



Closing the Gender Gap in Alberta Employment

The Issue

Albertans face an affordability crisis on top of the impact of lost wages and work disruptions that started during the pandemic and continue today.

Women are strongly affected by this crisis.

Albertans need solutions to improve pay equity, childcare, training, and business investment.

Women & Work in Alberta

- **34%** of Albertan women are out of the labour force,¹ compared to **26%** of men.
- Alberta has the widest wage gap in Canada.²
- Women with children under 12 lost **twice** the work hours as men did during COVID-19.³
- Recent immigrant women have nearly **twice** the unemployment rate of other women.⁴
- **79%** of women-owned businesses operate without employees, compared to **67%** of men's businesses.⁵

The Opportunity

Alberta's community non-profits are well-positioned to support women's employment opportunities and close the gender gap in the labour force.

Community non-profits have on-the-ground knowledge of what women require to participate in Alberta's workforce. They have the unique ability to develop nimble and innovative solutions.

Industry, government, and non-profit partnerships can leverage these strengths to collaboratively support women's employment.

Applying community non-profits' knowledge and solutions to these partnerships can ensure policies and programs adequately support women to fully participate in the workforce and have equitable employment opportunities.

Listening to community non-profits and heeding their calls to action can promote gender equity, strengthen the economy, and support the well-being of families and communities, while addressing Alberta's nearly 100,000 job vacancies.⁶



71%

*Albertan women
make on average
of what men make
working in a
similar job²*

Five Calls to Action

Albertans vote on May 29, 2023.

The provincial election is an opportunity to connect with politicians motivated to meet the needs of Albertans. Community non-profits can advocate for the women they serve.

Through our research about supporting women's workforce participation, we have developed five calls to action to close the gender gap in Alberta.

We hope that community non-profits use this information to support their work by:

- Amplifying the need for gender equity in Alberta's labour force in communications with candidates and the new government.
- Citing the knowledge in grant applications or policy briefs to demonstrate the urgent need for gender equity in Alberta employment.

Using a coordinated effort, we can demonstrate the impact of community non-profits and put the priorities on the attention of our elected officials.

1. Enhance Childcare Systems

- **Increase affordability** by fast-tracking and expanding the \$10-a-day program and including childcare in employee benefits.
- **Diversify childcare options** by expanding daycare schedules and program options, including culturally responsive childcare, and supporting partnerships between industry and non-profits.
- **Attract and retain Early Childhood Educators** by increasing wages, improving benefits, and supporting professional development.

2. Build Jobs & Training for Women

- **Partner with community non-profits to design and deliver employment programs** by determining training priorities through community engagement, supporting employment programs with good impact, and investing in women leaders.
- **Foster equitable, safe, and respectful workplaces** by enacting pay equity legislation, growing awareness of the [Duty to Accommodate](#), and building Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion capacity.

3. Invest in Women Entrepreneurs

- **Improve access to start-up funding** by partnering with business development programs to offer seed funding to graduates and increasing investment in women's businesses.
- **Build strong business networks** by partnering with community organizations to provide access to affordable business accounting, mentorship, and networking.



35%

*of managers in Alberta
are women⁷*

4. Embrace Newcomer Women's Full Potential

- **Welcome global expertise** by streamlining foreign credential recognition, creating opportunities for newcomers to build Canadian work experience, and improving labour protections for temporary foreign workers.

5. Mobilize Community Solutions

- **Provide organizations with stable funding** by re-envisioning funding models to centre sustainability, increasing the length of project funding, and ensuring support for community engagement and evaluation.
- **Enhance capacity for collaboration and coordination** by investing in wraparound care, enhancing cross-sectoral partnerships, and addressing intersectional employment needs.

The next section details the *Five Calls to Action*, informed by voices of diverse women and non-profits.

Moving Beyond the Binary

Canada lacks publicly available data about transgender, non-binary, and gender-diverse people. Some data sources use binary sex to classify respondents. Others put gender-diverse people in binary categories. We focus on women in this advocacy brief to align with the available data. Gender-diverse people have unique needs. To inform the development of inclusive policies and programs, public agencies must improve how they handle gender in their research.



Five Calls to Action

1. Enhance Childcare Systems

Affordable, accessible, and quality childcare facilitates women’s labour force participation.

“Why isn’t childcare something people can use flex spending for? Parents are still struggling to pay those fees.”

—Community non-profit worker

Increase Affordability

Childcare affordability is improving in Alberta through the Federal-Provincial Child Care Agreement \$10-a-day deal. But, it will not be fully implemented until 2026. The Agreement is also limited in scope, leaving after-school care out.

To improve childcare affordability, the Alberta government can:

- Fast-track the \$10-a-day childcare deal.
- Expand the Child Care Subsidy and the \$10-a-day deal to include after-school and extended hours care.
- Create additional licensed childcare spaces.
- Streamline day home licensing.
- Explore sustainable options for kinship caregiving.
- Ensure the \$10-a-day deal includes culturally responsive childcare.
- Incentivize employers to include childcare in their benefits packages.
- Extend the use of health spending or “flex spending” accounts to include childcare.

Diversify Childcare Options

We heard from Albertan women that they struggle to find work that accommodates childcare schedules. Most childcare options align with weekday business hours, which are not a good fit for shift and gig work. After-hours childcare is scarce. Families also need access to childcare options that respect and celebrate their cultural needs.

To meet Albertan families’ diverse childcare needs, the Alberta government can:

- Conduct a community-engaged needs assessment to determine childcare priorities.
- Partner with school districts to establish school-based childcare options.⁸
- Work with community non-profits to create training programs and employment opportunities with on-site childcare.
- Provide funding to childcare operators for extended hours, drop-in access, and flexible pick-up times to accommodate shift work and unexpected overtime.
- Develop culturally responsive childcare programs with Indigenous- and newcomer-led community non-profits and small businesses.

Albertan families say they have trouble finding childcare that fits their:

Budget ————— **43%**

Schedule ————— **39%**

Cultural or language needs¹⁰ — **10%**

“The [after school] daycare expects you to bring the kids to their location. They are not arranging transportation from the school to the daycare. So, if I can drive the kids to the daycare, then I don’t need daycare, right? It doesn’t really work.”

—Newcomer woman entrepreneur

44%

Early Childhood Educators make of what the average Albertan worker makes⁹

Attract and Retain Early Childhood Educators

Early Childhood Educators are a skilled workforce who play an essential role in child development and our province’s future. Increasing childcare affordability will increase demand and the industry will require more workers. Investing in Early Childhood Educators is an opportunity to support Albertan women and children. It can improve the job conditions for a women-led workforce while enhancing access to quality childcare for women in other sectors.⁹

29%

of childcare workers in Canada are self-employed, compared to 15% of workers in other industries⁹

To attract and retain more Early Childhood Educators, the Alberta government can:

- Adopt transparent wage grids for Early Childhood Educators.¹¹
- Ensure Level 1 Early Childhood Educator starting wages exceed \$20.20 per hour.
- Expand benefits to childcare operators for paying wages during professional development.
- Provide funding for operators to provide competitive benefits packages.
- Streamline foreign credential recognition for Early Childhood Educators.
- Establish Early Childhood Educator scholarship and bursary programs.
- Cap tuition for Early Childhood Educator certification.

2. Build Jobs & Training for Women

Women underscored how their career paths improved when they connected with a community-based employment program.

Partner with Community-Based Non-Profits to Design and Deliver Employment Programs

A range of employment programs connecting women with well-paying jobs can enhance workforce participation in woman-minority and -majority fields. We heard that women want training opportunities that extend beyond entry-level work and support their advancement. They also want access to networking opportunities. Employment programs with opportunities to build networks support women's mental health, provide guidance, and connect them with employment.

Women have diverse career goals and do not feel that all workplaces, particularly in trades and energy, are safe and compatible with their needs. Supportive and inclusive policies, like paid professional development and anti-discrimination policies, need to be paired with efforts to shift women-minority industries. Community non-profits are well-suited to design and deliver these programs by adapting to the specific needs and priorities of the women they serve.

“ [Workers] don’t know what their rights are until they’re pushed out. Even if their employer knows, sometimes they are just kind of hoping that the employee isn’t aware of [their rights], just hopes that they go away, and they often do.”

—Community non-profit worker

“ I’m coming from Nigeria. It works differently there with how you apply for jobs, and what should be on your resume. There was [a session for newcomers] where they pair you with a mentor in your field in Canada. They actually paired me with someone from my same country. I felt like he could relate, and he really gave me some good advice. I’m hoping that I can be a mentor to someone someday.”

—Newcomer woman

To create employment programs that centre women's needs and build a vibrant workforce, the Alberta government can:

- Consult with women with lived experience and organizations that support their employment to identify training priorities that meet both labour market demands and women's needs.
- Spread and scale existing community-based training models with demonstrated impact.
- Partner with non-profits to expand leadership development programs for women.
- Provide stable funding for community-based non-profits that improve workplace inclusion in women-minority industries.
- Fund mentorship and systems navigation programs for newcomer women, women entrepreneurs, and women in employment programs.

Foster Equitable, Safe, and Respectful Workplaces

Women are more likely than men to work in low-wage jobs.¹² These jobs often lack security, which can lead to abuse and exploitation of the workforce. Many women also experience workplace discrimination due to gender, sexuality, race, or disability. We heard stories of women's requests for accommodation due to pregnancy, injuries, or concerns about COVID-19 being rejected. Women described being unaware of their rights related to anti-discrimination legislation and the Duty to Accommodate.

To ensure all workers are safe and respected, the Alberta government can:

- Enact pay equity legislation.
- Legislate 14 days of paid sick leave and family leave for all workers.
- Encourage employers to enact pay transparency and equity policies.
- Create accessible resources about employers' Duty to Accommodate and labour standards.
- Fund community non-profit initiatives that build employers' capacity to create equity, diversity, and inclusion policies.
- Expedite complaints processes through the Alberta Human Rights Commission.

Low wage workers are:

14% — less likely to have their mental health needs met

14% — less likely to be satisfied in their lives

2.4 times — more likely to have an anxiety disorder compared to higher wage workers¹⁵

3. Invest in Women Entrepreneurs

Alberta's passionate women business owners see entrepreneurship as a source of financial independence, cultural expression, community building, and personal development.

Improve Access to Startup Funding

Women who set out to become entrepreneurs at the beginning of COVID-19 experienced challenges starting their businesses. We heard about barriers to accessing capital due in part to gendered stereotypes about women in business. Establishing a new business means paying for licensing, business accounting, marketing, and more. Women who took on loans and lost revenue over the pandemic accumulated debt. Targeted support for up-and-coming women entrepreneurs can help them build and sustain their businesses.

“Resources [to start a business] are limited. There are so many criteria. It limits you because, if you're new, you don't have employees, you don't have the experience that they're saying you should have. I'm thinking to myself, if you're starting from scratch, where do you begin if you don't have those resources?”

—Newcomer woman entrepreneur

To support women-owned businesses, the Alberta government can:

- Offer low-barrier seed capital grants for women with built-in mentorship support.
- Partner with community-based business development programs to offer startup funding to program graduates from racialized, Indigenous, and newcomer communities.
- Create government-private sector partnerships that increase transparency in business investment by identifying factors like gender, race, Indigeneity, and immigration status.

“So, looking back now, what I would have wanted is mentorship. I think I just had no idea. I was lost in the abyss. I didn’t know what to do.”

—Indigenous woman entrepreneur

Build Strong Business Networks

Many women entrepreneurs started businesses in sectors hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁴ Newer businesses struggled because they were ineligible for COVID-19 relief funding. Women described juggling business planning, attracting investment, managing inventory, promotion, licensing, accounting, and more on their own—tasks that required different skill sets and a strong support network.¹⁴ Most women entrepreneurs do not have additional help,¹⁵ which means work interruptions due to childcare demands, illness, or other life circumstances halt progress. Community business development programs can connect women with investors, mentors, and fellow business owners for guidance and support.

To increase access to business mentorship, navigation, and networking for women entrepreneurs, the Alberta government can:

- Create long-term funding opportunities for community-based business mentorship programs.
- Partner with community non-profits to create affordable business accounting services for women entrepreneurs.
- Facilitate networking opportunities between women entrepreneurs, mentors, investors, and government sponsors.
- Fund mentorship programs that support building sustainability and budgeting for disruptions to cash flow for one-person businesses.

4. Embrace Newcomer Women’s Full Potential

Community-based programs play a crucial role in building bridges and navigating employment for newcomer women, including making social connections to access job information, supports, training, and employers.

“Most of the time, we cannot even work in the fields that we came for, so we’re doing those little jobs to survive.”

—Newcomer woman

Welcome Global Expertise

Many skilled newcomers in Alberta end up unemployed or underemployed. Newcomer women described a disconnect between the Canadian jobs they were promised when they applied for immigration and their experience in the Canadian job market. Employers often expect newcomers to have Canadian work experience. Highly educated newcomers described difficulty getting their credentials recognized and using their education and training. This can lead newcomer women into “survival” jobs that do not align with their training and for which they are over-qualified.

To connect newcomer women with well-paying jobs in their fields, the Alberta government can:

- Streamline recognition of foreign professional credentials in compliance with the [Lisbon Recognition Convention](#).
- Invest in community-based capacity-building programs that challenge employers’ conscious and unconscious bias towards newcomers.
- Develop employment bridging programs and paid internships with a clear path to licensing.
- Establish partnerships with international post-secondary institutions to create streamlined recognition pathways for their graduates.
- Create dedicated positions to broker industry-community partnerships and maximize the expertise of non-profits to match skilled newcomer women with appropriate workplaces.
- Offer incentives for employers who hire newcomer women into professional positions.
- Support industry in offering on-the-job language courses and mentorship.
- Improve labour protections for temporary foreign workers, including personal and family responsibility leave.



5. Mobilize Community Solutions

Community non-profits have an in-depth understanding of the unique realities women experience and the service gaps that create barriers to women’s workforce participation. Non-profits are critical partners that funders and government can leverage to co-design services that holistically meet women’s needs.

Re-Envision Non-Profit Funding Models

Short-term, project-based funding challenges the ability of community non-profits to sustain programs and maintain a skilled workforce. Stable operational funding means community non-profits can get out of the grant-to-grant cycle, focus on designing programs that align with emerging needs, like a global pandemic, and serve communities better.

“Funding is set up to be competitive and not to be collaborative. So, if they could change the way the funding is given, so that organizations can actually work together without being penalized for it, I think that would make a huge difference.”

—Community non-profit worker

To create funding opportunities that promote long-term sustainability for community non-profits, the Alberta government can:

- Provide operational funding so non-profits can attract and retain the skilled workforce to create innovative programs, expand services, and reduce barriers to women's employment success.
- Increase project funding lengths to ensure sufficient time to meaningfully engage communities in program design, develop strong project advisories, and collaborate across sectors.
- Ensure projects have sufficient funding for honouraria to engage community members with lived experience, advisory committees, and knowledge keepers.
- Provide additional funding for projects to incorporate developmental, iterative, outcomes, and impact evaluations.

Increase Capacity for Collaborative Care

A collaborative, systems approach can support women's career goals and participation in Alberta's economy. Community non-profits' knowledge and experience are critical for understanding communities' needs and crafting responses to address them. Community non-profits and policy-makers can work together to create environments and supportive structures for women so they can thrive as part of the Alberta workforce and economy.

To support collaboration within the social sector, the Alberta government can:

- Appoint a dedicated ministry for coordinated wraparound social care.
- Improve communication pathways across ministries.
- Support cross-sectoral partnerships.
- Develop communities of practice to improve cross-sectoral sharing of lessons learned.
- Invest in government-community partnerships to design training, employment, business, and bridging programs.
- Fund coordination of wraparound services supporting basic needs within workforce readiness, business development, and financial literacy programs.

“I think it’s important that governments are more involved with non-profits and community agencies because we are the ones that are working with these people. We know their stories, and there is a kind of that disconnect between the government, whether it’s about funding or income support grant or any of that.”

—Community non-profit worker

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We acknowledge and thank all women and community non-profits who contributed to this project.

To cite this document

PolicyWise for Children & Families. (2023, May). Closing the Gender Gap in Alberta Employment: Advocacy Brief. Edmonton, AB.

PolicyWise is a non-profit organization that supports the development of policies, programs, and services to benefit the well-being of Albertans. We conduct research, evaluation, and data analyses to ensure children, youth, and families can thrive.

To connect with us about these calls to action, contact the project team at info@policywise.com.

This project has been funded by:



Women and Gender
Equality Canada

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des genres Canada



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