

International WOMEN'S Rights Project

Voters Guide on Women's Issues – Election 2015

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We envision this brief voter guide to be used as a tool to inform voters about issues regarding women in Canada and to provide focused questions to pose to candidates.¹ Our hope is that voters will use the questions in all candidates meetings, election forums, social media, or by emailing or phoning their candidate to engage them on issues that matter. We also hope that the guide will provide a lens towards women's issues in politics that are often overlooked during elections. By realizing how integral and intersecting women's issues are to broader electoral topics like the environment or the economy, our aim is to help Canadians voting in the 2015 Federal election to highlight women's issues before they cast their vote as well as to hold those elected accountable after the election. Each issue provides some pertinent background information, examines the current situation, discusses possible solutions, and briefly reviews party positions. It is hoped that this guide can elevate the importance of these issues in the public sphere and drive public policy. This guide is intended to be accessible and equip individual voters with the necessary tools they need to engage with their candidates and make an informed decision on Election Day that will enhance and support women's equality rights in Canada. Please use and adapt this guide as you need to for your region or specific issues, with acknowledgement. Thank you!

¹ This election guide has been researched and written for IWRP by Michael McDonald, a recent Political Science graduate from the University of Victoria, with the supervision and support of Dr. Janni Aragon, Director Technology Integrated Learning and Assistant Teaching Professor in the Department of Political Science, UVic; the International Women's Rights Project; and the Up for Debate Coalition. This guide is based on the original National Action Committee (NAC) *NAC Voters Guide* from the 1980s, which has been revised by IWRP for the last two BC provincial elections and can be found on the IWRP website. The IWRP is very grateful to Michael for his hard work in producing this guide.

Federal Election Information and Questions

1. Early Childhood Education and Care: Access and Cost

Affordable access to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is essential to women's equality and the development of future generations. The Canadian government does not have a national childcare strategy, instead placing the responsibility on parents to find spaces for their children. Due to the lack of federal focus, care costs vary across the country from as low as \$152 a month in Gatineau, Quebec, to as high as \$1,676 in Toronto, Ontario.¹ This disparity leads to regional inequality that affects families. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) has determined that women spend more than 36% of their incomes on childcare,² further compounding the inequity felt through the pay gap.

Not only is childcare unaffordable, but it is often unregulated and difficult for families to find spaces. The CCPA has highlighted the devastating shortages that exist in Indigenous and rural communities.³ Parents of children with disabilities are also left with few options, as many service providers are too underfunded to accommodate them.⁴ While there are some subsidized childcare options for low-income families, the spaces have “essentially remained static since 2001,” but the child poverty rate in Canada has increased to 19.1%.⁵ The issue is exacerbated by the fact that early childhood educators are poorly valued and underpaid, leading to a national shortage of trained professionals.⁶ Instead of taking action to increase the affordability and accessibility of childcare, the current government has focused instead on direct payments and tax credits. Since 2006, the Conservative government has spent \$20 billion on the Universal Child Care Benefit.⁷ Parents of children under six receive \$160 monthly, and parents of children 6-17 receive

only \$60 monthly.⁸ Given the median costs of childcare, this does not remotely offset the costs that parents face, and it does nothing to train new professionals or open up more spaces. Additionally, the federal government’s Child Care Expense Deduction costs nearly \$1 billion annually, and “does nothing to build a childcare system.”⁹ The federal government has also introduced a new income splitting policy at a cost of \$2 billion annually, which “benefits higher income two-parent families” with great income disparity; it does nothing to help low and middle income Canadians.¹⁰

The Conservatives have opted for a market-based approach that assumes that direct payments to parents – in combination with tax credits – will placate parents enough to forego a national childcare plan. At the most recent national childcare conference, ChildCare2020, delegates rejected these market-based approaches suggesting that they run contrary to the premise “that public management of childcare” is a “more effective and fair way to deliver services.”¹¹ At the time of drafting, the Liberal Party of Canada has not signaled its policy intentions though a resolution adopted at its 2014 Montreal Convention has called for a “Universal ECEC Program with national standards and monitoring.”¹² The New Democratic Party (NDP), meanwhile, has unveiled a plan that aims to “create or maintain a million childcare spaces over the next decade,” and ensures that no parents pay more than \$15 a day per child.¹³ Affordable and accessible childcare is integral to creating a more equitable society, and providing parents with the peace of mind that their children are well taken care of.

Questions for Candidates:

The cost of childcare continues to disadvantage women across the country. Do you support a universal Early Childhood Education and Care Program?

Many families do not have access to childcare in this country. How do you intend to create more childcare spaces in Canada?

Indigenous women and women in rural communities have some of the greatest difficulty accessing affordable childcare. How would you make childcare more affordable and accessible for these groups?

There is a lack of trained childhood educators, particularly for children with disabilities. How would you attract more people to the profession, and what would you do to ensure that children with disabilities have equal access to Early Childhood Education?

2. Health Care

Canada's universal health care system is undergoing increased demand as Baby Boomers age, but funding levels are not keeping pace. Affordable access to care is essential to women's equality and the health of all Canadians. The federal government provides transfer payments to the provinces, which focus on health care delivery. Organizations, such as the Fraser Institute, have criticized the *Canada Health Act* (CHA) for the prohibition of additional user fees, claiming that this leads to "over-use" of the system.¹⁴ This argument is intended to promote the development of two-tiered private-public healthcare, which is disconcerting. Whereas 57% of health care spending once went "to physicians and hospitals," only 45% goes there today, with the balance shifted to private options.¹⁵ It is clear that government should not tell patients when they have used too much health care, and expect them to turn to costly private options instead.

In 2010, Canada's private health expenditures "totaled \$1569 per capita," placing Canada behind only "the predominantly private-systems of the United States and Switzerland."¹⁶ Canadians are spending record amounts on private care because the universal system only covers specific procedures, forcing individuals to rely on private plans for dental, vision, and pharmaceuticals.¹⁷ Additionally, there are differences in levels of coverage across the country, and some provinces charge additional health care premiums. For instance, in British Columbia monthly Medical Service Plan (MSP) premiums will increase for the sixth time, bringing the total cost to \$144 for an average family.¹⁸ Private health premiums, combined with user fees seen in the MSP model, place an undue burden on marginalized women who are forced to spend large portions of their income on health care. Due to the high cost of private premiums, many people are forced

to go without essential dental and vision care, clearly indicating that Canada's health care system is far from universal.

Equal access to abortions across Canada is imperative to women's reproductive rights, and to ensure economic equality. Abortion clinics are often sparsely located, forcing women to travel great distances to gain access to abortion facilities. There are currently no abortion clinics in Saskatchewan or Prince Edward Island, which forces women to travel out of province to obtain the procedure.¹⁹ Additionally, abortion services are offered up to 12 weeks in some provinces and territories, while others allow abortions up to 24 weeks.²⁰ The disparity in access to abortions may be unconstitutional and in violation of the *Canada Health Act*. The cost and time of travel may act as barriers to the right to choose, and thereby negatively impact economic equality.

Indigenous women are at a disproportionately higher rate of contracting HIV/AIDS and are frequently left in poor health, without access to clean drinking water or medical care.²¹ The World Health Organization has observed that across all countries, "the lower the socioeconomic position, the worse the health."²² The Canadian government seems to have neglected particularly marginalized groups that have been ostracized through colonial histories. Women with HIV/AIDS "are more likely than men to receive sub-standard care and treatment," increasing the possibility of death and risk of transmission.²³ As a result, the federal government must focus on ensuring that a national HIV/AIDS strategy emphasizes care for infected women. Furthermore, it is important that the government be aware of the unique health care needs of women with disabilities and ensure that adequate services are provided. Women with disabilities may face

increased costs associated with their care, and the government must ensure that these costs are affordable.

Given the important role the federal government plays in establishing provincial practices under the *Canada Health Act* – and the importance of federal funds in Canada’s health care system – this election is important. Under the Health Accord, the Conservative government has agreed to maintain health transfers at 6% per year through 2017, before reducing them to “nominal GDP growth.”²⁴ This cut in health care funding could result in the further erosion of Canada’s public health care system. At the 2014 Montreal Convention, the Liberal Party of Canada has passed a policy that affirms its commitment to a publicly funded health care system and federal transfer payments.²⁵ The NDP has signaled through its policy book that it wishes to increase federal transfers to the provinces as well as to provide additional funding for pharmaceuticals.²⁶ To increase women’s equality, it is essential that the federal government ensure Canada have a robust universal health care system.

Questions for Candidates:

Canadians are spending record amounts on private health care plans and fees. What would you do to reduce the health care costs that Canadians face?

There has been a shift from a public universal health care system to a more private delivery model. Do you support a robust, efficient, and well-funded public health care system?

Abortion clinics are sparsely located, often forcing women to travel great distances to have an abortion. What would you do to improve access to abortion facilities?

Indigenous Women are at a disproportionately higher risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and are often forced to live in deplorable conditions. How would you go about reducing this risk, ensuring that they have access to appropriate treatment, and improving their living conditions?

What initiatives do you favour to reduce health costs for women with disabilities?

3. Violence Against Women

The threat of sexual assault remains one of the greatest barriers to women's equality. Sexual assault survivors are forced to deal with a tremendous emotional and personal strain that can impact their relationships, employment prospects, and health. It is imperative that government takes action to reduce the epidemic of sexual assault and underreporting, while also ensuring appropriate services for survivors.

In 82% of sexual assault cases victims knew their perpetrators, suggesting that the greatest risk comes not from strangers but from acquaintances, family members, authority figures, and romantic partners.²⁷ An estimated 80% of sexual assaults go unreported due to a fear of "humiliation" or "re-victimization in the legal process."²⁸ These numbers are exacerbated for women of colour whose fear is "worsened by the experience of racism."²⁹ Sexual assault on university campuses also appears underreported as numbers are below national averages.³⁰ Universities have distinct systems for reporting, and the higher reporting at some campuses suggests that some universities are better at providing support than others.³¹ Given the rape-culture exposed at Canadian campuses through recent rape chants at several schools, sexual harassment by dentistry students, etc., it is apparent that government must oversee support services for students. Marginalized groups such as homeless women have a greater likelihood of childhood sexual abuse, and are less likely to report an assault due to "distrust of the police."³² Indigenous Women are subjected to domestic violence and sexual assault at a rate 3.5 times higher than non-Indigenous women.³³

Women with disabilities face a risk of sexual assault that is 150% greater than women without disabilities.³⁴ Due to the high rates of violence against women that exist,

the issue of unreported assaults, and the higher risk of violence that marginalized women face compel the government to take action. The Conservative government has slashed funding for the Ministry for the Status of Women, resulting in devastating cuts to gender equality groups across the country.³⁵ The CCPA has also observed that the federal government has only addressed violence through “non-gender specific policies,” and does not have a national strategy to reduce violence against women, or a “policy on intimate partner violence.”³⁶ The Ontario government, as part of its new *Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment*, has launched an anti-sexual violence campaign, aimed at getting bystanders to intervene before an assault happens.³⁷ At the time of drafting, neither the Liberal Party of Canada or NDP have a specific policy around ending violence against women, although both have made commitments to gender equality in the past.

Questions for Candidates:

Violence against women remains an important issue. What would you do to improve support services for sexual assault survivors?

Access to transition housing for women and children is essential to ensuring that women can flee domestic violence. What would you do to improve transition housing?

How would you work with provinces and post-secondary institutions to create a culture of consent?

Sexual violence remains one of the greatest burdens to gender equality. What steps would you take to ensure that women feel safe in their communities? And do you believe Canada needs a national strategy to eliminate violence against women?

What commitments will you make to provide additional support services for victimized women and sexual violence prevention?

4. Indigenous Women

Indigenous Women are some of most marginalized in Canada, often forced to live in intolerable conditions and subjected to higher rates of violence. The colonial history of Canada, and the extension of this through residential schools, has left a legacy that continues to impact Indigenous Women today. According to a recent RCMP report, 1017 Indigenous Women have been murdered between 1980 and 2012, which puts the homicide rate “4.5 times higher than that of all other women in Canada.”³⁸ The report also estimates that an additional 105 Indigenous women and girls remain missing today.³⁹ The recent report by the Truth and Reconciliation Committee has linked the “inter-generational legacy of residential schools” with the 1181 missing and murdered Indigenous women; the committee has called for a national inquiry into the violence.⁴⁰ Amnesty International has also observed that “deep inequalities in living conditions and discrimination in the provision of government services” has left Indigenous Women with few options.⁴¹ Poor living conditions and economic inequality have forced many Indigenous women into dangerous situations that worsen the risk of violence.

In 2013, twenty-four countries expressed concern of the high rates of violence against Indigenous Women, and nine countries explicitly called for a national strategy or inquiry to address this.⁴² Public pressure continues to increase, and many organizations such as the Native Women’s Association of Canada and the Assembly of First Nations have called on the government to take action.⁴³ Similarly, the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has said that the Canadian government has violated the rights of Indigenous women by failing to investigate the high rates of violence, and prosecute those responsible.⁴⁴ Dr. Sarah Hunt, a member of

the *Kwagiulth* band of the *Kwakwaka'wakw* First Nation, has stated that a national inquiry must “[shift] power back into the hands of Indigenous women,” and be “led by Indigenous women.”⁴⁵ It is imperative that a national inquiry result in government action, and not just formality. The NDP has stipulated that they would call a public inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women within their first 100 days of office, and would consult with Indigenous partners to discern the systemic problems of violence.⁴⁶ The Liberal Party of Canada has also made a commitment to a national inquiry,⁴⁷ whereas Prime Minister Harper has stated that “it really isn’t high on [his] radar.”⁴⁸

To improve equality and increase opportunity for Indigenous women, it is imperative that access to education be improved. It is estimated that while 28% of non-indigenous women have a “bachelor’s degree or higher,” only about 14% of indigenous women do.⁴⁹ Additionally indigenous women and men are less likely to complete high school than their non-indigenous counterparts.⁵⁰ Education is an essential element of combating violence against indigenous women, while also reducing the income gap between indigenous and non-indigenous women. It is estimated that Indigenous peoples with a bachelor’s degree make a comparable amount to non-indigenous people, but that those with a high school education alone make substantially less.⁵¹ While education is not the sole solution to solving the vast inequality that indigenous women face, it is a foundational component.

Questions for Candidates:

Do you support a national inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls? And if so, how would you ensure that the findings of the inquiry resulted in government action?

How would you ensure that the RCMP, the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women taskforce, and other law enforcement bodies are building positive relationships with Indigenous women?

What types of resources would you allocate to improve living conditions and reduce the risk of violence for Indigenous women?

What commitments are you willing to make to improve access to secondary and post-secondary education for Indigenous women?

5. Housing

Affordable access to housing is essential to increasing women's equality and reducing poverty more broadly. CEDAW has expressed its concern with Canada's lack of an affordable housing strategy.⁵² It has called on Canada to improve and enforce anti-discrimination legislation, shelter allowances and social assistance rates, as well as to provide "adequate support to people with disabilities."⁵³ It is imperative that women fleeing intimate partner violence have access to transition housing, to ensure they have adequate support.

Currently, 3.3 million households spend 30% of their income on shelter, and 982000 households report that their housing is substandard.⁵⁴ Housing is also "one of the most important determinants of health for individuals," communities, and the economy.⁵⁵ While the federal government currently commits funding to housing projects, these amounts are expected to decline to \$1.9 billion by 2018, an amount 36% below 2010 levels. Such a reduction in funding will create gaps in coverage that will make it even harder for impoverished women to find suitable housing. Currently, the federal government has committed to a "Housing First" initiative but its "one-size-fits-all model" is problematic.⁵⁶ In particular, this model falsely assumes that issues of homelessness are the same, without recognizing that the needs of "women fleeing domestic violence" are diverse.⁵⁷

Canada should commit to a National Affordable Housing strategy that seeks to address the needs of varying communities. The Conservative government has maintained funding for housing, but these levels are set to decrease. At its recent national convention, the Liberal Party of Canada committed to formulating a national housing action plan

committed to delivering affordable housing.⁵⁸ The NDP have also committed to developing a “national strategy to ensure secure, adequate, accessible, and affordable housing.”⁵⁹

Questions for Candidates:

Housing remains inaccessible for many women across the country. What would you do to reduce the cost of housing, and increase availability?

Women fleeing domestic violence have particular needs that are unique to them. How would you ensure that social housing meets these needs?

Many Indigenous Women are living in substandard and unsafe conditions. How would you work with Indigenous partners to provide affordable and safe housing for these women?

6. Economic Equality

There is still great economic disparity between men and women, much of it caused by pay inequality. The *Canadian Human Rights Act* mandates that employees of any gender must be paid the same for equal work,⁶⁰ but this has not manifested in actuality. In Canada, it is estimated that on average, women earn 71% of what men earn in a year.⁶¹ Even with a university degree, women only earn 74% of what a university-educated man earns.⁶² The pay gap exists in every sector, and even when women work in the same jobs as men they still earn less.⁶³ Canada has recently fallen to eleventh on the Human Development Index, and falls to eighteenth when adjusted for income inequality.⁶⁴

The root causes of economic inequality are structural in nature. A Statistics Canada study found that the presence of children leads to inequality as women are still expected to do much of the domestic work.⁶⁵ Additionally, it is women who are expected to take leave from work to deal with emergency familial situations or to take care of children; this allows men to continue working and climb the employment ladder.⁶⁶ Women are paid less for work that has been traditionally allocated to women such as teaching, childcare, health, and clerical duties.⁶⁷ Women have also been affected by provincial cuts to social assistance and reductions in federal transfer payments.⁶⁸ Finally, the Canada Pension Plan is based on earnings throughout one's life and therefore older women and persons with disabilities are frequently disadvantaged as they typically earn less throughout their lives.⁶⁹

While the *Canadian Human Rights Act* recognizes pay equity, it places the responsibility on individuals to file complaints. Instead, the onus should be placed on employers to ensure that men and women are paid equally for equal work. The

Conservative government does not appear to have any plans to table pay equity legislation. In fact, it has previously tried to force public sector employees to resolve pay equity complaints through collective bargaining rather than through the Canada Human Rights Commission.⁷⁰ The NDP have called for “proactive pay equity legislation” that would require employers to take immediate action to ensure that men and women are paid equally.⁷¹ Prominent Liberal party MP Marc Garneau has faulted the current complaints based process and called on the federal government to adopt a similar “proactive pay equity” plan in adherence with the findings of the Pay Equity task force.⁷²

Questions for Candidates:

Pay equity between men and women remains a major burden to economic equality. What policies or initiatives would you undertake to ensure pay equity for women across Canada?

Many women still work in traditionally feminized spheres and are paid less because of this. What would you do to counteract this and how would you work to increase pay in these fields?

One of the major issues with the current Canadian Human Rights Act system is that the complaint process places the burden on the employee. How would you make the employer more accountable to ensure pay equity?

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

7. Political Participation

Women are underrepresented in Parliament, and in politics more broadly. It can be difficult for women to build the political capital necessary to capture the nomination in a “winnable riding,” as many women are nominated in so-called “lost-cause ridings.” In the 2011 federal election, women were elected to 76 of 308 constituencies, comprising approximately 25% of the House of Commons.⁷³ As most elected members are representatives of particular parties, it is important to examine the number of women candidates each party nominated. In 2011, 40 of 124 women were elected for the NDP, the Conservative Party saw 28 of its 68 women candidates elected, and only 6 of the 90 Liberal Party women candidates were elected.⁷⁴

Women face a number of barriers to entering politics, and it is important to understand these before we can correct them. Women are forced to encounter sex stereotyping which suggests that they should be less aggressive campaigners, thereby raising doubts about their suitability for an election campaign.⁷⁵ A second deterrent to running is contained in political socialization: from a young age it perpetuates the idea that politics are a masculine pursuit.⁷⁶ Women are also less likely than men to be employed in fields – such as law – that allow for the establishment of political connections, and provide time off to run for office.⁷⁷ It is also worth noting that a majority of members in most political parties tend to be Canadian born, educated, older, and male thereby signifying an underrepresentation of minority groups and women.⁷⁸

In order to make representative decisions, Canada’s Parliament must be reflective of the nation’s demographics. Therefore, parties must take a greater role in recruiting women candidates and ensuring that they are nominated in ridings where they have a real

opportunity of achieving victory. Since 1980, the NDP has run more women than any other party in nearly every election, and they have frequently elected many of these candidates.⁷⁹ The BC NDP has adopted affirmative action quotas that set aside 30% of all provincial ridings for women, and another 10% for other underrepresented groups.⁸⁰ Additionally, they have mandated that any riding “vacated by retiring NDP MLAs be designated for women candidates.”⁸¹ Beginning with the 2015 election, Liberal Party of Canada Electoral District Associations (EDAs) are required to submit reports indicating that they undertook a “thorough search” for women and minority candidates.⁸² Regardless whether the approach is quotas or reporting processes, it is essential that parties seek to recruit more women candidates to ensure that Parliament is representative of women’s voices.

Questions for Candidates:

Women are drastically underrepresented in the Canadian political system. What policies would you support to change this trend?

Do you think that electoral reform is necessary to increase women’s involvement in politics?

What policies or initiatives would you support to encourage more women to become involved in party politics?

8. Refugee Women and Temporary Foreign Workers

Migrant women are typically forced to live in poverty and are at a higher risk of violence.

Refugees and Temporary Foreign Workers (TFW) are frequently forced to work in precarious positions of employment, often devoid of regulation and living benefits.⁸³

Given that many refugees and temporary foreign workers are racialized, they earn less than their non-racialized counterparts. It is estimated that racialized women earn 55.6 cents to every dollar non-racialized men earn, and that racialized women earn 88.2 cents to every dollar non-racialized women earn.⁸⁴

The federal government has attempted to reduce the level of healthcare coverage for refugees. In 2014, the Federal Court ruled that cuts to the Interim Federal Health Program were unconstitutional and declared that refugees must not be subjected to “cruel and unusual punishment.”⁸⁵ The Conservative government has appealed this ruling, and has also tabled legislation that allows provinces “to impose minimum residency requirements” on groups who require social assistance.⁸⁶ The CCPA observes that these cuts were initiated by the federal government on its own accord, and serve only “to deny refugee claimants the basic assistance they need,”⁸⁷ thereby perpetuating both poverty and the risk of violence.

While employers are mandated to pay for recruitment and placement fees of TFWs, there is no system in place to monitor this, resulting in frequent exploitation of workers.⁸⁸ Employers have been known to violate labour standards, paying TFWs rates well below minimum wage, forcing them to work long hours, and requiring them to pay for cramped housing.⁸⁹ Throughout the program, “work permits are tied to a single employer,” which increases the risk of abuse, coercion, and violence especially for

women.⁹⁰ Racialized workers also have difficulty finding tenancy outside of their employer as many landlords actively stereotype and discriminate against these individuals.⁹¹

Much of the conversation around the TFW Program has centered upon employers who utilize it, rather than the workers who are often subjected to deplorable living conditions. It is imperative that the abuses that have taken place in the program be brought to light, and that the issue of citizenship be address. The Conservative government has restricted the pathway to permanent residency for these workers, and streamlined the program to bring in a “high-skilled stream.”⁹² Meanwhile many workers are being left behind and have little chance of attaining citizenship. It is imperative that all parties be made aware of the abuses that have occurred, and implored to extend a path to citizenship for these workers.

Questions for Candidates:

Refugee women are at a higher risk of violence and frequently live in abject poverty. What would you do to improve living conditions and reduce violence for refugees?

There are many burdens to being accepted as a refugee to Canada. What, if anything, would you do to increase the ease of application?

There are many abuses that take place in the Temporary Foreign Worker Program and the Live-in Caregiver program. What steps would you take to reduce coercion, abuse, and violence against women in these programs?

Many Temporary Foreign Workers wish to apply for permanent residency and ultimately citizenship. Would you provide a path to citizenship for these workers, regardless whether they are high-skilled or low-skilled?

9. Women with Disabilities

Women living with disabilities have a diverse set of concerns that government must address. There are more women than men living with disabilities in Canada, and Indigenous peoples “have twice the national disability rate.”⁹³ They often face immense economic barriers as the average income for a woman with a disability under 35 is \$13 000, and women over 55 have an average income of \$14 000.⁹⁴ Women with disabilities face significant issues finding affordable childcare, and accessible affordable housing. The DisAbled Women’s Network Canada (DAWN) has stressed the importance of making the workplace accessible, and “educating the labour sector...to accommodate women with disabilities.”⁹⁵ DAWN Canada also believes that this accessibility must extend to the private sphere, to ensure that women with disabilities can perform household tasks.⁹⁶ It is imperative, therefore, that any national housing strategy considers accessible housing.

Many stereotypes exist against women with disabilities leading to stigmatization. DAWN Canada believes that more employment opportunities will be created with expanded knowledge, improved social attitudes, and the creation of support groups for women with disabilities.⁹⁷ Given the high rates of violence against women with disabilities, it is also necessary to prioritize shelter and transition housing. Additionally, many refugee and immigrant women with disabilities face additional challenges with settlement, and government must ensure they have all necessary resources.⁹⁸ It also important to note that the ending of Canada Post door-to-door delivery has implications for disabled women who may face increased difficulty in accessing their mail. Finally, it

is important to note that while women with disabilities face unique challenges, many of their challenges are the same as the ones faced by other women.

Questions for Candidates:

Women with disabilities are some of the most economically disadvantaged citizens. What actions would you undertake to improve the annual salaries for these women?

There are many spaces that are inaccessible to women with disabilities. How would you create more accessible spaces at work, at home, and in transition housing?

Women with disabilities face greater barriers when accessing health care. What policies would you support to increase access for these women?

Immigrant and Refugee women who live with disabilities face even greater barriers to settlement than other immigrants and refugees. How would you lessen the burden on these new Canadians?

With the understanding that Women with disabilities may face increased challenges in getting their mail, will you commit to reinstate Canada Post's door-to-door delivery?

10. Rights of Trans People

Despite much advancement for LGBTQ+ rights in Canada, there is still work to be done. Trans people have not been afforded the same rights as many others have within the queer community. Trans people often face difficulty in the job market for a variety of reasons. A survey by Trans Pulse, highlighted that 18% of trans Ontarians “had been turned down for a job because of their trans identities or histories,” and an additional 17% “had [declined] a job offer due to the lack of a trans-positive work environment.”⁹⁹ The process of providing references and credentials can also be difficult as these materials often contain information from before a transition occurred.¹⁰⁰ It is imperative that trans people be comfortable in their work environments and be free from discrimination.

In addition to discrimination faced in the workplace, many trans people face discrimination and violence in their everyday lives. It is estimated that 74% of trans youth have experienced “verbal harassment in school,” and as many as 37% have faced extreme violence.¹⁰¹ To combat discrimination and transphobia it is essential that trans people be afforded the same rights under the law. New Democratic MP Randall Garrison has been championing trans rights through his attempts to add gender identity provisions to the Criminal Code and the Canadian Human Rights Act with bill C-279. While the bill passed the House of Commons with the support of 18 Conservative MPs, it has since been stalled in the Senate.¹⁰² An amendment was added to prevent these protections from applying in “prisons, crisis centres, and public washrooms,” which both Garrison and progressive senators like Grant Mitchell have perceived as transphobic and “deeply troubling.”¹⁰³ While equality for the trans community cannot be attained through

legislation alone, ensuring trans people are protected from discrimination in day to day life is a foundational starting point.

Questions for Candidates:

What proactive measures would you take to address discrimination against trans people?

What programs and services would your party develop to address the discrimination and transphobia against trans youth?

11. Making Sure You Can Vote: The Fair Elections Act

In order for democracy to function properly, voters must be able to cast their ballots on Election Day. The government has recently introduced and passed *The Fair Elections Act* which has changed the way that Elections are conducted. In particular, it has eliminated the process of ‘vouching’ that previously allowed voters without ID to have someone they know vouch for them.¹⁰⁴ Additionally, the bill also eliminated the use of the “Voter Information Card” as a piece of ID; many voters use this card to verify their address at the polling station.¹⁰⁵ These moves were widely opposed by the current and former Chief Electoral Officers, along with academics and election observers, as they make it harder for people to vote.¹⁰⁶

The Fair Elections Act also restricts Elections Canada from engaging in advertising and marketing that encourages people to vote.¹⁰⁷ To ensure that you can vote on Election Day make sure that you have one valid piece of government issued photo ID with your current address on it, or one piece of ID with your name and a second with your current address. While vouching has been eliminated, there is still a process for an Oath to be taken; this now requires you to show at least two pieces with your name and have someone who knows you attest to your address. In order to ensure that you do not have issues on Election Day, it is advisable to ensure that your Voter Registration is updated which can be done online at Elections.ca. Any additional questions can be directed to Elections Canada and contact information is available on their website as well.

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