

February 2016

**PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATION 2016
FOR PRESENTATION TO THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE
THE HONOURABLE CHARLES SOUSA**

PROFILE OF COUNCIL

The Provincial Council of Women of Ontario (PCWO) was founded in 1923 as federate of the National Council of Women of Canada, which was founded in 1893, and the International Council of Women established in 1888. We represented:

PCWO'S FEDERATED MEMBERS LOCAL COUNCILS

London and Area Council of Women

Ottawa Council of Women

St. Catharines & District Council of Women

Toronto & Area Council of Women

Oakville & Area Study Group

PROVINCIALY ORGANIZED SOCIETIES

Association of Early Childhood Educators – Ontario

Business and Professional Women's Clubs of Ontario

Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario

Ontario Dental Hygienists' Association

Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association

Ontario Home Economics Association

Polish Canadian Women's Federation

Ukrainian Women's Association of Canada – Eastern Executive

Introduction:

The Provincial Council of Women of Ontario (PCWO) has a long history of advocating on social justice issues related to those living in poverty, and for many years our members have participated in government consultations and advocated on behalf of Ontario Women for the need to invest in gender parity, poverty reduction, and environmentally responsible development such as:

- universal childcare for all Ontarians
- child care benefit – protection from clawback
- a gender analysis process embedded into all Ministries
- dental health for low income adults
- a Patient Care Ombudsman
- energy planning
- fruit land protection

We have submitted our 2015 Brief to the Government in which PCWO supports many thousands of Ontarians, including Municipal representatives of over 3 million Ontarians, who urged the government to immediately provide funding and implement a dental program so that low income adults may receive preventive and remedial dental care.

We commend the Government on the initiative to employ an Ombudsman for Patient Care, however, this office must have adequate resources and autonomy to complete the mandate required to address the void in the current healthcare system. This position is responsible for our most vulnerable element of our society and funding must reflect the importance of the mission.

We also commend the Government on initiating a Steering Committee to investigate and recommend actions to close Ontario's Gender Wage Gap. We remind Government that each Ministry must incorporate gender analysis into its procedures as indicated by Premier Wynn in her 2014 mandate letter to the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues. This mandate will require training of staff to adequately understand the process of gender analysis and additional resources to perform the analysis. We advocate that funding for each Ministry be established so this mandate can be realized.

As is evident in these examples, PCWO believes strongly in the value of investment in Ontarians to alleviate suffering and create opportunities of a better future. Creating equality in our society will also allow Ontarians to help themselves. Therefore, we request that this Committee make Budget recommendations that address our areas of concern and we provide the following rationale, along with a few more specific recommendations for Provincial investments and actions.

Economic Rationale for Investments

Universal Child Care for All Ontarians

The 2014 Macdonald/Friendly report ‘The Parent Trap’, recognized that child care fees can play a major role in labour force participation rates, particularly for women. Quebec has the lowest rates in Canada at \$8.00 per day, as of April 22, 2015.

- More than three-quarters of mothers with children under the age of six are part of the labour force.
- Families rely on child care in order to be able to work. Women’s labour force participation rates correlate to the availability and affordability of child care.
- In Quebec, women spend a month’s earnings to pay for yearly child care expenses. This has led to more women participating in the labour force which is good for families and good for the economy.

PCWO agrees that it is time for the Ontario Government to meet the needs of families and provide universal child care at an affordable rate geared to income as they have done in Quebec.

Child Care Benefit Protection from Clawback

The new Canada Child Benefit by consolidating existing federal child benefits, will mean that the lowest income families with children will see an income boost in the range of between \$50 and \$68 per month per child. While this significant restructuring of child benefits is good news, it also raises a concern about the impact on families with children on social assistance.

When the National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS) was introduced in 1998, the program rules explicitly allowed for provinces and territories to claw back this new income source from social assistance recipients. In Ontario, the NCBS clawback was opposed until the eventual institution of the Ontario Child Benefit in 2008, which ended the NCBS clawback.

The PCWO supports the new CCB and advocates that all Ontario children, regardless of the source of their parents' incomes, get the full benefit of any new federal child benefit that is created, by continuing to specifically exempt federal child benefits from social assistance incomes and by ensuring that OW and ODSP benefits are not restructured in any way.

Gender Analysis in all Ministries

PCWO has advocated for gender equality since its inception. On September 25, 2014 Premier Wynne instructed the Honourable Tracy MacCharles, Minister Responsible for Women's Issues, to play a key role ensuring the individuals identifying as women or girls are able to participate as full members of society, exercise their rights and enjoy fundamental freedoms in social, economic and civil life. Her priority is to promote gender equality in Ontario.

Among other things, Minister MacCharles was tasked with collaborating with colleagues across government to “ensure that a gender lens is brought to government strategies, policies and programs”. This task will require adequate resources to establish training and awareness so that all Ministries can understand and adequately understand the process of applying a gender lens and then to perform the gender analysis of all their strategies, policies and programs.

PCWO agrees that a gender lens is a key process in establishing gender equality in Ontario. Unless this budget supports the efforts of all Ministries with adequate funding to perform their work in applying a gender lens, gender equality will not be realized and unacceptably remain a low priority.

Dental Work

In a November 20th, 2013 letter to the Minister of Health, the Simcoe/Muskoka Board of Health noted that the 2008 Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy allocated funds for dental care to help ameliorate pain and assist in employment efforts for families and individuals, “were reduced substantially by 2011/2012 leaving many low income people with no affordable access to dental care.” PCWO commends the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care’s has expanded investment in the dental care of children and youth; however, it still fails to address the dental care needs of adults and seniors. It has long been known that poor dental care can lead to other health issues. In addition to the pain and embarrassment of poor dental health it is often hard to find and maintain employment.

We would also note that the Association of Ontario Health Centres (AOHC) have cautioned the Ministry that “one in every five people in Ontario do not visit a dentist because they cannot afford it, and in 2012 there were almost 58,000 visits to costly

hospital emergency rooms for dental reasons. But hospitals can provide only pain killers, not dental treatment, so people return. This costly use of emergency rooms amounts to at least \$30 million a year.”

PCWO supports the AOHC in its call “to keep Ontarians healthy by extending public oral health programs to low income adults,” something we have advocated for since 2007 and we urge the Minister of Finance to establish adequate funding for this program.

Patient Care Ombudsman

PCWO commends the Ontario Government and the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, for putting patients first as noted in the recent discussion paper “Patients First – A Proposal to Strengthen Patient-Centred Health Care in Ontario”. Ontarians continue to find healthcare difficult to access and systems difficult to navigate. This has resulted in individuals unable to access proper healthcare for themselves or their families.

The Ontario Government has created a new Patient Care Ombudsman to help mend the ailing healthcare system. PCWO supports patient care and views the new Ombudsman position as helpful to resolve patients’ immediate issues, while healthcare reform is being strategized and deliberated. This new position can afford much needed assistance to Ontarians but only if it is adequately funded and has sufficient autonomy and power to affect change and resolve issues on behalf of the people.

Energy Planning

The Provincial Council of Women of Ontario welcomes the Government’s signing of a ‘Memorandum of Understanding’ that will explore the potential for increased trade in electricity between

Ontario and Quebec, and the Premier's commitment to a long term water-power agreement. If concluded this will enhance the ability of Ontarians to use clean, renewable, affordable energy, and, together with energy conservation and efficiencies provide the opportunity for a much less expensive energy future than the billions of dollars required for the currently planned life-extension of 4 existing nuclear reactors and 2 new-build reactors at Darlington .

Of particular interest to PCWO is the Government's recent recognition that there is an opportunity to withdraw from Ontario Power Generation's Darlington new-build proposal, should this project be "over-budget or delayed". As Mr. Edward Clark, former CEO of Toronto Dominion Bank said recently, "The Darlington Re-build is a project which carries enormous risks and that cost over-runs can dwarf any savings that can be had elsewhere in the system."

PCWO strongly believes that post-Fukushima, Ontario should be headed for a new energy future that favors and invests in renewables and energy conservation, and efficiencies rather than risking the enormous costs of a major disaster that would drastically affect communities surrounding nuclear plants, economically, and through long term health, social and environmental impacts.

The Greenbelt and Tender Fruit Land Protection

The Provincial Council of Women of Ontario has been concerned about the loss of farmland for many years, and despite previous efforts and the Government's Greenbelt protections, which PCWO heartily supports, urban pressures continue gradually intruding on the Niagara region. Therefore we urge the Ontario Government to strengthen the Greenbelt through the investment in the tender fruit farmers and their industry which, along with grapes and

wineries, is at the heart of the region's tourism and a significant employer. This protection can be realized through the purchase of easements/restrictive covenants to protect Niagara's tender fruit lands "in perpetuity".

Conclusion

Many programs over the years have been funded and last for a year or two and then are no longer funded. This kind of off-handed solution is not a good use of taxpayer's money. We must establish clear reasons for funding, outcomes expected and track changes that justify the costs.

PCWO encourages the Minister of Finance to deliver funding for sustainable solutions to ongoing issues and maintain funding as needed. Women comprise the highest number of poverty and low income earners. Women suffer to a greater degree when health care budgets are cut, when home care and child care are not affordable or accessible, when social assistance rates are inadequate and when housing is not affordable or accessible. These conditions put women in vulnerable situations where they can more easily become victims of domestic and sexual violence requiring shelter, protection and medical assistance.

PCWO believes that an austerity budget can only create increased social strife. This Government must invest in the people of Ontario. The cost of poverty is unsustainable when considering health, social, educational and institutional services. Every dollar invested in Ontarians to reduce poverty through adequate social assistance, liveable wages, health services for all, affordable housing and support services, brings a high rate of return, not only for families, but for communities and business alike. PCWO also notes that it's all about Government choices. Immediate and sustained investments in people and communities will be extremely important in the long-term economic health of Ontario and must not be delayed further.

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