efficiency

- solidarity – shared identity and symbols

There must be space for progressive universalism - programs designed to meet the unique needs of specific communities.

5. Climate Justice

Social policy must be developed to ensure that the brunt of adjustment in the transition to a green economy does not fall onto marginalized communities, and ensuring these communities benefit as much. A just transition relies on addressing environmental racism and on strong social policy (income support, skills retraining, infrastructure investments, pharmacare, child care, housing). It means taking the opportunity to develop holistic policies. Public investment in caregiving jobs is investing in green jobs.

6. Decent Work and Well-Being

Social policy needs to attend to both paid work and unpaid caregiving through policies that address precarious work and caregiving for children, aging parents and/or partners. Caregiving is associated with high rates of depression, financial burden, and social isolation, especially acute for women, affecting their economic security and health. Social policies must recognize the value of caregiving with money, services, and time (including improved paid maternity and parental leaves and pension supports; investing in social infrastructure, like child care, home care, and long-term care, and increasing leisure time with more time out of the labour market to spend with family and to engage in our communities).

7. Public Provision

We need to move away from the current approach, which relies heavily on the private sphere of either the market or the family (especially women) to meet our social needs. We see the limitations of this approach in caregiving, post-secondary education, employment training. Public services are superior for at least 3 reasons:

- quality of services

- equity – access for users and working conditions of providers

- accountability to citizens

Also need to recognize that not all communities have the same relationship with public institutions. Thus, we must bear in mind decolonization and social inclusion.

8. Fiscal Fairness

We cannot have high quality, affordable and accessible public services without also transforming our taxing and spending. We need a progressive tax system, where those who can afford it pay their fair share. And we need to reject tax benefits (such as income splitting) that benefit the wealthy, encourage traditional family and gender relations, and discourage women's labour market participation. Tax measures can't replace the direct provision of services. We have to challenge the politics of scarcity and invest in our communities.

9. Shared Governance

Federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments need to cooperate in order to deliver programs and services such as health care and social welfare to Canadians. We have moved away from this model in favour of federal government retrenchment and "flexibility" for provinces and territories, resulting in weakened accountability, the erosion of national standards, and further fragmentation of Canada's patchwork of social programs. The federal government must work with the provinces, territories, municipalities, and First Nations in the funding of services and the setting of standards. Federal transfers to the provinces and territories and equalization payments are integral to supporting universal programs in Canada.

10. Democratization

Social policy that works for everyone must ensure that everyone has a say in its creation. The rising influence of corporations and business organizations in politics, alongside the declining power of labour unions and the weakening of equality-seeking civil society organizations has damaged our democracy, and citizens are increasingly disillusioned with their governments. Social policy in Canada is held back by the weak representation of labour in the policy process, our decentralized federation with limited federal leadership, and our first-past-the-post electoral system. Governments need to consider the potential social impact of each policy they introduce — breaking down policy silos, and applying substantive gender-based and intersectional analyses. Communities need the capacity to engage and to shape public policy. In our economy, unions, worker control and ownership are essential for addressing inequality.

Using the Social Policy Framework
An example: Child Care Policy

1. Interconnectedness

- Child care is a social determinant of health. Catching vulnerabilities before children enter school avoids high social and financial costs later on. Investing in the early years also has many future benefits including healthier, better educated, and more prosperous adults.[1]

- Child care can address multiple social challenges at once: child development; demographic decline; rural revitalization; immigrant retention; gender equality; work/family balance, social inclusion; and precarity for early childhood educators.[2]

- Child care is a proven economic development strategy.[3]

- Comprehensive child care gives options to parents, such as flexible scheduling and a variety of locations. It includes wrap around care that covers the full working day in a seamless system.[4]

- Quality child care provides both learning and care.[5]

- Child care is one component of a broader package of necessary family policies that include improved income supports, maternity and parental leave.

2. Decolonization

- Child care services must be developed with respect for the right to self-governance and self-de¬termination for Indigenous communities.[6]

- Child care in Indigenous communities must be informed by traditional practices of education and care.[7]

- Child care policy must be aligned with the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

3. Social Inclusion

- Quality, affordable and accessible child care can advance social inclusion in several ways.

- Quality, play-based child care with evidence-based, developmentally appropriate curriculum, provides equal opportunities for all children to thrive.

- Inclusive child care can be especially important for supporting children with special needs and from culturally diverse backgrounds.[8]

- Quality child care brings better wages and working conditions for the female-dominated early childhood education work force.[9]

- Public child care boosts the social value of caring work.[10]

- Child care ensures more equitable access to the labour market for women.

- Flexible child care helps parents achieve work/life balance.[11]

- Public child care can offer more secure employment options for migrant care-givers and diversify the child care sector.[12]

- Child care aids in immigrant settlement and retention.[13]

- Child care investments can stem rural depopulation.[14]

4. Universality

- We need universal child care that is available to all who want it, regardless of their income or labour force participation.[15] Services should not be targeted only to 'vulnerable communities.'

- All children should have access to child care as a human right.

- Universally accessible child care is more likely to be of high quality and to provide better wages and training for early childhood educators.[16]

- Only universal, high quality child care brings the economic benefits that have been achieved in other jurisdictions.[17]

5. Climate Justice

- Investing in public child care creates green jobs.

- Child care supports workers, particularly women, in the just transition to the green economy.

- Programs, such as Eco-Healthy Child Care, can be implemented to ensure best practices for healthy, safe and sustainable child care environments.[18]

- Child care curriculum can encourage children to think about their relationship with the environment and the changing climate.[19]

6. Decent Work and Well-being

- Flexible child care assists parents, especially women, in combining work, caregiving, leisure, and community engagement.[20]

- Child care allows women to have more equitable access to paid work.[21]

- Quality child care will improve the working conditions for early childhood educators and allow them to afford the same services they now provide for others.[22]

7. Public Provision

- Child care in Canada is largely private (either non-profit or commercial) and market-based.[23]

- We need to treat child care as a service, not a business.[24]

- Child care should be a "public good," the same as public education or health care.[25]

- Public funding should not be provided to for-profit providers.[26]

- Subsidies should be replaced with a public system of regulated child care.[27]

- Public child care follows international evidence pointing to higher quality, better access, and stronger accountability.[28]

8. Fiscal Fairness

- Child care, like all social investment, requires a progressive tax system.[29]

- Public child care is entirely affordable, we just need to make it a priority.[30]

- The international benchmark is that governments should spend 1% of their GDP for children aged 0-5. Canada and Nova Scotia do not meet this target.[31]

- Child care is an investment, which means it brings economic returns. Research shows that child care more than pays for itself through job creation and increased tax revenue for governments.[32]

- Governments must provide capital and operational funding to improve the wages of the child care workforce, ensure that parent fees are affordable; and fund data collection and research.[33]

- Gender-based analysis of budgets should assess the impact of government inaction in child care policy.[34]

9. Shared Governance

- Child care is a provincial responsibility, but the federal government has an important role to play in providing and funding a coherent framework of principles and standards throughout the country. [35]

- Stable and sufficient federal funding must be provided to provinces, territories and Indigenous governments for child care, tied to conditions for accountability.[36]

- Federal transfers for social programs (the Canada Social Transfer) are overshadowed by health care (the Canada Health Transfer) and have been given low priority. The federal government must grow its social transfers to the provinces and territories and strengthen mechanisms for accountability.

10. Democratization

- Governments must be held accountable for persistent inaction on child care and other social policies. This requires significant democratic reform to our policy-processes and our electoral system.

- Governments should work with local and school authorities, indigenous communities, service providers, early childhood educators, parent and community groups, and researchers to design, deliver, and evaluate child care services and to transition from the patchwork to a full system.[37]

- Public consultation is important, but cannot be used by governments as a stalling strategy. The need for a system is clear and well-established in research. Community expertise should be tapped to put this knowledge into action.

Social Policy Framework

It is your turn.

Choose a social policy and apply the framework.

1. INTERCONNECTEDNESS

2. DECOLONIZATION

3. SOCIAL INCLUSION

4. UNIVERSALITY

5. CLIMATE JUSTICE

6. DECENT WORK AND WELL-BEING

7. PUBLIC PROVISION

8. FISCAL FAIRNESS

9. SHARED GOVERNANCE

10. DEMOCRATIZATION

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