

Prince Edward Island
Advisory Council on the Status of Women

2009

 PEI Equality
Report Card 



June 2009

Introduction

During the 2007 election, the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women introduced its plan for an EQUALITY REPORT CARD for PEI, and in June 2008, we published the first, pilot report. The Equality Report Card is a process to assess our Province's progress towards women's equality goals. The Status of Women's goal is to work collaboratively with government to help the Province to achieve high grades in all priority areas.

A Fair and Collaborative Process

How the Equality Report Card process worked:

- Members of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women reviewed last year's Report Card priorities and all the recommendations they had made to government over the past eight years. They selected issues and recommendations that continued to be of highest priority.
- PEI Status of Women published the priority areas for assessment and mailed them to all government departments, along with assessment criteria.
- PEI Status of Women staff invited each department of government and each provincial political party to appoint a representative and offered customized orientation sessions.
- Each department of government completed a questionnaire about actions their department had taken to support women's equality and diversity.
- Members of the Advisory Council used information from departments and from their own research and experience to set draft grades in each priority area, in a collaborative and consensus-based workshop process.
- PEI Status of Women staff shared these draft grades with government and opposition representatives for corrections, updates, and other input.
- Members of the Advisory Council shared draft grades with community members and community organizations for corrections, updates, and other input.
- Members of the Advisory Council made any changes they felt were necessary to the grades and analysis, based on feedback and new information from government and community.
- PEI Status of Women staff finalized and released the Equality Report Card.

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Assessments based on information
updated to May 30, 2009

Assessment

| Category | Grade |
|----------------------------|-------|
| Making Equality a Priority | C+ |
| Women in Decision-Making | C |
| Family Violence Prevention | B- |
| Access to Justice | C+ |
| Supports for Caregiving | C |
| Women's Health | C- |
| Women's Economic Status | D |
| Overall Average C | |

↗ A "C" means government is taking small steps towards priority actions the Advisory Council on the Status of Women identifies as crucial to making Island society more equitable.

↗ Government has made some good moves, including renewed work on family violence prevention; continued work on woman abuse protocols that support women in abusive situations to interact with government systems; real movement towards training policy-makers to consider gender effects in policies and programs; and steps to update provincial data about women.

→ Initiatives for community-based support for victims of violence, access to family-law legal aid, housing and help for low-income people, and supports to caregiving for young children and older adults have all been beneficial but do not yet keep pace with community need, leaving important support services under strain.

→ Meanwhile, government has taken minimal action on some priorities women have identified as important. For instance, little has been done to ensure women benefit equally with men from economic development plans, invest in Islanders' mental health, or begin steps towards more birthing options.

↘ Most disappointing are equality areas where government has yet to act on promises, such as updating the Employment Standards Act, establishing an Office of Public Engagement, striking the Special Committee on the Role of the MLA, or, most importantly of all, putting in place a process for a cross-government Poverty Reduction Strategy built from grassroots consultation.

MAKING EQUALITY A PRIORITY: C+

To make women's equality a priority, we expect the provincial government to meet its commitments to analyze the effects on everyday Island women of existing and proposed legislation, policy, and budgeting. This means applying gender- and diversity-based analysis and collecting and using up-to-date sex-disaggregated data.

Commitment to applying gender- and diversity-based analysis (GBA) throughout government

B-

- Minister Responsible for the Status of Women Valerie Docherty succeeded in passing a motion strike a committee on gender-based analysis. This committee has already begun to examine best practices, to assess training needs within the public service, and to identify training models and opportunities. This is a good first step towards greater application of gender and diversity analysis tools across government. This is a good commitment, provided there is follow-up and follow-through.
- We understand that submissions to Executive Council are supposed include potential policy impacts on women as well as a number of other groups with unique needs. We are hopeful these impacts will be analyzed increasingly well in future, as more government workers receive training on how to apply a gender lens.
- Minister Docherty has preserved the provincial grant program for projects by community organizations that provide direct services and programs for the benefit of women and/or work on women's equality and that receive no core funding.
- The Status of Women Council recognizes an impressive range and level of activity in the work of the Interministerial Women's Secretariat on behalf of the Minister this year. The Secretariat is government's internal office for advising government on women's equality issues, and its accomplishments are especially remarkable considering it is a two-person office.
- The PEI government does notably good work in applying gender analysis in UN-mandated reporting regarding the six UN Human Rights conventions to which Canada is party. The Office of the Attorney General coordinates reporting and consistently seeks out diverse and inclusive views and includes them in their reports.
- Government continues to develop and apply multiple "lenses" through which to view policy decisions. We support all efforts to increase the depth of analysis around policy decisions. It is essential to examine evidence about how policies can be expected to impact different communities differently. However, all new lenses must be coordinated and integrated with a gender lens and applied together, not separately. A policy designed to consider the particular needs of people with disabilities, for instance, will raise the bar for people with disabilities, but if the measure still impacts women and men differently and preserves the equality gap between women with disabilities and men with disabilities, then it does not truly meet the needs of the population affected.
- The status quo situation remains unchanged: some departments apply gender analysis regularly. The Department of Education, for instance, applies gender- and diversity-analysis widely across programs. Most departments apply it unevenly at best. There remains no system-wide application of gender analysis across government. We expect smooth and routine use will only happen over a number of years; however, all departments should by this time be in early implementation stages or better.
- There are still no formal requirements or mechanisms for legislation to be vetted with a gender lens before being put to the Legislature.
- There continues to be reluctance across government to name women's inequality for what it is.

Steps to ensure that women will benefit equally from government's proposed economic development plans

D

✎ There is no question that economic development is essential for Prince Edward Island. Because economic development is essential for both women and men, and because it may affect each in different ways, we ask that women be consulted and considered *systematically* in economic development planning.

✎ The “Island Prosperity” plan was developed without public consultation or input that might have provided insights from a diversity of grassroots perspectives. Innovation and Advanced Learning admits it has taken no steps to ensure that women benefit equally with men from proposed economic development plans. Executive Council points to increasing numbers of women in science-based professions that are highlighted in the plan, but not about whether or not the plan was developed with equality of benefit anticipated for these and other women.

✎ The Council of People with Disabilities reminds us that in PEI, about 65% of homes that receive social services support include a person with a disability. People with disabilities are often the poorest in our society, and women with disabilities are often the poorest among them. Yet, the Province’s economic development plans so far include no mention of planning for inclusion, accessibility, or other strategies to ensure people with disabilities can share fully and equally in “Island prosperity.”

✎ Government reports that the Rural Development Strategy will “break from traditional approaches to development” to create a more holistic approach to development that should result in more inclusive strategy and more inclusive implementation to achieve the best possible results for women and men in rural PEI. We look forward to evidence of this in the Strategy when it is developed. However, there is no formal commitment at this point to include in the new approach to development social economy activities such as volunteer work, cooperatives, or caregiving. And what about traditional areas of economic development, such as farming, fishing, and tourism, where women have worked hard to have their role in family enterprises recognized? Women could be change agents in these industries.

✎ The “Office of Public Engagement” proposed by government in the 2008 Speech from the Throne has not come into being. Community organizations and our organization looked forward to being a resource to staff of the office about community engagement, strong relationships and collaborations with community organizations, and inclusive public consultations processes. To the best of community organizations’ knowledge, the Office of Public Engagement doesn’t exist, although Executive Council reports that it fulfills the role of the Office in advising government-led or commissioned public consultation processes.

✎ Across the board, but there is growing concern in the community about this government’s uneven and unpredictable interactions with grassroots organizations and the drivers of the social economy.

✎ If the closure of rural schools was not explicitly a gender issue before the trustees’ vote, it became a gender issue when all the female trustees voted against school closures, based on their concerns, shared by many women, about impacts on communities and families and their dissatisfaction with the decision-making process.

→ There is still time and opportunity to make input on the Rural Development Strategy. The Rural Development Division reports that they communicate consistently with rural women about events and opportunities of interest, and that they are aware of the importance of having equal representation of women on various community boards, and therefore promote female participation on boards. That being said, no women’s organizations we know of were invited to the launch event of the discussion paper “Renewing Rural Prince Edward Island,” and women are not mentioned directly in the document.

Equality for PEI Report Card

MAKING EQUALITY A PRIORITY, *continued*

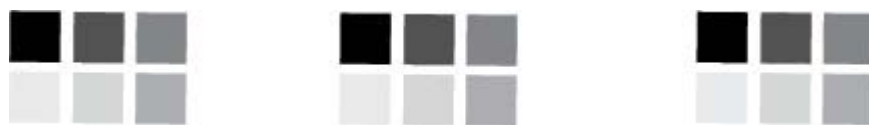
Update of 1996 statistical profile of women on PEI

B

➤ Finally, a long-awaited draft is in progress to update the statistical portrait of women that was compiled in 1996. So far, so good: the process has already been consultative and collaborative, with input from the Status of Women Council and women's community organizations to help identify what kinds of data are needed in the profile. Council is hopeful that collaboration will continue and that we will be invited to provide input on a draft when it is completed.

➔ Anticipated print date for this project is winter 2010. We hope government will stand behind the findings of the statistical review and use the data systematically and well for increased gender-sensitive decision-making. This should include making formal connections with other provincial statistical exercises, such as the Annual Review of Statistics and the work currently underway on Community Accounts.

Pockets within the government have been actively working to incorporate more considerations of gender into their work, but leadership is key to system-wide thinking and action. Government willingly participated in this Equality Report Card process, which we view as a positive sign that future improvements will likely result, and that we will see those results more clearly in the coming two years.



WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING: C

To increase women's participation in the highest levels of decision-making, we expect the provincial government to actively encourage women's advancement and break down barriers to women's leadership.

Increased equality in appointments to agencies, boards, and commissions

C

➤ Participate in PEI has planned a marketing effort for June 2009 to encourage a new intake of applicants, and the effort will highlight the need for women on ABCs, including as chairs. A new application form will invite applicants to identify under-represented groups they are a part of.

➤ Almost 30% of applicants to Participate in PEI since April 2008 have been women. (This is an increase over last year, but there were many more total applicants last year than this year.) Close to 40% of appointees since April 2008 have been women, a small decline over last year but based on fewer appointments. Participate in PEI continues to seek a 50/50 gender balance in appointments, as well as appointments of chairs and vice-chairs, and we congratulate the office for continued attention to this item.

➤ Women and under-represented groups face societal barriers to nominating themselves through the Participate in PEI process. Because of these barriers, the number and proportion of women who put their names forward is not likely to increase much "naturally." Active recruitment strategies are needed to ensure more equal representation, and a marketing strategy all by itself is not enough. Recruitment could include outreach, such as organizing and offering an "Introduction to ABCs" session that could be presented across the province. Additionally, the Participate in PEI office needs also to put a priority on appointing more women in non-traditional areas for greater equity.

WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING, *continued*

Gender focus and gender-based strategies applied in the Special Committee on the Role of the MLA, to examine and reduce barriers to women in elected office

D

↘ The Special Committee on the Role of the MLA was proposed by government in the 2008 Speech from the Throne, but the Committee is still in the planning stages. They profess good intentions for their focus. For instance, they state that they expect one of the key issues the committee will examine is how the current role of the MLA is less appealing for women and how that can be changed. However, the terms of reference have not been set, so this intended focus cannot be confirmed.

Increased employment equity, especially women in leadership roles, within the provincial civil service

B

↗ The Public Service is clearly the most important employer of women on PEI. Women make up over 70% of departmental staff and almost 53% of management. Most of these women are employed full-time and in permanent positions. This is good news. Given the Province's role as a major employer of women, its leadership on employment equity is all the more important to pay attention to.

↗ Judging from the initiatives we've seen reported for this Report Card, the departments that seem to be making the most progress to understand and act on gender issues tend to be those with a strong balance between the number of women working in the department and the number of women managers – not necessarily just those with the highest percentage of women employees. There is a less than 4% difference between the percentage of women employees and the percentage of women managers in the Provincial Treasury, Agriculture, and the Attorney General's Office, and there is a less than 9% difference between the percentage of women employees and the percentage of women managers in Social Services and Seniors, Education and Early Childhood Development, and Health. This is good news.

↗ The new Public Service Leadership program with UPEI has a strong complement of women participants. This creates hope for ongoing positive contributions by women.

→ Women make up from 16% of any department (Transportation & Public Works) to 85% of the departmental workforce (Health). Women make up from 7% of managers (Transportation & Public Works) to 77% of managers (Health).

→ In the future, it will be important to examine more closely ways to make the most unbalanced departments more balanced in terms of gender. Just over 70% of all women who work for the provincial government work in Health. Outside Health, Social Services, and Education (the "traditional" areas of women's employment), women make up only 44% of the civil service.

Working to include more women in decision-making is not just a numbers game. Around the world, in governments and public spheres where women are more fairly represented, policy changes tend to follow to make life better for women and their families. Societies benefit from having diverse life experiences and perspectives among their leaders. The recent gender split among elected school trustees highlighted this point: male and female trustees clearly made their decisions about school closures on different bases. Our government is taking some steps to reduce barriers to women participating in provincial leadership, but the process is slow and many barriers remain, especially for women in non-traditional fields.

FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION: B-

To reduce violence in our province, we expect the provincial government to provide for community-based, women-led, pro-feminist programs and services that prevent violence against women specifically and family violence more generally, and that provide services when violence occurs.

Enhanced core funding for Family Violence Prevention Services and the Rape and Sexual Assault Centre to support them to flourish as community organizations

C-

↗ Government reports that both Family Violence Prevention Services and the Rape and Sexual Assault Centre received additional funding last year that a further increase for both organizations will result from the 2009/2010 budget. We look forward to hearing more details about these investments in vital community-based services.

↗ The Interministerial Women's Secretariat has provided funding for in-house staff training at PEI Family Violence Prevention Services.

→ After a very long wait, the Province has finally filled the Family Violence Prevention and Community Development Coordinator position and begun to reconstitute the Premier's Action Committee on Family Violence Prevention. The Status of Women Council was very concerned to see these important roles unfilled for so long and looks forward to a commitment that violence against women, with its roots in gender inequality, will be a strong focus for government policy, planning, and programming in the realm of family violence prevention.

↘ While it is accurate to say that funding will increase for crucial community-based services for victims of violence, it is important to ask if that funding is enough to support sustainability. Government has supported organizational reviews and restructuring for FVPS and the Rape and Sexual Assault Centre: now it is time to ensure they can thrive under their renewed models. For instance, Family Violence Prevention Services has not historically received provincial funding for 100% of the work that they do. They undertake fundraising for about \$60,000 a year, just to be equipped to meet community need for their services. Without larger increases, organizations' ability to focus on preventing violence, in addition to providing emergency services after the fact, may be increasingly limited when they could instead be expanded, to everyone's benefit (as suggested on page 7).

Increased application of existing Woman Abuse Protocols, with more protocols developed as needed

B

↗ Council is heartened to see movement to increase application of Woman Abuse Protocols and to enhance training in the protocols across affected government departments and services. Promising, government-initiated recent meetings among officials from affected departments evaluated the need for updates and helped identify gaps to be filled. These meetings also served to increase awareness of the protocols and their importance.

↗ It is gratifying to see that government departments are identifying areas for improvement. This is particularly important given unstable project funding for community groups that might otherwise be able to undertake long-term follow-up and evaluation of Woman Abuse Protocols.

→ We continue to wait for action or follow-up on a Woman Abuse Protocol for the Child Protection Act. Also, as part of the Disability Support Services Review, we called for funding to assess the need for new Woman Abuse Protocols to support women with disabilities. We hope that when government acts on the Review, it will consider the particular needs of women who face the risk of violence and will develop a Woman Abuse Protocols for women with disabilities.

FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION, *continued*

Targetted programs for preventing violence against women of various ages (youth, seniors) and/or various vulnerable groups (Aboriginal women, women with disabilities, new immigrant women)

B

↗ Government has shown leadership with anti-violence programs to support Aboriginal women, including steps towards a domestic violence treatment program, and an Aboriginal coordinator to provide cultural recognition in Social Services and support to aboriginal communities.

↗ A new Attorney General's Office policy on Management of High Risk Offenders (effective October 2008) helps identify and ensure coordinated case management approaches to high-risk domestic violence situations.

↗ We were pleased to see that women's emergency shelters will be exempted from changes to the Smoke Free Places Act. This will help protect women who have sought shelter from intimate partner violence.

→ The Province has established a \$50,000/year training fund to complement training budgets of the municipal police departments, and there's continued priority on family violence as a provincial priority for policing by the RCMP under the provincial policing services contract. However, we continue to hear mixed reviews of the frequency, adequacy, content, and effectiveness of police training.

→ The Seniors' Secretariat has been active in raising awareness of elder abuse and ensuring preventing this abuse is a priority. Last year's focus on caregiver stress during World Elder Abuse Awareness Day was good. It remains unclear if the particular causes and effects of violence against women are recognized as a particular and ongoing focus of elder abuse strategies.

→ The recently released Disability Services Review includes recommendations to address the need for training for service providers and persons with disabilities in the area of family violence and the need to provide training to Family Violence Prevention service providers on disability issues. However, the Review effectively ignores gender as a special consideration, despite the staggering risk of violence women with disabilities face. The Review states that violence "is a potential risk for all people with disabilities." This is true, and general measures are important, but we hope that when government acts on the Review, they will consider measures for women in particular.

→ There is great potential for effective new investment in preventing violence. As suggested above, this funding would be best placed in core funding to community organizations that already exist and that already place a high value on being inclusive and meeting the needs of a diverse population. Targetted programs can make an important difference for groups with unique needs. Some groups that continue to be underserved in our province include young women, especially those between 16 and 18 years old who fall between cracks in the system; immigrant women, especially those who face language and cultural barriers; and same-sex couples. More investment in piloting prevention programs that focus on intervening with abusers to have them change their behaviour and take responsibility for violence could also make a difference for many victims of violence.

The government seems to be finding its footing again with respect to work on family violence prevention. This is good news. And yet, as the work gains new energy at the provincial level, we will be keeping close watch to ensure that family violence prevention strategies and mechanisms pay special attention to the violence against women that is rooted in women's historical and continuing inequality. The Premier and the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women named and addressed violence against women on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. We hope this is a sign from the top that this inescapable aspect of family violence will be recognized as a priority across government.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE: C+

Access to family law legal aid continues to be a challenge for Island women. Most calls to the PEI Status of Women office continue to be from women who need a lawyer's advice. In many cases, they cannot afford a lawyer. We expect government to continue to place high priority on ensuring women and families have access to justice.

Improved access to family law legal aid lawyers

C+

➤ Following last year's 28% budget increase (\$299,000) for legal aid, and through a partnership with the Law Foundation of PEI, the province hired one additional family law legal aid lawyer for the Legal Aid Office in Summerside. The position has been filled by a bilingual lawyer. This is good news and will reduce waiting lists.

➤ Increased funding also enabled additional referrals to outside counsel when legal aid services cannot be provided by a staff lawyer, though we understand these fees may be paid at less than competitive rates and be subject to a maximum number of hours.

⚡ Despite these new investments and the new hiring, we hear that access to family law legal aid is still challenging for too many women. Women in crisis and in danger do not face waiting lists for lawyers, but we continue to hear that they face delays accessing justice. We continue to support priority placement and full funding for women in the greatest and most urgent need, including women with children. However, for women whose situations are clearly serious but are not assessed as urgent, waiting lists have been long, especially in Charlottetown. Women without dependants, senior women, and low-income working women face the greatest challenges to accessing assistance. We hear that some women who can't afford a lawyer simply feel helpless and hopeless and give in to the demands of their spouse, just to get out of the relationship. This cannot be good for families or for society.

⚡ There is a federal aspect to this issue. Historically across Canada, financial cut-offs to access legal aid have been too low, and the cut-offs have not kept pace with increases in the cost of living. It has become harder and harder for low-to-middle-income Canadians to hire lawyers in the private sector, and at the same time it has been harder and harder for them to meet the eligibility requirements for legal aid.

Steps towards a domestic violence court option

C

➤ Minister Responsible for the Status of Women Valerie Docherty has publicly stated her support for moving towards a domestic violence court option with the inter-departmental working group and with other Ministers. This is good news.

➤ Discussions have taken place over the last year to determine feasibility of a domestic violence court option, and we understand that these have used community recommendations to guide the early stages of considering what kind of court would work best for PEI.

→ The discussions led by the Office of Attorney General and Interministerial Women's Secretariat and including the Departments of Health and Social Services and Seniors are focused on a determining the needs and concerns of government departments to implement a domestic violence court option This cross-departmental consultation process is taking a long time, but we are hopeful that the time invested will result in better results.

⚡ The Status of Women Council sees these as small steps, which we already acknowledged in last year's Report Card. Council wishes to support government to move towards larger, more substantive steps and to participate in community input about models and best practices for a domestic violence court option.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE, *continued***Actions to implement the recommendations of the Justice Options for Women project****C**

➤ A highlight of action to implement Justice Options is that Victim Services and the Interministerial Women's Secretariat divisions of government actively participate on the Advisory Committee for Circles of Support and Accountability. Victim Services staff assist to identify and support women who may benefit from a circle of safety and support, and this translates into more use of the circles. In the past year, three clients of Victim Services, with the support of a Victim Services Worker, participated in a community-coordinated safety circle.

➤ The Steering Committee of the Victims of Family Violence Act has been working for a number of years to assist with monitoring and training related to the Act. The Committee attempts to identify issues related to family violence which require systemic responses: custody issues have been identified as an area in need of work. This is a positive step, though we ask who will monitor who provides this training and what attitudes they bring towards women's equality.

➤ The Office of the Attorney General supported six staff from various sectors to attend a Justice Canada Symposium and a Federal/Provincial/Territorial (FPT) meeting in February 2009 on "Family Violence: The Intersection of Family and Criminal Justice System Responses." The symposium permitted participants to identify the challenges posed by the different objectives and legal standards of criminal and family justice system responses to family violence from the perspective of families. Participants discussed innovative and promising mechanisms to respond to challenges and better link the two systems.

➤ The FPT meeting provided officials an opportunity to discuss the symposium, to enhance links between FPT committees, to share information on challenges, and to showcase promising practices to respond. This symposium appears to have been influential among provincial officials.

➔ Government took an active part in developing the recommendations from the Justice Options project, and these recommendations continue to have legs, though this year saw fewer of the small-but-concrete actions on recommendations than we saw in last year's Report Card. Community involvement and consultation, especially with women's groups, will continue to be important in access to justice issues.

Despite measures to support women who experience violence as they move through the justice system, despite much-valued programs such as Victim Services or the Aboriginal Justice Program, despite significant investment in family law legal aid, the system remains wanting. Many – in fact, most – women and families are left without legal aid for family matters as important and as hard to negotiate as separation, divorce, custody, access, and child or spousal support. Criminal law legal aid remains better funded federally, even while provinces such as PEI devote more to family and civil legal aid than to criminal legal aid. We need to build on initiatives already underway that enhance access to justice through services and programs designed to provide access to the courts and to legal relief, without depending on having a lawyer for every case and every client. We need to go further and re-think the whole system of family law and consider measures that encourage mediation and/or parallel processes outside the courts (where these would be appropriate and safe).

SUPPORTS FOR CAREGIVING: C

Early childhood care and education has been a particular policy focus recently, and this has implications for caregivers. From childcare, to supports for caregivers of people with disabilities, to home care for ailing adults and seniors, we expect government to recognize unpaid or underpaid labour provided by caregivers, most frequently women. Government must not enact policies that increase the burden on caregivers, without increasing supports.

Additional investment in early childhood care and education that increases quality, accessibility, affordability, and focus on child development

C

- Of \$10.6 million in budget increases earmarked for Education and Early Childhood Development, \$250,000 (2.4% of the total) is allocated for inclusion of kindergarten in the public school system. Government anticipates this amount will support kindergarten teachers to upgrade credentials and provide for additional professional development for school teams which will now include kindergarten teachers.
- Other investments and initiatives this past year have focused on funding to kindergartens to support larger enrollments caused by changes in age of entry, initiatives in early intervention, continued support for Best Start for new parents and babies up to 24 months, and continued funding for community-supported activity through the Partnerships for Children program.
- The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is also providing funding to the Children's Secretariat to make changes to the Child Care Subsidy Policy.
- Last year, we were pleased to see early childhood development moved to the Department of Education. We echo the Early Childhood Development Association in asking: What structures and infrastructure for early childhood development are and will be within the newly merged Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to specifically support early childhood development?
- Government continues to incrementally increase investment in Early Childhood Care and Education, but the focus remains on school-aged children. There is still a fundamental need for accessible, affordable, universal, high-quality, developmentally based child care, especially in PEI where we have the highest level of workforce participation in the country for mothers of young children. Wages are very low in PEI (the lowest hourly and yearly wages in Canada), and wages for early childhood educators remain low, too. The only way to bridge the gap between what Island workers can afford to pay and what educators require to make a sustainable living is public investment. Of course, this is not exclusively a provincial responsibility, and the Province can't be held accountable for the federal government's failure to support early childhood care and education. Meaningful investment in children in the early years remains our best, most broad-based investment – especially given what we now understand about early childhood development. Providing universal programs for children and parents is the best way to improve the quality of life into the future for our society.
- A concern for the near future: When kindergarten moves into the public schools, early childhood centres that previously included kindergarten programs will see about a 30% loss of revenue to support the bare bones of their centres, programs, and staff. Currently, the only way to recoup this loss of revenue would be to ask for more from parents (about \$45 a week from parents who pay \$150 a week at present). Unless one or another level of government steps in, there will be no other revenue stream to make up the difference.
- To benefit more young Island children and their families, investments to help the public school system adjust to the transition of kindergarten into public schools need to be matched by investments to help the early childhood care and education sector adjust to these changes and to the effects of decreased enrollment.

Consultation and planning with early-childhood educators for changes in early childhood care and education

C

→ Government has supported some degree of consultation with early-childhood educators, which educators hope will make a difference to planning for caring for and educating young children on the Island. However, consultation has been on limited terms. Last year, government made decisions about moving kindergarten into the public system and about school entry age changes with no consultation with the early childhood care and education sector. This year's consultation processes are not open to changing these decisions; only to acting on them.

↗ The Public Kindergarten Commissioner, Pat Mella, and the Department, have consulted with key community groups and the Department has funded a study to allow these groups to examine the impact of the move of kindergarten into the public school system. Their results so far show a lot of concern and insecurity among early childhood centre educators and owners, a priority concern for government to address without delay.

→ What is most important is what happens next. It will be absolutely essential for government to act very swiftly on the recommendations of the Public Kindergarten Commissioner's report. Recent rural school closures will now have additional significant impacts on planning for kindergartens to move into public schools. Early Childhood Educators, public school districts, and parents of young children (especially parents of four-year-olds) all must know as soon as possible where and how kindergartens are going to be operated as of September 2010. The implications are important for childcare centres, schools, and families, and any delay or hesitation will make the transition all the more difficult. Time is already short.

Measures to address the needs of seniors for elder care, home care, and other non-professional services in their homes and communities

C

↗ The additional funding promised for homecare in the recent budget is significant: \$2.2 million dollars, or almost 8% of new spending in Health.

↗ Social Services supports programs to allow seniors to remain in their own homes and communities longer, including the Seniors Emergency Home Repair program (matched grant of \$1,500 for low income seniors for repairs to enhance livability and comfort). The 2009/2010 budget increases this program by \$150,000 to bring it to \$500,000.

→ It is still unclear where government sees the balance between support for seniors to live in their homes and communities and support for their caregivers, so that the pressure does not fall to family, neighbours, and friends (most often women). New investment in homecare is welcome: is it sufficient? What about wraparound services, such as broad-based public transit that works in concert with specialized services such as Transportation West (which received welcome increased funding in the budget)?

↘ Community organizations see the Salvation Army Fuel Program as an unfortunate example of the government off-loading responsibility for managing an important program for low-income Islanders onto a volunteer organization, and an example of treating a social program as "charity" rather than public policy. We would like to see government consult with the community to develop effective partnership models for work with community organizations and agencies.

Supports for caregiving are a crucial aspect of economic development on PEI, where we have high labourforce participation rates. In rural regions, where there are higher concentrations of seniors and children and lower concentrations of working-age adults, especially because of out-migration to other provinces for work, the caregiving burden is especially significant. Much of this care falls to women. While there have been important initiatives to support caregivers this past year, these steps are counterbalanced by the ongoing needs of children, seniors, and their caregivers for support.

WOMEN'S HEALTH: C-

We expect government to sustain a strong system for acute care, but to relieve future burdens on the acute care system by continuing to take steps that recognize whole-body holistic health and that address social determinants of health such as gender, income, language, and culture. We encourage government to demonstrate a commitment to wellness and prevention in health.

Enhanced initiatives to provide appropriate, gender-specific mental health programming

D

➤ Additional mental health and addictions staff resources for the O'Leary area are a sign that government is paying attention to particular needs.

→ A new Mental Health Services strategy is underway, with an initial focus on "system accountability" and "coordination of service delivery." We look forward to finding out what this means.

✘ In a budget with \$28 million in increases to healthcare spending, the increase to Community Mental Health is about \$375,300, less than 1.5% of the total new health spending. Mental health services have not gained priority within the health system and remain under strain.

✘ A concern we have heard is that women with mental health problems or progressive dementia face a serious risk of losing their right to make their own decisions in this province. (Women with intellectual challenges have expressed the same concern.) The Province can appoint a guardian to make decisions on behalf of a person who is deemed to lack capacity, and there is no provincial Ombudsperson to turn to with concerns, no one to investigate and address rights violations. Despite having drafted supported decision-making legislation more than ten years ago, PEI still does not have a law that would make guardianship an option only as a last resort.

Enhanced services for women with addictions

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➤ We are encouraged by increased investment in addictions services (over \$900,000 additional dollars over last year), investment in mental health and addictions services in particular regions of the Island, and better communication and coordination between Mental Health and Addictions.

➤ Enhancements to Lacey House, the extended care facility/recovery home for women in Charlottetown, demonstrate government's commitment to continue important gender-specific services. Still needed, though, are physically accessible extended care facilities or recovery homes, for both women and men, and facilities in Summerside as well as Charlottetown.

➤ Council values having a strong Youth Addictions Strategy, and we express a sincere hope that taking gender into consideration remains a priority for the working groups involved with advancing the strategy.

✘ Council continues to be concerned about addressing the root causes of women's addictions, coordinating care for women with mental health and addictions problems, lack of diversity in the models of treatment available, the need for treatment tailored for different kinds of drugs, and challenges for women to leave their home communities and to find child care to receive treatment at Mt. Herbert Provincial Addictions Treatment Facility.

✘ We continue to question the Province's decision to take over the needle exchange program for intravenous drug users from the community-based organization, AIDS-PEI, that ran it at arms-length from government. It is good to hear government is reconsidering a poorly chosen location for the Charlottetown service, but women who use intravenous drugs will continue to refuse to go to a government-run facility to exchange needles.

Increased integration of nurse practitioners into the health-care system, including instituting a Sexual Abuse Nurse Examiner (SANE) program

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➤ In the Island health system, there are now three nurse practitioners active on the Island, one more than last year.

➤ A Sexual Abuse Nurse Examiner (SANE) program might be in place as soon as 2010, when the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Emergency Department moves into their new location. We look forward to a formal, public commitment by government to establish a SANE program.

➔ “Integrating” nurse practitioners into the system will require efforts to create good and supportive working environments and health care models that include nurse practitioners. The Corpus Sanchez report on Integrated Health System Review in PEI calls for “a long-term strategy to increase use of nurse practitioners” and “expansion of the nurse practitioner model [in support of community-based primary health care], including redefining the nature of the collaborative practice model so that access to nurse practitioners is not impeded due to the lack of an on-site family physician.” These are recommendations we look forward to seeing implemented.

Steps towards increased birthing options for Island women, towards an eventual birthing centre

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➤ It's good news that both the Queen Elizabeth Hospital is now permitting mothers and babies to be cared for together in the mother's room 24 hours a day, and by the same nurse when possible. It is also great that the facilities at the Prince County Hospital are up-to-date for meeting women's needs for family-centred maternity care.

➤ The facilities at the QEH simply don't accommodate family-centred maternity care that meets Health Canada guidelines. The timeline the QEH has given for updating its maternity unit is 7 to 8 years. That's a lot of babies and new moms waiting for improved family-centred care.

➤ Women on PEI still have few birth options beyond hospital births, and while there is more awareness in government about the need for choices, there have been no steps towards regulating midwifery, which is critical to expanding birth options. PEI is now the last province in Canada with no midwifery regulation and funding, even though the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada supports regulated midwifery as part of the health care team. We hear some women are choosing to have unassisted home births because of lack of options.

➤ PEI has active doulas (birth support people), but few women can pay for this private service. International controlled trials show that having a doula present for a birth consistently leads to a 50% reduction in the rate of cesarean section (Klaus and Kennell). In PEI, we had 1,348 births in 2006/2007. According to the Canadian average, 18.6% of these, or about 250 births, would have been a primary cesarean section (Canadian Institute of Health Information). In 2002/2003, it cost on average \$1,800 more to care for mothers with cesarean sections than mothers who gave birth vaginally. If all mothers had access to a doula and the rate of sections reduced by half, this could result in savings of at least \$225,000 a year on PEI, an amount that could fully subsidize doula care for about 25% of pregnant Island women.

The focus for healthcare in PEI continues to be acute care rather than health promotion, wellness, illness prevention, or holistic health. Health has seen the largest proportion of increases in public investment in the past year, but not a great deal of this has been directed to gender-specific services. And there are still serious gaps, especially the complete lack of access to abortion services in the province. On the other hand, there have been good steps: a new youth sexual health clinic in Charlottetown, improved neonatal care, investment in more cancer drugs, commitment to a stroke unit, and free use of ambulance services for seniors. However, it is alarming that government invests so little on anti-poverty measures, food security, and social determinants of health compared to the acute healthcare that treats the end results of poverty at such high costs to human lives and society.

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC STATUS: D

We expect the provincial government to set a priority on improving the health, dignity, and well-being of Islanders who struggle with a less than livable income. We urge the government to consult and collaborate with community-based organizations to develop a Poverty Reduction Strategy like those in other provinces. We see the three priority areas below as key elements of Poverty Reduction:

Improvements to the Employment Standards Act that improve working conditions and wages for non-unionized workers

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- We were happy a new statutory holiday, Islander Day, was instituted. This will help contribute to work-life balance in many Island families.
- Long-awaited updates to the Employment Standards Act that protects non-unionized workers on PEI were publicly promised for the fall, and then the spring, sitting of the legislature, but they were not brought forward in either sitting.
- Public consultation on Employment Standards was extensive and was completed more than three years ago. Community organizations devoted hundreds of hours to analyzing the legislation and making recommendations and presentations. The Review Panel's recommendations for change were delivered to the new government two years ago. Work to revise the legislation has been done: it is past time to make the proposed updates.
- Among the Review Panel's proposed updates to benefit workers are reduced qualification threshold for caregiving leaves; extension to maternity leave if the baby is ill; strengthened provisions for caregiving leaves requiring employer to grant an employee the option of maintaining a benefit plan if employee pays the costs; enhanced definition of "family member" for compassionate care leave; and three weeks' paid vacation after eight years continuous employment with the same employer. However, we still have heard no public commitment that these recommendations will be set forward in the updated legislation. We also don't know if there will be other changes that may offset positive changes or even be negative for women and their families.
- There is still no systematic process for legislation such as the Employment Standards Act to undergo a full evidence-based review based on gender and diversity considerations.
- The 2009 increase to the minimum wage means the minimum wage is headed in the right direction, but it does not raise the wage to a livable amount. At \$8.40/hr full-time, full-year minimum wage workers still fall below the poverty line. Also, government doesn't demonstrate a long-term plan for wages: increases only go as far as this year, and the minimum wage is not indexed to the cost of living. We continued to have the lowest hourly and yearly wages in the country, year after year, and the minimum wage serves as an "anchor" weighing all wages down across the province.

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC STATUS, *continued*

Investment in affordable, accessible, appropriate housing, including housing designed to meet the needs of seniors and persons with disabilities

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➤ In May, the federal and provincial governments announced combined funding of \$13 million to build new affordable housing and help low-income households with renovations to their homes. This is the most substantial investment in affordable housing we've seen in a long time, and we look forward to seeing the funding used well and quickly for housing projects on PEI. This investment is urgently needed: people who live on the edge of poverty describe the housing situation as a crisis. CMHC estimates that 6,200 households in PEI are in core housing need ("Households which occupy housing that falls below any of the dwelling adequacy, suitability or affordability standards, and which would have to spend 30 per cent or more of their before-tax income to pay for the median rent of alternative local market housing that meet all three standards"). Of these, 1,800 are senior-led; 3,800 are renters (and 1,100 of these are seniors). PEI has the highest proportion of seniors with core housing need in Atlantic Canada, at about 29% of all those with core housing need.

➤ There have been 132 new units of affordable housing built since 2003, representing an investment of \$3 million. Of these, 64 have been designated for persons with disabilities and 14 for seniors. The November 2008 Capital Budget (for infrastructure/building/etc.) announced \$3 million for new seniors' housing from 2009 to 2011. Work is underway to determine the most appropriate use of funds.

➤ Government has increased the income limits on a property tax deferral program for seniors from \$30,000 to \$35,000, a move that will make more seniors eligible for a program which helps them stay in their homes longer.

→ The January 2009 federal budget included funding for new seniors' housing and housing for people with disabilities. Funding requires cost-matching from the Province, and they are reviewing the terms to determine future provincial contributions. We are waiting to see how the Province matches these funds.

→ Other recent cost-matched programs have relied heavily on community and charity partnership; of this, \$700,000 will be spent on housing initiatives to be completed by summer 2009: special new housing initiatives for low-income aboriginal seniors, first-time aboriginal homeowners and First Nations persons who require temporary transitional housing.

✘ We hear that many of the new physically accessible housing units are currently rented to people without disabilities, despite high demand for housing among people with disabilities. Policies for housing allotment may need to be reviewed with a disability lens; for instance, to ensure that people with disabilities who live with an attendant have this fact considered fairly when household income is measured.

✘ PEI ecoENERGY audit assistance and energy efficiency grants programs offer additional assistance to low-income households (defined as household income below \$30,000) and provide assistance to low-income clients in accessing the programs, through three program assistants. However, groups that work with people who lack livable income have been quite concerned about government's approach to providing energy efficiency help for low-income Islanders. For instance, programs for renters are inadequate, even though many renters have low incomes and poor energy efficiency in their homes. The committee that the Office of Energy Efficiency struck to increase uptake among low-income Islanders took an approach that was criticized for lack of effectiveness, sensitivity, and social justice. It was focused on getting service organizations to do promotional work for the Office on a volunteer basis.

Increased allotment of funds for direct payment to social services recipients to bring them up to a standard of living in which all basic needs are met

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- Food rates for people receiving Social Assistance will be increased by 10% in June 2009. This is a budgetary increase of nearly half a million dollars. Social Assistance shelter rates were increased by 1% in April 2008 and will be further increased by 5% in June 2009.
- Rates for clients in community care facilities had their subsidized per diem increased by \$5/day in July 2008. (Over the past three years, this daily rate has increased by 22%.)
- ➔ The Social Assistance Healthy Child Allowance has increased \$3 per child per month, tied to the increase in the National Child Benefit which is now indexed to the Consumer Price Index. However, this amount will make little difference in most families' budgets and still does not compensate for the provincial clawback of the Child Tax Benefit.
- ➔ PEI has decided to exempt income from the federal Working Income Tax Benefit from any Social Services income-tested programs, to ensure the intended benefit of this program is maximized. However, two other provinces and one territory have already enhanced this program, and PEI would do well to do the same.
- ⚠ There have been increases to social assistance rates, but our rating has not increased over last year. Why? The standard has not been met: PEI's people living on social assistance will still not be able to meet their basic needs on the amounts allocated by government. Not enough is still not enough. The 10% increase in food rate is significant, and it is an important public policy measure that may take some pressure off community charity responses to poverty such as food banks and soup kitchens. But it is shocking to us that this long-overdue increase in food rates for some of our province's most vulnerable citizens was so hard to achieve when the amount required, just half a million dollars, is comparatively small.
- ⚠ There has been no action towards the promised Poverty Reduction Strategy to consider how we are doing across the province and across departments to assist people who live in poverty. There is no political will to name the problem of poverty and to provide poverty reduction initiatives. The full-time position in government that is meant to be dedicated to Poverty Reduction has been vacant for over a year. It is clear that to address poverty in this province all of government's leadership must be on board, and all departments must play a part and work together.

The big disappointment in this category is government's failure to act on its commitment to work towards a Poverty Reduction Strategy for PEI. Our provincial Budget did not even contain the word "poverty." To meaningfully reduce poverty in the province, action must take place within a framework. There must be a well-coordinated plan, with buy-in and leadership from across government. We continue to call on the provincial government to consult and collaborate with community-based organizations to develop a Poverty Reduction Strategy built from the grassroots on a similar model to that in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thanks

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- The Premier, the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, and all Ministers and Deputy Ministers of government.

Within the community:

- Representatives and leaders of the province's four provincial political parties.
- Representatives from community organizations including BORN PEI, Chief Mary Bernard Memorial Women's Shelter, Early Childhood Development Association, East Prince Women's Information Centre, Institute of Island Studies, Justice Options for Women project, PEI Coalition for Women in Government, PEI Family Violence Prevention Services, PEI Council of People with Disabilities, PEI People First, PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre, Women's Network PEI, and PEI Working Group for a Livable Income (and its member groups).
- Individual women in the community who were consulted by Advisory Council members for their comments and perspectives.
- Women who have called the Advisory Council on the Status of Women office to share their experiences and to help us identify the gaps in policy, services, and legislation that affect their lives.



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