

**WOMEN'S
ECONOMIC
EMPOWERMENT:** | A CALL TO
ACTION
FOR ONTARIO

Ontario.ca/EmpowerWomen

Discussion paper: Women's Economic Empowerment – A Call to Action for Ontario

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by poverty, discrimination, violence, and their work is often undervalued. Ontario has taken steps to support women's economic empowerment through working to close the wage gap, encouraging gender diversity on boards, providing violence against women services and supports, and increasing access to high-quality childcare, but there is much more to do.

Please read our engagement paper and share your feedback by August 15, 2017.



— *Indira Naidoo-Harris,
Minister of the Status
of Women*

MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER OF THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Most of us take for granted that women in Canada have the right to own property, build careers and run for political office. These are basic freedoms. These successes were gained through the collective strength and tireless efforts of women and their allies. Not long ago women in Ontario were fighting for these very rights, as well as many others.

Years of history and activism brought us to the place we are today, and that is something to celebrate. But we cannot stop now: full security, equality and justice for women and girls in Ontario requires renewed action and leadership.

I am proud to be Ontario's first Minister for the Status of Women. Our government created this ambitious new ministry as a way of strengthening and fortifying our commitment to advancing gender equality in the province. We are leading by example and examining our own policies and practices, as well as working with the people of Ontario to create a culture of change - one in which women and girls have the opportunity to succeed on whatever path they choose.

Important progress is being made. For example, we are working to ensure that women are free from violence and harassment, and that women are represented in leadership roles in our society. In addition, we are committed to closing the gender wage gap, increasing access to affordable childcare and providing employment training to low-income women putting them on a path to greater economic security.

But there is more to do. To help women, from every walk of life, to reach their full economic and social potential, our government is creating a new strategy to support women's economic empowerment.

We believe in a fairer, more equal Ontario. We know you do too.

We need your input, your ideas, your experiences and your feedback to build the best possible plan forward for women and girls in Ontario.

While government can provide important leadership, we cannot do this alone. For real, systemic change to happen, it has to come from everyone — from all levels of government, businesses, organizations, and from individuals. That's how Ontario moves forward.

Society benefits when all women are able to fully contribute to the economy. We owe it to the women activists who came before us, and to our daughters and granddaughters, to continue to strive vigorously for equality. When women succeed, we all succeed.

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WHAT IS ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT?

The goal of economic empowerment is for women and girls of all ages, abilities and backgrounds to access and benefit from economic and social opportunities, and be able to participate fully in society.

This means:

- equal access to opportunities and resources in education, and skills development, entrepreneurship, and employment
- institutional environments that promote economic growth and safety for women and girls and remove systemic barriers



“I am calling upon people, businesses and organizations across Ontario to build on the momentum we have been creating in recent years and work together to advance a culture of empowerment where all women in this province can pursue their full potential free of barriers or discrimination.”

— *Premier Kathleen Wynne*

THE ECONOMIC STATUS OF WOMEN IN ONTARIO

Our society has made enormous strides over the last few generations because of the contributions made by women and girls to the social and economic fabric of this province. Today, women make up nearly half of Ontario's workforce;¹ the number of women entrepreneurs, small-business owners, community workers, educators, health sector workers, and corporate leaders continues to rise. This not only benefits women, it contributes to the growth and foundation of Ontario's economy and promotes a fair society.

But progress made in recent years has not yet reached everyone.² Too many women and girls in Ontario continue to face barriers that prevent them from achieving their full potential.

From a young age, girls may face gender discrimination and stereotyping. This can impact their health, well-being, education, career options, and other life goals. We also know that one in three women in Canada will experience sexual violence at some point in their lives. Women also face barriers in the workforce. Measured by annual wages, women take home approximately 26 per cent less than men. For Indigenous and newcomer women, the wage gap is even wider.

This is unacceptable and does not meet Ontario's values of equality and diversity. Every step we take towards the economic empowerment of women in Ontario will help build a better society for everyone.

1 Statistics Canada, CANSIM Table 282-0098, Labour Force Survey Estimates

2 Statistics Canada (2017), "Women in Paid Work," *Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report*, (89-503-X); see: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2015001/article/14694-eng.pdf>

BARRIERS TO THE ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

The causes of inequity are complex and can vary for different women. Many women in Ontario face barriers to economic opportunity:

- part-time, low-paid and precarious jobs are often done by women
- biased hiring and pay practices mean women are unable to achieve fair compensation for their work, and can limit opportunities for advancement
- limited access to quality, affordable childcare can restrict a woman's ability to participate in the workforce
- limited access to safe and affordable housing can result in women, including those fleeing domestic violence, experiencing hidden homelessness and difficulties accessing support

In Ontario, more women than men hold university and college degrees.

(Source: Statistics Canada, CANSIM 282-0004)

42.3% of persons in female lone-parent families in Ontario were in poverty (below the after-tax Low Income Measure) in 2014.

(Source: Statistics Canada, CANSIM 206-0042)

Women account for only 20.8% of the S&P/TSX 60's board seats in Canada.

(Source: Catalyst, 2016)

- newcomer women, women with disabilities, Indigenous women, transgender persons, single mothers and racialized women face a heightened risk of violence, poverty, and are often less likely to find meaningful employment
- senior women are more likely to live alone, and have lower income than senior men, heightening the risk of social isolation³

Ontario's gender wage gap was 26% in 2016 as measured by annual wages of all earners.
(Source: Ontario Ministry of Labour)

Young women are less likely to choose a STEM program regardless of mathematic ability.
(Source: Statistics Canada, 2013)

3 Statistics Canada (2016), "Senior Women," *In Women in Canada; A Gender-based Statistical Report* (89-503-X).

STEPS TO SUPPORT WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN ONTARIO

To strengthen the advancement of women, the Ontario government is leading through a number of actions:

- building a multi-year roadmap for income security reform to support further efforts to reduce poverty
- helping more than 1,700 low-income women gain entrepreneurship and financial literacy training through our micro-lending program and reaching 2,600 others through our Women In Skilled Trades and Information Technology Training Program
- committing to helping 100,000 more children, aged 0-4, access licensed child care over the next five years
- setting targets to ensure that more women are on provincial boards and agencies by 2019, and encouraging businesses to appoint more women to their own boards, as well
- beginning this September, making college and university more affordable for lower-income families through enhancements to Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) that will cover more of the costs of tuition
- investing \$30 million over the next three years in the Survivors of Domestic Violence Portable Housing Benefit Pilot to provide up to 3,000 survivors of domestic violence with the flexibility to choose where they want to live
- raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour and introducing new scheduling rules on January 1st, 2019; ensuring part-time workers are paid the same hourly wage as full-time workers; expanding personal emergency leave to include an across-the-board minimum of at least two paid days per year for all workers; and stepping up enforcement of employment laws, all pending passage of legislation.



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OUR PROPOSED VISION AND GOALS

How You Can Help

Ontario's first strategy for the economic empowerment of women will build on the progress we have made to date, in partnership with communities across the province, and will include putting in place the tools and resources to track and measure women's advancement.

Government cannot do this alone. Women's economic empowerment requires strong partnerships between business, government, public institutions and communities.

We want all women to see themselves in this strategy. We want to hear your ideas about how to economically empower women and girls in Ontario. What is working in your community and what other steps can be taken to help women and girls succeed? We want to hear from you on how best to move forward.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES




**Voices of Women
and Girls**



**Diversity and
Inclusion**



**Perspectives
of Indigenous
Peoples**



**Collaboration
and Partnerships**

Ontario has taken a number of steps to support women's economic empowerment but there is more to be done. The vision is to build an Ontario where every woman and girl is empowered to succeed. We propose to achieve this vision by starting with four key areas: empowering youth, promoting economic opportunities, encouraging leadership, and shifting social attitudes.

Vision: Every woman and girl in Ontario is empowered to succeed, with their choices supported and sustained by a society that provides equal access to economic and social opportunities.

01

Goal One: Empower Youth

- Continue to address gender bias in education
- Increase supports for girls and women in STEAM* (“Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics”)
- Continue to support experiential learning and education pathways (apprenticeship, college, community living, university and the workplace).
- Continue to support groups facing challenges (e.g. low-income, youth in care)

Goal Four: Shift Social Attitudes

- Examine gender bias in institutions (public, private sector)
- Generate social awareness about gender equity at home and work
- Encourage use of gender based analysis
- Examine social norms in a multicultural context

02

Goal Two: Promote Economic Opportunities

- Increase women’s participation in underrepresented fields
- Promote income security (low-income women and girls, youth, seniors) and poverty reduction
- Enhance entrepreneurship and social enterprise opportunities

Goal Three: Encourage Leadership

- Promote women in leadership
- Increase access to mentorship opportunities
- Support career progression for women of all ages

04

03

PROPOSED OUTCOMES

- Educational and career pathways are used by youth and women in all fields
- Increased opportunities to participate in activities that generate economic well-being and access to skills development
- Targets set to promote the advancement of women in public, private, and community leadership roles
- Increased awareness and longer-term generational shifts in attitudes about gender
- Improved educational and economic status of low-income women and girls in Ontario.

Goal one: Empower youth

All young women and girls should feel empowered to follow any educational or career path they choose. Some young women and girls experience barriers when considering certain education and career paths. We are eager to learn about tools that can support them in exploring a diverse range of learning and career opportunities.

Goal two: Promote economic opportunities

In today's economy, women continue to face barriers to employment. And there are key sectors, such as the trades, science, technology, engineering, and math, where women remain underrepresented. Many women entrepreneurs need opportunities to grow and sustain their business, and often, rural women face unique barriers to accessing economic opportunities. We know from our conversations with Ontarians that we can do more to help women — all women — achieve their economic goals.

Goal three: Encourage leadership

There are many examples of visionary female leaders in Ontario who have transformed their communities. However, more needs to be done to inspire and promote female leaders. Research has

shown that gender-diverse businesses help ensure different perspectives, voices, and life experiences shape corporate decisions.⁴ To achieve this, business, the broader public sector and all levels of government need to do more to promote women to leadership roles.

Goal four: Shift social attitudes

Discrimination against women and girls is not always explicit – it is often rooted in subtle, but pervasive social attitudes about what women should and shouldn't do. We want more people to be aware of the barriers women face throughout their lives, and to be able to recognize and address hidden bias in all its forms related to gender, age, sexual orientation, race, disability, and ethnicity. A shift in discriminatory social attitudes will not come easily. Beliefs about the roles of women and girls are shaped by many factors and change over time. We need to develop creative ways to address gender stereotypes from a young age.

4 McKinsey & Company (2015), *Why Diversity Matters*. See: <http://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/why-diversity-matters>

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SHARE YOUR FEEDBACK

As leaders, community members and people of Ontario, your voice is important. We want to hear your innovative and imaginative ideas, experiences and vision to inform the development of the Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy. Please share your thoughts on what economic empowerment means to you and your community, and your input on our goals for Ontario. Your feedback will help us create new possibilities for the future of women and girls in Ontario.

If you have any questions or comments, please submit them for consideration to womensempowerment@ontario.ca **before August 15, 2017**. In addition, you can also visit Ontario.ca/EmpowerWomen for more information and to respond to our online survey.