



PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND  
Advisory Council on the Status of  
**WOMEN**

## GUIDE TO THE ISSUES

Addiction Services for Women  
Family Law  
Women's Health  
Women and Unpaid Work  
Early Childhood Care and Education  
Women and Decision-Making  
Reproductive Health  
Violence Against Women

**PROVINCIAL ELECTION 2003**

### A LETTER FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

Dear Voter,

Do you want the provincial election to produce results that will move Island women closer to equality?

If so, you must challenge the candidates on issues that are important to you and to all Island women.

The Advisory Council on the Status of Women is composed of women from all across the province. We are all active in our communities and we hear what Island women are saying.

Our Council has named eight key issues that need action from our provincial government. These are: 1) Addiction Services for Women; 2) Family Law; 3) Women's Health; 4) Women and Unpaid Work; 5) Early Childhood Care and Education; 6) Women and Decision-Making; 7) Reproductive Health; and 8) Violence Against Women.

None of these issues are new ones, but you need to remind candidates that Island women are using their votes to choose representatives who will address their concerns.

All of these issues are interconnected. They show that there is a lot of work to be done in our province.

Please take the information that we have provided and talk to your candidates about the things that matter to you.

Remember to vote on *Monday, September 29th* for the person of your choice and make your vote count for all Island women.

Sincerely, Kirstin Lund

## ADDICTION SERVICES FOR WOMEN

"I find that people look down on me for being an alcoholic. At the same time, I am trying to deal with many other issues and look after my children."

While women make up one-third to one-half of the addicted population, only 13% of all addiction program admissions are women.

Provincial addiction programs were designed for men, but we are learning that the roots of women's addictions are different, their physical interactions with addictive substances are different, their addiction patterns are different, and their service needs are different.

The Province of PEI has committed to doing a better job of meeting women's unique needs through its *Women's Mobile Treatment Program*, its short-term residential program at the Provincial Addictions Centre, and its long-term program at Lacey House.

For women, dealing with an addiction means dealing with many issues at many levels. That requires a continuum of services across the province.

### **ASK YOUR CANDIDATE:**

**How will your party work to better meet the needs of Island women with addictions?**

## FAMILY LAW

"My partner can afford to drag out the legal process longer than I can. I just want to get this over with but I can't get the service I need."

Over the years, changes in family law have given women increased legal support for their choice to end a relationship and rebuild their lives. There is still more work to be done, though.

Many pieces of provincial legislation need to be changed so that all types of unions - married, common-law, and same-sex - have the same legal protection.

Plans have been made to coordinate services for family law clients but that effort has moved slowly.

Our legal aid program is so under-funded that it can only handle a very small number of family cases in violent situations. Women are the ones who most frequently need this type of service.

And, throughout all efforts to reform family law, we must be mindful of the reality of family violence and high-stress situations.

### **ASK YOUR CANDIDATE:**

**How will your party reform family law and improve access to justice?**

## WOMEN'S HEALTH

"I want to be treated like a person, not a collection of body parts. And, I need help in looking after the health of my whole family."

When it comes to health, it matters whether you are a man or a woman. And, that's not just because women's bodies are different. Their entire lives are different.

Women take a broad view of health and they want their health care providers to serve them accordingly. Right now, they see a system that focuses on the parts, rather than the whole.

Island women want to collaborate with physicians who have time to treat them as persons. They want support for complementary health practices.

They want the system to address mental health needs. And, as the caregivers of society, they want to be supported in that role.

Women are the largest consumers and providers of health care. Meeting their needs is crucial to everyone's health.

### **ASK YOUR CANDIDATE:**

**How will your party make the health care system work better for women?**

## WOMEN AND UNPAID WORK

"I know I do important work at home and in my community, but I feel like nobody notices what I do or respects me for my contributions."

Women do about two-thirds of all unpaid work. This reality affects their well-being, their financial security, and their status in society.

Through their unpaid work at home, in family businesses, and in the community, women have always subsidized the Island economy. This tradition continued even when more and more women entered the paid workforce.

Now, most Island women do a combination of paid and unpaid work, but their enormous contribution is being ignored.

When government makes budget and policy decisions, it usually considers paid work only. For example, when hospitals stays got shorter, did anyone consider who would have to leave work to do the care at home?

There is no need to attach money to everything that women do, but there is a need to value what they do.

### **ASK YOUR CANDIDATE:**

**How will your party acknowledge and value women's unpaid work?**

## EARLY CHILDHOOD

"I struggle with finding and paying for good child care. And I know that child care workers are not being paid what they are worth."

All families need support in caring for and educating their young children. Here on PEI, the need is particularly acute. About 83% of all mothers of young children participate in the workforce while still acting as their children's primary caregiver.

Despite this obvious need, the Province of PEI pays only about 20% of the total service costs. The Canadian average is closer to 50%. Many Western nations cover the entire cost or charge only a nominal fee.

The lack of financial support means that parents struggle to pay fees while workers struggle to provide service with low wages and poor working conditions.

Things have started to change. The kindergarten program is now universal. More money is being directed toward the sector, but there is still much to be done.

### **ASK YOUR CANDIDATE:**

**How will your party provide child care and education services that are accessible to parents and fair to workers?**

## WOMEN AND DECISION-MAKING

"I don't see governments dealing with the issues that are important to me. Why aren't more women getting elected to political offices?"

There have been some remarkable individual achievements by women politicians in this province. But as a group, women are still under-represented. They typically make up between 20 - 25% of the Members of the Legislature.

Island women are political, though. They work hard to create change, mostly at the community level. But, they are not at the centre of decision-making in this province, therefore issues of greater concern to women do not get noticed as easily.

For real change to occur, this inequity must be addressed. It is undemocratic to represent only a portion of the population. Women's equality groups are interested in what new voting systems like proportional representation could do to increase their numbers and their power.

And, they think it's time that the Province developed real strategies to address the barriers to elected office.

### **ASK YOUR CANDIDATE:**

**How will your party ensure that women's representation is fair?**

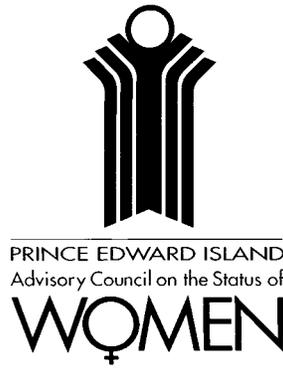
## REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

"It's hard to believe that in 2003 I can't find information about reproductive choices and have access to the services that are available in other Canadian provinces."

Prince Edward Island is the only province without a chapter of Planned Parenthood, a national organization which advises government. In the community, they also provide counseling, information, and services related to reproductive health. And, although abortion is a legal medical procedure in Canada, Island women are denied access to this service.

### **ASK YOUR CANDIDATE:**

**How will your party ensure that women and girls have the same access as other Canadian women to basic information on reproductive health and access to abortion services?**



The *PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women* is an arms-length provincial government agency that works for equality and supports women's full and active participation in social, legal, cultural, economic, and political spheres of life.

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

"I am trying to recover from a lifetime of sexual abuse, but I live in the country and there is nothing here to help me get healthy. I wonder how many other Island women are in the same boat? "

Needs assessments show that not all Island women can get the services they need to recover from violence that they have experienced. This is particularly true for women living in rural areas, women with disabilities, Aboriginal women, and women who have experienced sexual violence.

### **ASK YOUR CANDIDATE:**

**How will your party ensure that all Island women will have access to the services required to deal with the trauma of violence, especially sexual violence?**

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