

# **British Columbia Provincial Election Voter Guide for 2013**

**International  
WOMEN'S  
Rights Project**

Elections are a natural and integral part of a health democracy. This voters guide is to be used as a tool to inform voters about various women's issues within British Columbia and in the upcoming 2013 election. We hope this updated guide will help British Columbians understand the complex political and economic issues that are affecting women in the this province and throughout Canada. By giving the public information and questions they can ask it raises awareness and support for important issues that branch from the Provincial level to the Federal level of government. We hope voters use the questions provided and ask their local and provincial candidates about the issues that matter to them. By doing this we can engage candidates and make them aware of issues that are important to the public so they can become platforms to be addressed during this election. Change towards women's issues within this country must start with the public voicing their concerns and then the politicians and public policy will follow.

## **1. Childcare: Federal and Provincial Supports**

The Federal Government introduced a taxable \$100 per month child benefit payments to families for each child under the age of six. The Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB) has recently strengthened its policies by improving the taxation to ensure that single-parent families receive tax treatment comparable to two-parent families. This change will provide up to \$168 in tax relief for single parents with one child under the age of six (Service Canada, 2012). Even with strengthened policies the effect of this payment still favour wealthier parents and provides little if any incentive to expand the number of childcare spaces available. Within BC, childcare fees account for an average of 20% of families' monthly costs and 2010 estimates are around \$1,000 a month on childcare expenses in Metro Vancouver (West Coast Leaf, 2010).

The BC government is expected to spend \$365 million over a three-year period to implement full day kindergarten for all eligible children as of September 2011 (Shokoohi, 2011). Previously full day kindergarten was only available for up to 50% of kindergarten students in 2010, however every 5 year old is now eligible since the Ministry of Education began phasing in universal access over a 2 years process (Ministry of Education). Full day kindergarten is now available for all five year olds in the province yet the money for the program is not coming without a cost elsewhere in the system. Teachers are subsidizing the system so that the level of materials needed to do all-day kindergarten is do-able (Shokoohi, 2011).

The British Columbia Representative for Children and Youth, Mary-Ellen Turpel-Lafond's has quoted that BC's child poverty rate is one of the worst child poverty records in the country. BC has been the worst child poverty record in the country for the past six years, however it has dropped to 14.3% in 2010 and now it is slightly above Manitoba's child poverty rate, yet still higher than the Canadian average of 13.7% (BC Council of Families, 2011).

Furthermore, prospects do not improve for BC children, as they grow older. There are currently only enough regulated childcare spaces for 17% of children from ages 0 to 12 in BC. Regulated full or part-time center based space for 20% of children ages 0-5 years (CBC Market Place, 2013). Waiting times for care spaces are years long. In addition, the Ministry of Children and Family is being cut a further \$7 million for the coming fiscal year, concentrated in early years, youth services.

### **Questions for Candidates:**

*Inaccessible childcare continues to disadvantage women in BC and Canada. What policies will you support to alleviate waitlists for childcare and what would you do to create affordable, accessible childcare in BC?*

*Are you aware of the \$10 a day plan? If so, are you willing to implement such a proposal?*

*There is already a limiting amount of space for childcare, what about children with special needs? Where do they fit in with all of this?*

*Would you, as a representative of the federal government, be willing to work with provincial governments to establish a national childcare system?*

## **2. Healthcare**

Despite Canada having a universal healthcare system, care is not equal for all individuals. Currently, we are witnessing an erosion of the public healthcare system and a failure to recognize the connection between good health and effective social policies (International Women's Rights Project, 2011).

Although the provinces manage the direct funding of health care across Canada, the system of payment transfers between the federal government and the provinces that supports health care funding will need to be renegotiated in 2014. This makes the federal government in 2014 a key player in what is otherwise seen as a provincial issue.

Equal access to abortions for women across Canada is key to economic equality. However, not all women in Canada or BC have equal and affordable access to medical abortion procedures. Many women must travel for hours to reach an abortion clinic. Within BC there are only seven abortion clinics available, 4 in the lower mainland, and one each in Victoria, Kelowna, and Kootneys (Options for Sexual Health, 2009). Women from rural areas in BC must travel to more populated areas to receive this access and it might not be affordable due to travel and lodging expenses.

Aboriginal women are disproportionately impacted by HIV/AIDS. Aboriginal women are 2.8 times likelier to become infected than non-Aboriginal women. Aboriginal women are receiving a diagnosis at a younger age, which account for approximately 45% of new HIV infections. Injected drug user is the most common mode of HIV infections in the Aboriginal population with 53% versus 14% in the non-aboriginal population (The Source of Women's Health, 2012).

Senior women within BC are not receiving adequate care for their age-specific health issues. The World Health Organization states that social determinants are

linked with health – the lower the socioeconomic position, the worse the health of that person. Women often outlive men but face crippling conditions such as arthritis, osteoporosis or mental health issues without receiving adequate treatment or care (CBC News, 2011). Many of these women facing these conditions live alone and are not financially secure. Most of them don't have access to a regular informal care provider.

About 600 nursing positions in BC have been cut since March 2009 (The Vancouver Sun, 2010). From that time there has been a jump of 8% in employment of nurses, however this increase might make even from the number of jobs that were cut previously (CTV News, 2013). In overcrowded hospitals, treating people in hallways has become the new normal. For seniors needing complex care, the government's failure to provide the promised 5,000 intermediate and long-term care beds continues to have dire consequences. Across BC the number of seniors over 75 increased 28% from 2001 to 2010, their access to residential care dropped 21% and access to home support fell 30% (O'Connor, 2012).

### **Questions for Candidates:**

*What will you do to ensure more equitable access to the array of different healthcare practitioners in rural and urban areas?*

*Access to abortion is essential to women's reproductive equality, yet access in BC is limited to urban areas. The limited number of abortion services in rural areas increase the cost for many women who have to travel, make arrangements for children and take time off work, What will you do to increase access to abortion services in BC?*

*As a federal representative, would you work with provincial governments to better support access to reproductive services and maternal care within Canada? Do you see reproductive services as an important part of Canada's role in international aid work?*

*There has been a gradual increase in the number of seniors over the age of 75, what changes must be made to the healthcare system to provide more accessible home support for the aging population?*

### **3. Violence Against Women**

Violence against women takes many forms; it includes both physical and sexual assault, which is usually accompanied by verbal and emotional abuse. Trauma caused by sexual assault can affect a survivor's long-term ability to have relationships or gain and maintain employment due to an accompanying loss of self-esteem, sense of safety and trust.

About one in ten sexual assaults are reported to police. With 58%, the most common reason why victims of sexual assault do not come forward with these incidents to the police is because they do not feel that it was important enough (SASC). Other reasons include they felt that it was a personal matter (47%), they did not want to get the police involved (41%) or that they have dealt with it in another way (54%) (SASC). With only a small proportion of sexual offences formally documented through law enforcement, the prevalence of sexual assault in Canada has been difficult to quantify. Females are 5 times higher than the rate of males in sexual victimized cases (SASC). The rate of sexual assault has declined in 2011, which was down 3% from the previous year (Brennan, 2011). It is likely that the number of sexual assaults reported is likely an undercount of the actual number of sexual assaults that occur. Given that most sexual assaults go unreported, police-reported sexual assault counts are notably lower (Brennan, 2011).

In 2002, BC government funding was cut to all of BC's Sexual Assault/Women Assault Centers providing crisis support and counseling to women who were victimized by sexual violence. These services were replaced with a 1-800 number located in Vancouver. Funding for remaining victim assistance programs was cut in 2008. There are several Stopping the Violence (STV) counseling programs provided for long term counseling to adult women who have been victimized but many of these programs are inadequately funded (Hodge).

The 2013 budget for BC has been released but it fails to provide any meaningful assistance for women who have experienced or are at risk of experiencing sexual or domestic violence. The budget does include an additional \$5 million to address problems with gambling and an additional \$52 million for increased RCMP costs associated with gang activity, yet the budget fails to include an increase to ensure victims of domestic and sexual violence with any support services. The budget presented will not be passed until after the May election so there is still an opportunity for changes before the election.

### **Questions for Candidates:**

*Violence against women remains an important issue, as one in four women will experience sexualized or domestic violence in her lifetime. What will you do to support and fund more transition housing for women and children who are fleeing abusive relationships?*

*The release of the 2013 budget has failed to include any meaningful funding for at risk or women who have experienced sexual or domestic violence. Will your party make any changes to the budget to include funding for victimized women or not? If there are changes to include funding, what will they be?*



## **4. Aboriginal Women**

Aboriginal issues within Canada and British Columbia is a common political subject, they have been relevant within politics and policy making for many years. Even with the political involvement little has been done to stop discrimination, racism, inequality, violence, and other social issues that are affecting the aboriginal people in British Columbia. Aboriginal women face many obstacles in life with high levels of social issues and violence towards them. In a survey taken over 80% of aboriginal women said that they had been victims of family violence and sexual assault (Awan BC, 2011). Many women also claimed they were victimized from the police as well as the judicial system. Most of the women who have disappeared or gone missing from the Downtown East side and other communities are aboriginal women. There are more than 580 cases of missing women and the Native Women's Association of Canada has documented murdered indigenous women (Vancouver Observer, 2013). There are few provincial and federal programs that support aboriginal women who are dealing with spousal or family abuse due to the fact that many of the bands and communities wish to self regulate themselves, which can put the women in more danger. What is worse is when these women go to police, some times they are met with racism, derogatory, and even sometimes violent or sexual behavior. In a human rights investigation this year many aboriginal women stated that RCMP officers physically, emotionally, and sexually abused them. This in turn made the women fearful and reluctant to talk or collaborate with police on various issues within their communities (CBC News, 2013).

Another issue facing Aboriginal women is the apprehension and placement policies regarding aboriginal children. Of all children in government care over half are aboriginal. This is a social problem where support services need to be increased especially for single and teenage mothers. Aboriginal mothers are continually at risk for losing custody of their children if they disclose any drug or alcohol use and there are few support facilities in place within the aboriginal community that help with drug and alcohol problems. Courts determine the best interest of the child however

this can be either to send them into foster care or to put the child's care in the hands of the relatives. However without the support of the government with assistance programs the family can be ill equipped to take care of the child properly (Awan BC, 2011).

### **Questions for Candidates:**

*What programs or policies would you implement to make sure abuse from Police or RCMP officers against aboriginal women no longer happens?*

*What policies or recommendations or funding would you suggest to help aid struggling single mothers or teen parents within the aboriginal community?*

*What would you do to help take away the fear and skepticism that aboriginal women hold towards public policies and programs as well as the police?*

## 5. Housing

The lack of safe and affordable housing across BC is having a severe impact on women. Many women stay in abusive relationships rather than risk being homeless. When women do decide to leave their home they will move often to find safe housing. The BC government, the city of Vancouver and a private foundation have put in \$225 million to build more than 1000 new supportive housing units for the homeless, the province have contributed \$205 million. There have also been 14 new supportive housing developments being built in partnership with the city of Vancouver and non-profit housing providers will create more than 1500 new apartments to help address homelessness. Over 400 new supportive housing units have opened in Vancouver since January of 2011 (Pemberton, 2010).

In rural areas where families might own their own houses, they may not be able to keep them in a state of adequate repair. The vast majority of urban poor of who are renters move into the best housing they can afford with tier low income. This would mean dishonest and abusive landlords, in high crime rate areas, on loud streets or near environmental hazards (CRIAW, 2011).

The economic, social, cultural and demographic needs of women who access Transition House Program services are becoming more diverse. The wide range of needs to be accommodated in one shelter might be in conflict with some of the other women needing assistance. An elderly woman who struggles with a mental illness and substance abuse requires different services than a woman with young children escaping intimate partner abuse. To ultimately improve access for diverse groups of women fleeing violence, there needs to be targeted staff training, small changes to facilities and amendments to agency policies (International Women's Rights Project, 2011).

There are also barriers that prevent referrals from one agency to another due to differences in framework and approach and lack of knowledge of other community

programs and services. There needs to be increased communication and referral between Violence Against Women services, as well as with other related social, health and justice services. There needs to be a sufficient increase in funding made available in order to provide enough spaces for women and children escaping violence. Women on social assistance who have their children removed from their care temporarily by the government will often lose their funding for child-friendly housing which can prevent the return of the child in the future (BC Housing).

### **Questions for Candidates:**

*Affordable housing in BC has been quite difficult. While there have been some advancements in BC addressing the affordable housing shortage, there continues to be a shortage of housing specific to women and their children that represent largest demographic below the poverty line. How will you address the specific need for affordable, long-term housing?*

## **6. Economic Equality**

The Canadian Human Rights Act recognizes pay equity, or equal pay for equal work between both males and females. However this act is not enforced and women are making approximately 71% of what men earn for a full year of work. Education also does not seem to be reducing the wage gap as women with university degrees are earning approximately 74% of what men with university degrees earn (Morris, 2013). The UN development program in 2011 knocked Canada down from 16 to 18 on its gender equality index. The “glass ceiling” still exists for women due to their over-sized share of motherly and household duties as well as their work duties. Some arguments can be made that the glass ceiling for women is actually growing instead of shrinking in regards to women’s equality within the workplace.

Another issue affecting the economic equality of women is the issue of maternity leave within the work place. Since maternity leave has been extended by the government to one full year many employers fear hiring a woman for fear of leaving to have a family and the company having to incur costs for rehiring and training someone to take her place. They are also concerned with the attitude of employees when they return wanting the same pay for less hours and more flex time and benefits. This can be detrimental to women being hired in high powered, high paying jobs because it is assumed that young women will make compromises to their careers when starting a family compared to men (Canadian Business, 2011).

It is becoming clear that voluntary compliance by employers for pay equality is not and does not work. The British Columbia government needs to implement equal pay legislation or an employment equity law that forces employers to abandon discriminatory hiring practices.

## **Questions for Candidates:**

*On average women earn 71% of what men earn. What policies would you enact to create economic equality for women in BC and across Canada?*

*Would you support legislation within BC that implemented pay equity legislation?*

*What would you do to support and compensate domestic work in Canada?*

*What would you do to make sure women are not stigmatized in their careers for wanting to be a mother and starting a family?*

## **7. Political Participation**

Women are still under-represented at all levels in formal politics. Nomination fights can be very expensive which can disadvantage many women given their economic inequality within Canada. The discrimination and stereotyping that female politicians often experience from opposition and the media can further dissuade women from entering the political field. It is also thought that the systemic discrimination that women experience daily in society in terms of healthcare, childcare, a lower wages makes it harder for women to find the time, energy, and resources to run for political office.

Women are over 50% of Canada's population and currently comprise an average of 25% of Canada's municipal councils, provincial legislatures, and the House of Commons. Canada's international ranking of women's political representation is currently 39th (Nov 2011). With some candidates still being selected for the upcoming election the BC Liberals now have 22 women running out of 85 ridings whereas in 2009 they party put forward 25 women candidates (Equal Voice, 2013).

The NDP with almost 80 candidates so far, has 30 women running for office. In 2009 the party had nearly half of its ridings represented by female candidates (41). Provincially, no legislature has more than one-third of its seats held by women, and federally less than one quarter of our representatives are women (Equal Voice, 2013).

Women provide an important perspective in politics. The United Nations maintains that a critical mass of at least one-third representation of women is what is required for legislatures to produce public policy representing concerns that are key to women. Our government should be one that reflects the population and that signals the importance of women in governing our society (Equal Voice, 2013).

## **Questions for Candidates:**

*Women are continually underrepresented in the Canadian political system. Would you be willing to support some type of affirmative action to increase women's representation in politics?*

*What do you think needs to be done to get women more involved in politics?*

*In Canada, we now have more female premiers than ever before – 87% of the population are governed by women - why do you think this is?*

*Would you support policies or programs that get young girls and women involved in political activism and education?*



## 8. Refugee Women

Migrant women who are often refugees or foreign domestic workers are also particularly at risk of poverty and exploitation, as they are often forced to work in unregulated or hidden employment. Women make up the majority of migrant workers from Asia and many work in Canada and BC to sustain their families back home. Immigrant women earn about 56 cents for each dollar earned by Canadian born women. Racialized immigrant women earn 48.7 cents for every dollar non-racialized male immigrants earn (CCR, 2012). These women are paid low wages and despite the fact that they contribute significantly to the Canadian economy, they are not entitled to many benefits such as employment insurance (CRIAW, 2011).

There is a huge myth that Canada accepts a large number of refugees. For every 443 Canadians born, 1 refugee is admitted. These figures lag behind countries such as Jordan that admits 1 refugee for every 3 born Jordanians. Immigration analyst has stated that Canada particularly discriminates against female refugees by preferring to provide them with aid camps near their home country while admitting more male refugees (Morris and Sinnott). Women and girls are vulnerable to sexual exploitation in camps, which include by humanitarian workers. Some men can offer women to the aid workers in order to receive any type of assistance for their families. Some single mothers will over themselves to the workers in order to receive enough food to feed their children (Morris and Sinnott). There are high chances that women can be attacked while collecting water or firewood around refugee camps. Young girls between the ages 13 to 18 are often faced with pregnancies, abortions, and exposure to STDs at these camps.

There has been a change in the perception of refugees and visa applications since September 11, 2001. Security has heightened and racist assumptions have been directed at refugees (Morris and Sinnott). Refugees have been increasingly viewed as threats to national and international security. Women wearing hijabs and women

with Muslim or Arab sounding names, whether or not they are immigrants or refugees are visible targets. Canada has already joined the United States in the Safe Third Country Legislation. This legislation links Canada's refugee hearing processes to those of the United States. It discriminates against female refugees because the United States does not recognize gender as a form of persecution to the same degree as Canada (Canada Border Services Agency, 2009).

Many female refugees face racism and sexism within Canada. Refugees within Canada are still suffering with funding cuts to immigrant settlements. The cuts have an impact on the stability of immigrant and refugee serving sector, where women are the majority in the services and on sector workers (CCR, 2012). There are often barriers for immigrant women in finding a place to live in Canada. Landlords frequently discriminate against immigrant women on the basis of gender, national origin, race, employment, and income status (CRIAOW, 2003). Immigrant women are also less likely to get paid employment than immigrant men and non-immigrant women. Many immigrant and refugee women end up in traditional gender specific roles while entering the workforce in BC, such as house keeping, hospitality and home support (CRIAOW, 2003). The federal government must invest in community-based training systems in order for immigrant and refugee women to succeed.

### **Questions for Candidates:**

*What is your stance on protecting refugee women's rights?*

*Historically, refugees who have communities in Canada are better able to integrate into society, find work and housing as become educated. What sort of policies do you support for refugee women's integration into Canadian society?*

## **9. Women with Disabilities**

There are more women living with disabilities in Canada and BC than men with disabilities. Aboriginal women have twice the national disability rate. Most First Nations, Inuit and Metis women live with a disability than non-Aboriginal women. When it comes to job seeking Aboriginal women with disabilities tend to face many discriminatory attitudes. The severity of a woman's disability is also an issue, the more severe the disability the lower her income will be (CRIA, 2011). The unemployment rate among women with disabilities has been identified as being as high as 75% compared to the rate of unemployment of men with disabilities of 60% (DAWN-RAF Canada, 2010).

Women with disabilities generally have a lower level of education. About 48% of these women with disabilities ages 15 and over had not completed high school. Approximately 25% of people living in low-income households are people with disabilities. Women with disabilities average at around \$8,360 a year while men with disabilities average at \$19,250 a year. Most medications, services, assistive technologies of disability related expenditures are not covered by public health insurance (DAWN-RAF Canada, 2010). Services for mothers with disabilities are limited while accessible cribs, accessible and affordable childcare and other services for mothers with disabilities are virtually non-existent.

Women with disabilities are often linked to many other issues that women without disabilities face. Approximately 15% of women in Canada have disabilities. Half of these women are abused and are more vulnerable to violence than able-bodied women (Ministry of Health, 2000). Across Canada, few rape crisis centers and transition houses are accessible to women with disabilities, leaving few options for these women.

## **Questions for Candidates:**

*Given that the unemployment rate among women with disabilities is up to 75%, what economic policies or programs would you suggest to support women with disabilities?*

*Due to their economic marginalization, access to healthcare is more difficult for disabled women. What healthcare policies would you support for increase access for disabled women?*

*What is your vision for supporting disabled women's access to affordable housing?*

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