

Call to Action

Put gender equity front and center. We the coalition of Ontario YWCA Member Associations call on Party Leaders and candidates across the province to prioritize the issues which disproportionately affect women, families and gender non-binary people in the 2018 Ontario Election.

As sector leaders with decades of experience serving women and families across Ontario, we need not remind you that women and girls are disproportionately impacted by poverty, violence and systemic oppression – particularly if they are racialized, Indigenous, newcomers, seniors, trans, queer, living with disabilities or gender non-binary.

Action starts with full implementation of the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We advocate for strong social policies that help to move all women out of precarious and unsafe situations, change lives and build better futures. Women are not a special interest group: we are 52% of the population bearing the brunt of social responsibilities. When you invest in us, the benefits are felt across communities – positive economic impacts, educational success, and healthy and vibrant communities.

Therefore, it is time for a plan to ensure:

- A continuum of housing options for women – including, safe, affordable housing, emergency shelters, transitional and supportive programs.
- Dedicated program dollars geared to the health, well-being and leadership development of girls, young women and gender non-binary youth.
- A universal, affordable and high quality child care system in Ontario that puts the priority on an affordable fee scale, and sustainable funding for decent work and retention of educators.

We need feminist governments, feminist policies and funding agendas to move Ontario forward. Meaningful social change demands action.

YWCA Cambridge
YWCA Durham
YWCA Hamilton
YWCA Kitchener Waterloo
YWCA Muskoka
YWCA Niagara Region

YWCA Peterborough Haliburton
YWCA St Thomas-Elgin
YWCA Sudbury
YWCA Toronto
YM/YWCA Guelph

Safe, Affordable Housing

Needed: Investment in continuum of housing options for women, girls and their families – including, safe, affordable housing, emergency shelters, transitional and supportive programs.

Access to housing and experiences of homelessness differ on the basis of gender. Women's homelessness is a poverty issue and is exacerbated by the affordable housing crisis right across Ontario. Women face unique systemic challenges as they flee violence and attempt to secure housing. Many will try to couch surf with friends, stay with family members, or may return to abusive situations. Women experiencing homelessness may also experience mental health and addictions challenges.

Provincially, the current Violence Against Women (VAW) staffing and funding models do not reflect the level of and the multiplicity of needs that women who experience violence face. These complexities could include trauma, mental health and addictions challenges, immigration and legal challenges, supports for infants, children and youth exposed to violence, and transitional housing support. At minimum, there must be funding for double staffing in shelters to address client needs and shelter safety. There must also be an adequate and flexible funding formula that allows existing women-serving organizations to address critical local needs.

At the federal level, there has been progress with the National Housing Strategy which includes the YWCA 'ask' for 25% of funds to flow directly to projects and services for women and girls. Now the provincial government must follow this lead. A gender-neutral housing policy renders the very real exclusions and barriers faced by women invisible and places at risk our mutual interest in equitable access to safe and affordable housing.

Key Ask: There is a critical need for gender-responsive housing options for women, including safe, affordable housing, emergency shelters, transitional and supportive programs. What concrete steps will you take to address the critical issues of housing and support for women, girls and their families?

Girls' Programming

Needed: Dedicated program dollars geared to the health, well-being and leadership development of girls, young women and gender non-binary youth.

The girls, young women and gender non-binary youth with whom we work are strong and capable leaders. They tell us that they want their own safe spaces to learn and grow, make new friends, and build leadership skills. They want to enter non-traditional fields, like STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math), access mental health supports and build skills to take on the systemic injustices they see and experience. Governments must listen and take action.

Currently, there is no dedicated provincial program funding stream for girls, young women, and gender non-binary youth. This must change. In a province where gender-based violence remains pervasive, our participants are speaking out about their lived experiences. Systemic issues such as violence, poverty, discrimination and rigid stereotypes impact these populations disproportionately. We all have a responsibility to be part of the solution and that begins with investing in girls, young women and gender non-binary youth as agents for social change.

Key Ask: Currently, there is no dedicated program funding stream for girls, young women and gender non-binary youth. What concrete steps will you take to invest in girls, young women and gender non-binary youth across Ontario?

Affordable, Accessible Child Care

Needed: A universal, affordable, high quality child care system in Ontario that puts the priority on an affordable fee scale, and sustainable funding for decent work and retention of educators.

Child care is, as Justice Rosalie Abella said, “the ramp to women’s equality.” It is central to women’s economic empowerment – providing a path out of poverty and enabling women to participate equally in the labour force. Yet many women tell us they cannot afford fees, which are amongst highest in the country. Barriers increase for women who are precariously employed, working evenings and weekends when quality child care is not available.

There is a strong economic case for investing in child care. In Quebec, [economist Pierre Fortin’s research](#) found that affordable child care helped 70,000 mothers join the workforce and boosted the economy by \$1.75 for every dollar invested by the government. Further, in 2016, Ontario’s Gender Wage Gap Strategy Steering Committee [highlighted](#) the centrality of child care in closing the gender wage gap both from the perspective of mothers and the early childhood workforce.

Ontario needs leadership to build a universal, affordable, high-quality child care system. As child care operators, our priorities are increased subsidies for parents; enhanced, predictable public funding to achieve professional pay for early childhood educators and child care workers; and a closer focus on retention of the educators required to build this system. Child care can’t wait!

Key Ask: Accessible and affordable child care is central to gender equity and women’s economic empowerment. What concrete steps will you take to build a universal, affordable, high quality child care system in Ontario?