

Gender Equity Status Update Report

December 2019



Table of Contents

Message from Mitzi Dean, Parliamentary Secretary for Gender Equity	3
I. Executive Summary	4
II. Advancing Economic and Political Empowerment.....	5
III. Eliminating Systemic Barriers to Gender Equity.....	7
IV. Ending Gender-Based Violence	9
V. Conclusion & Priorities Ahead.....	11

Message from Mitzi Dean, Parliamentary Secretary for Gender Equity



Our lives and communities are enriched every day by the many different people and cultures that make up British Columbia.

In my role as Parliamentary Secretary for Gender Equity, I meet people around the province who

are directly and deeply affected by injustice and barriers because of their gender.

Too often, women and gender-diverse people experience multiple barriers – such as poverty, racism, ableism, homophobia or transphobia.

Gender equity means people of all genders are treated fairly and have the same opportunities. Everyone has the right to be respected, included and safe in their home, community and place of work.

Having a strong economy that works for everyone is supported by gender equity. Work is underway across government to remove barriers, provide more opportunities for training and good jobs, and encourage inspiring new leaders.

We are working to advance gender equality throughout B.C by expanding access to child care, health care, education and training, affordable housing, counselling and crisis support services, as well as support for people facing domestic violence and sexual assault.

When all British Columbians can reach their full potential – regardless of their gender, race, class, sexual orientation or ability – our communities are stronger, more accessible and better places for everyone. I believe this is more than possible if we stand up for what's fair and right, and work on removing systemic barriers.

I am very grateful for the many community partners, advocates and leaders who are helping drive change and support those who need our help.

Together, we are creating a B.C. where everyone can live free of discrimination and violence, thrive and be successful.

Equity and equality are often defined as two strategies that can be used to achieve fairness. Equity is giving everyone what they need to be successful – the means. Equality is treating everyone the same but it can only work if everyone starts from the same place and needs the same help – the end goal.

I. Executive Summary

B.C.'s Gender Equity Office in the Ministry of Finance has a broad mandate and a vision to achieve gender equality throughout British Columbia. Although much of the work is focused on women, the purpose is to support people of all genders.

This means that no matter if you are a man or a woman, trans or gender diverse, you are treated fairly and with respect.

This is important because people experience the world differently, and don't all have the same needs and opportunities. Treating people fairly doesn't always mean treating people the same way.

Vision: gender equality across British Columbia

With this vision as a guide, the Gender Equity Office has three main goals with work underway across government and with community partners to help make life better and more fair for all people.

GOALS:

- 1. Advance Economic & Political Empowerment**
It is important that all British Columbians have the power and authority to improve their lives regardless of gender. B.C. is helping to level the field by providing better access to child care, more training and good jobs. By providing the services British Columbians need, we are encouraging new, more diverse leaders to help grow our communities.
- 2. Eliminate Systemic Barriers to Gender Equity**
By removing systemic barriers that prevent people from reaching their full potential, it's possible to create equal opportunity for all British Columbians regardless of their gender identity.

3. End Gender-Based Violence

Tens of thousands of women, men and gender-diverse people are directly affected by violence just because of who they are. Sexual assault and violence all too often impact women, girls and gender diverse people, with devastating and long-lasting effects. There are supports to help people who face gender-based violence and work underway to encourage each of us to take a role in helping to end it.



II. Advancing Economic and Political Empowerment

“Although the road to gender equality still stretches long before us, we are on the right track,”

Minerva BC

It is important that all British Columbians have the power and authority to improve their lives regardless of gender.

Today, women in B.C. earn less, on average, than men. Women are more likely to work in lower-paid, part-time jobs and are less likely to be in leadership positions. Indigenous women, visible minority women and women with disabilities experience even larger pay gaps.

Women also make up a disproportionately large number of minimum wage workers. In addition, social expectations assign most of the responsibility for unpaid work and caregiving to women.

LGBTQ2S+ people and those in other marginalized groups are also too often excluded from opportunities to advance.

HELPING TO LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD

B.C. has more than 1.2 million women working – the most in B.C.’s history. Women represent nearly half of the current provincial labour force.

The introduction of B.C.’s child care plan has put B.C. on the path to universal child care so no parent has to choose between their career and family. This historic investment - \$1.3 billion - is the single most impactful way we can help more women obtain post-secondary education, retain their employment and advance in their careers. It is also an important way that we can grow our economy and address the workforce needs of the present – and future.

B.C. is also investing \$75 million in respite services and adult day programs over three years. This will also help support the disproportionate number of women providing unpaid caregiving and allow them to participate more fully in the economy.

B.C. has raised the minimum wage for workers and liquor servers – most of whom are women – and legislation has been introduced to ensure tips are paid to the employees who earned them.

TRAINING, EDUCATION & GOOD-PAYING JOBS

Women in skilled trades are receiving enhanced employment and skills training so that all British Columbians can benefit from good-paying jobs. These supports include:

- » No interest on B.C. student loans (61% of which are held by women)
- » \$1.8 million invested to support women working in the building trades
- » Encouraging more women and girls in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math)
- » Community Benefits Agreements introduced so that women, youth and Indigenous peoples have access to employment, training and apprenticeship opportunities on major infrastructure projects in B.C.



INCREASING WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

Women now make up over 49% of public sector board members in British Columbia, up from 41% in 2017 — an increase of 174 women.

B.C. is working in partnership with Minerva BC and leaders in the private sector to promote representation for women in leadership positions.

According to Minerva BC 2019 saw the biggest global increase in women in executive leadership roles, rising to 29%, which is a 20% increase from 2018.

WORKING WITH THE MINISTER'S ADVISORY COUNCIL ON INDIGENOUS WOMEN (MACIW)

The Parliamentary Secretary for Gender Equity takes advice from, and provides support to, MACIW in collaboration with the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation. This partnership helps to ensure that indigenous women's perspectives are recognized in government policy, programs and services.

GENDER-BASED ANALYSIS PLUS

GBA+ is a tool developed by the Status of Women Canada to assess how diverse groups of women/girls, men/boys and gender-diverse people may experience policies, programs and initiatives.

The "plus" in GBA+ acknowledges that GBA goes beyond biological (sex) and socio-cultural (gender) differences. We all have multiple identity factors that intersect to make us who we are. In addition to gender, GBA+ also considers many other identity factors, such as: Indigenous status, religion, sexual orientation, race, age, language, socio-economic status, mental and physical ability, etc.

More than 160 governments and international/regional institutions use a tool like GBA+ in their policy process. The BC Public Service is implementing GBA+ to ensure budgets, policies and programs serve the needs of British Columbians, regardless of their gender, race, class, sexual orientation or other identity factors.



III. Eliminating Systemic Barriers to Gender Equity

No one should ever live in fear because of who they are or who they love. Many gender diverse people in B.C. still face harassment and prejudice in their daily lives and are at increased risk for higher rates of violence, poverty and mental health issues.

B.C.'s Human Rights Commission, which was dismantled in 2002 - leaving B.C. as the only province in Canada without one - has been re-established to fight inequality and discrimination in all its forms.

A \$26 million investment has also been made to expand legal aid and improve access to affordable, quality legal services.

A MORE INCLUSIVE PROVINCE

To help all kids feel safe and accepted, the B.C. government is supporting sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) education in schools. We are proud that all 60 school districts in B.C. have signed on to the SOGI Educators Network.

The spectrum of gender identity is now included on B.C. government identification - British Columbians can choose X as a third option in the gender field.

We will be providing publicly-funded, gender-affirming lower surgeries in B.C., making us the first province in Western Canada to offer these essential procedures right here at home.

Government has also expanded coverage for HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), providing vital preventative protection from HIV to the people of B.C.

LGBTQ2S+ people are more than two times more likely to face violence than heterosexual people.

POVERTY REDUCTION

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Act, which came into effect in fall 2018, requires government to specifically consider women and persons of all genders, and LGBTQ2S+ persons within the poverty reduction strategy.

In March 2019, the B.C. government released TogetherBC, the Province's first Poverty Reduction Strategy, which brings together investments from across government that will, over the next five years, help reduce the overall poverty rate in the province by 25% and cut the child poverty rate in half.

As part of ongoing consultations on poverty reduction, the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction asked Aaron Devor, PhD, to plan and facilitate engagement sessions for LGBTQ2S+ communities throughout the province. Dr. Devor holds the inaugural position as the world's only Chair in Transgender Studies at University of Victoria. The consultation is focusin on understanding local needs and priorities for promoting social development and reducing poverty among transgender, non-binary and two spirit populations.

As part of TogetherBC, a series of changes to the BC Employment and Assistance program were made. One of these changes was modernizing the ministry's definition of spouse to better support people entering and leaving relationships by:

- » increasing the amount of time two people can live together in a common-law relationship before reducing their assistance to the lower couple's rate; and
- » providing the singles assistance rate to two married people who have separated but not yet divorced, and are living in the same residence independently.

Modernizing the definition of spouse aligns with the goals of the Gender Equity Office.

PERIOD PROMISE

Period Promise is an annual campaign run by United Way that seeks to connect vulnerable people with necessary menstrual supplies.

Menstruation is often treated with shame and silence that can leave people feeling isolated and alone. That stigma shouldn't exist, because menstruation and periods are a part of everyday life for more than half of the world's population.

In April 2019, all B.C. public schools were asked to provide free menstrual products for students in school washrooms by the end of the year.

Government also committed \$95,000 to the United Way Period Promise research project, which will distribute menstrual products to 12 non-profit agencies that serve vulnerable populations throughout the province. The agencies will make the products easily accessible to clients from July 2019 to July 2020.

WORKPLACE POLICY FOR THE BC PUBLIC SERVICE AND THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Most organizations have policies in place that set out the expectations for workplace behavior and guide the process for addressing concerns or complaints. For employees of the BC Public Service, the Oath of Employment, the Standards of Conduct and the Discrimination and Harassment Policy and collective agreement provisions clearly set out the expectations for workplace behaviour and the process for addressing concerns and complaints. Recent efforts were undertaken to ensure these remain aligned with current best practices.

The Legislative Assembly of B.C. is currently undertaking further work to enhance respectful workplace policies and processes for the employees of the Legislative Assembly.

ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY ACROSS CANADA

This year, B.C. is co-chair of the National Forum on the Status of Women. After close to two decades without any significant presence at this table, B.C. is proud to not only have a seat at the table, but to take a leadership role in identifying priorities to advance gender equality across Canada.



IV. Ending Gender-Based Violence

Tens of thousands of women, men and gender-diverse people are directly affected by violence against them just because of who they are.

Indigenous women, visible minority women, immigrant women, trans people and women with disabilities disproportionately experience gender-based harassment, sexual assault, violence and discrimination.

Over half of women in B.C. have experienced physical or sexual violence by the age of 16; that is more than one million women in our province.

SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE FACING VIOLENCE

B.C. provides over \$37 million annually in funding to support over 400 victim service and violence against women programs across the province.

Annual funding has been increased by \$5 million starting in 2018/19, which will be further increased by an additional \$3 million in 2020/21, for a total increase of \$18 million over three years to better meet the ongoing demand for programs and services such as counselling, outreach and crisis support for women and children who experience domestic violence, sexual assault and other crimes.

B.C. is also investing in transition homes for women leaving violence and providing funding for organizations that assist women who have experienced gender-based violence. Building B.C.: Women's Transition Housing Fund provides \$734 million over the next 10 years to build 1,500 new transition and safe homes, second stage housing

and affordable housing spaces for women leaving violence, including new housing options in remote and First Nations communities.

All Canadians pay a steep price for gender-based violence. It's estimated that each year, Canadians collectively spend \$7.4 billion to deal with the aftermath of spousal violence alone.

LEAVE FOR PEOPLE FACING DOMESTIC OR SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Recent changes to employment standards provide job-protected, unpaid leave for people who need time away from work after facing domestic or sexual violence. Before, people escaping, recovering or rebuilding their lives had no ability to take time from their jobs to find the solutions needed to make life safer for themselves and their families unless their employer agreed to the leave.

B.C. has undertaken a consultation on paid leave for people facing domestic or sexual violence because anyone facing this type of violence needs all the support possible to rebuild their life.

More than 5,900 people participated online and in-person meetings were held with a number of stakeholders. The feedback is currently being evaluated.

“Collectively as all Canadians and British Columbians, we have a long road ahead of us to address the systemic racism that has led to a dominant narrative in this country and province that Indigenous women’s lives are of less value than other women’s lives in this country,”

Chastity Davis, Chair of the Minister’s Advisory Council on Indigenous Women

NATIONAL INQUIRY INTO MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS

In honour of the women, girls and two spirit peoples who have been stolen and those who have survived, B.C. is committed to taking action and enacting change.

We know that leadership for this change will come from community – from family members, survivors and those with lived experience.

As a result, community-based engagement to identify priorities and collaborate on concrete steps was undertaken throughout summer 2019. The priorities identified by community will guide the Province as it reviews the Calls for Justice of the National Inquiry, and collaborates on the development of a path forward to ending violence against Indigenous women, girls and two spirit people.

BC BUS NORTH

The launch of BC Bus North is helping people who live in northern B.C. travel safely from community to community. This government funded service was introduced when Greyhound stopped operating in the area. Due to the unique nature and distance between communities, BC Bus North provides an affordable option for people who need to travel

long distances to access services or visit loved ones. This service will continue until March 31, 2021, with funding cost-shared between the Province and federal government.

HIGHWAY 16 TRANSPORTATION ACTION PLAN

The Province continues to work with Indigenous peoples and local communities to provide safe, reliable transportation in northern B.C. by providing funding toward the Highway 16 Transportation Action Plan. This plan includes an expansion of transit services (inter-community transit services are now running along Highway 16 from Terrace to Prince George), a community vehicle grant program (successfully running in 12 communities), Indigenous driver training (helping Indigenous people learn to drive commercial vehicles), and new webcams and bus shelters. These safe travel options are particularly critical for women, teenagers and elders to travel safely and affordably.

SUPPORT FOR THE MOOSE HIDE CAMPAIGN

The Moose Hide Campaign is a grassroots movement of Indigenous and non-Indigenous men and boys who are standing up against violence towards women and children. B.C. has provided \$2 million to support the campaign’s work and pledged an ongoing commitment to end violence against women and children.

INCREASED CELL SERVICE ALONG HIGHWAY 16

Witset, the only First Nation without cellular service along Highway 16, now has access to new wireless coverage, increasing safety, enhancing communications and bringing economic opportunities for people in Witset and surrounding areas.

Construction of the Rogers cell tower began in late September 2018 with a one-time \$1.2-million grant from the province and provides wireless coverage along an additional 22 kilometres of Highway 16 between New Hazelton and Smithers.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE PREVENTION CAMPAIGN AT PUBLIC POST-SECONDARY CAMPUSES

Students attending British Columbia's public post-secondary campuses deserve to feel safe and be free from potential sexual violence.

This is the focus of the 2019-20 Sexual Violence Prevention campaign.

The campaign is aimed at students, faculty and staff at public post-secondary institutions and the broader community. It reminds students that sex without consent is rape and that consent must be voluntary – otherwise it's assault.

"Domestic and sexual violence are deeply traumatizing, violent crimes. For most people who are targeted in these ways, the road ahead may be the most difficult they will encounter."

Tracy Porteous, Executive Director, Ending Violence Association of BC.

V. Conclusion & Priorities Ahead

People in B.C. are not all the same - and we shouldn't expect them to be. When you look at the various ways different people experience the world, it becomes clear that there is work to be done to stop harmful practises and truly make a difference in people's lives.

While progress is being made to advance gender equity for women, men and people of all genders, there is much more work to do, and it can't be done in isolation.

Work continues across government and with partner groups to help make life better and more fair for all people.





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