



September 30, 2023

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

www.bpwcanada.com

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau:

The Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW Canada) respectfully submits the enclosed 2023 Brief for your consideration and action. The items herein represent the resolutions brought forward by our members from across the country which were debated and accepted at our National Annual General Meeting held in August, 2023.

BPW Canada is a non-sectarian, non-partisan organization that promotes and practices inclusion, diversity, equity and access. Our history includes over 90 years of advocacy for the inclusion of equal rights for women in legislation and policy. It is through this process of voicing the issues outlined in this Brief and engaging in open dialogue with your government that we can together build a strong and thriving Canada.

On behalf of BPW Canada, I take this opportunity to acknowledge the federal government's action to advance gender equality. As we continue to recover from the pandemic, our resolutions and advocacy focus on improving workforce issues and accessibility to affordable child care, ensuring access and protection of women's reproductive rights, and anti-human trafficking.

We respectfully request that you and the appropriate Ministers review the enclosed resolutions and be available to meet with our delegation at a time in keeping with your schedules. A member of BPW Canada will follow up with this correspondence with a personal contact to confirm the preferred meeting times and dates.

We commend your efforts to advance gender equality and look forward to meeting with you in the near future.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Angie Godin'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Angie Godin
President 2022-2024
BPW Canada



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Submission
to

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE JUSTIN TRUDEAU

PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA

BY



The Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women

**La Fédération Canadienne des Femmes de Carrières Commerciales et
Professionnelles**

**Member of the International Federation of Business and Professional
Women**

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**Working towards improving economic, political, social, and
employment conditions for women in Canada**

“Women Working for Working Women”

September 2023



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INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW Canada) is an equality seeking group working towards improving the economic, political, social and employment conditions for women. BPW Canada is a non-sectarian, non-partisan organization that promotes and practices inclusion, diversity, equity and access. BPW Canada develops the professional and leadership potential of women through education, awareness, advocacy and mentoring within the supportive network of BPW.

In 1930, BPW Canada was a founding member of the International Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs. BPW International has had Consultative Status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) since 1947 and is the recognized voice of working women in over 100 countries worldwide. As of September 30, 2021, BPW Canada has also had special Consultative Status.

For over ninety years we have advocated for women's rights at all levels and have played a significant role in achieving advancements for a just and equal society. For more information on our achievements, please visit our website at www.bpwcanada.com.

The BPW Canada Virtual Annual General Meeting was held on August 12, 2023. The resolutions contained in this document were initiated at the club level, researched, formulated, and brought to the 2023 AGM where they were debated and put to a vote. These accepted resolutions are herein presented for your consideration.

We look forward to the opportunity to meet with our federal government representatives to present our resolutions and our concerns in more detail.

Angie Godin, President 2022-2024, BPW Canada president@bpwcanada.com

Colleen Babiuk-Ilkiw, Vice President, Resolutions, By-Laws and Public Affairs, 2022-2024, BPW Canada resolutions@bpwcanada.com



Resolution #1: Support to Add Non-State Torture to the Criminal Code of Canada

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW Canada) urges the Government of Canada and relevant ministries to amend the Criminal Code of Canada to address the matter of Non-State Torture as an article to be included in the Criminal Code of Canada; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that BPW Canada urges the Government of Canada and relevant ministries to establish a maximum punishment of 14 years imprisonment to better reflect the harm that is caused to a victim of torture.

Ministries to include: Justice and Attorney General of Canada

Rationale

Section 269.1 of the *Criminal Code* provides for the offence of torture as the intentional inflicting of severe physical or mental pain by a state official (Parliament of Canada, 2016). It does not, however, recognize non-state torture in which torture is committed by parents, spouses, other kin, guardians, neighbours, trusted adults, strangers, human traffickers, johns, pimps or pornographers and generally happens in the private or domestic sphere.

The United Nations Committee Against Torture has called on states to recognize and address acts of torture that are carried out in the private realm. The Government of Canada is a signatory to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), where Article 5 states, “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment” and Article 8 states, “Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or bylaw”.

The London Abused Women’s Center in Ontario reports that approximately 60 women a year report that they have suffered non-state torture victimization (Sarson & MacDonald, 2021). In Canada, these acts of torture are typically considered to constitute the offence of aggravated assault under section 268 of the *Criminal Code*, which carries a maximum punishment of 14 years of imprisonment (Parliament of Canada, 2016). According to the Criminal Code of Canada, Article 269.1, the maximum sentence for "State" inflicted torture is 14 years. Therefore, the maximum sentence for non-state torture should be in line with State torture.



Resolution #1: Support to Add Non-State Torture to the Criminal Code of Canada

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Resolution #2: Women's Access to Health Services and Health Education through Technology

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW Canada) urges the Government of Canada and relevant ministries to:

1. Ensure internet access and connectivity, public access to computer literacy, and skills training to remote locations, Indigenous communities and under-served areas as per UN CSW67 Technology and the Digital Gender Divide Agreed Conclusions V1.0 Sections: 13, 19, 24, 25, 26, 37;
2. Ensure health care transfers have standardized service requirements across the provinces and territories to include access to mental health, reproductive health, virtual health care, etc.;
3. Mandate a reporting process from provinces and territories to the federal government that measures data on:
 - a. Service to marginalized groups, Indigenous women, childbearing women, disabled women, 2SLGBTQI and elderly women and especially women living in rural, remote, Indigenous communities and underserved areas;
 - b. Access and delivery of crucial health and health education services without financial or other barriers including technical infrastructure and access to medical doctors, nurses and other health care professionals, including virtual health care services; and
 - c. Service gaps especially in mental health, substance use disorders and reproductive services; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that BPW Canada urges the Government of Canada to ensure federal ministries work in partnership with provincial and territorial counterparts to implement the required digital infrastructure and define and monitor health care delivery standards.

Ministries to include: Finance; Public Safety; Public Services and Procurement; Indigenous Services; Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario; Innovation, Science and Industry; Prairies Economic Development Canada; Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency; Northern Affairs; Housing, Infrastructure and Communities; Health; Rural Economic Development; Women, Gender Equality and Youth; Mental Health and Addictions; Diversity, Inclusion and Persons with Disabilities and Families, Children and Social Development.

Rationale

In 2019, the Government of Canada created Canada's Digital Charter promising all Canadians equal opportunity to the digital world, and in March 2023 Canada was a signatory to the UN CSW67 Technology and the Digital Gender Divide Agreed Conclusions. Despite these commitments, many communities are left without access to high-speed internet.



Resolution #2: Women's Access to Health Services and Health Education through Technology

Rationale (cont'd): Improving digital equity is necessary to support marginalized groups with full inclusion and participation in health equity. Technology and innovative health care, such as mobile clinics and telehealth, are not readily available in many of Canada's rural, remote, and Indigenous communities (Nguyen et al., 2021). Canadian women, especially marginalized women, have been struggling with inflated wait times at hospitals, closed emergency departments, and reduced access to health care workers (Speer, 2018).

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Resolution #3: National Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Standards for Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW Canada) urges the Government of Canada and relevant ministries to develop and monitor a standard for the pan-Canadian Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) system that ensures the incorporation of the principles of inclusion, diversity, equity and access into a robust community-driven national child care and early learning strategy that:

1. Promotes community engagement and ensures an inclusive voice, including underrepresented and marginalized women (racialized, Indigenous, gender diverse, newcomers and those living with disabilities) to shape the delivery models for ELCC policies, programs and services;
2. Promotes access to ELCC resources and information that is sensitive to language, cultural, multi-generational and gender diverse barriers;
3. Requires education and awareness training for ELCC providers to promote cultural and gender diverse sensitivity;
4. Supports the development of innovative child care delivery models to engage newcomers to Canada, racialized groups and low income women in establishing and delivering programs and services that meet or exceed agreed upon standards of care, inclusion, diversity, equity and access; and
5. Includes a national ELCC workforce strategy to ensure a sustainable supply of high quality ELCC providers through improved working conditions, wages and innovative collaborative training and certification initiatives with community colleges, newcomer centres and ELCC Centres.

Ministries to include: Finance; Employment, Workforce Development; Health; Women and Gender Equality and Youth; Diversity, Inclusion and Persons with Disabilities; and Families, Children and Social Development.

Rationale

The essential role of Early Learning Educators and a lack of access to affordable quality child care became increasingly clear during the COVID-19 pandemic (BPW Canada, 2021). Families, particularly women, were profoundly impacted by the lack of childcare support, with many leaving the workforce and disrupting career advancement to care for their children.

The Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Strategy and agreements from all provinces and territories, the recommendations outlined in Bill C-35 and the establishment of the National Advisory Council on Early Learning and Child Care are crucial steps toward a sustainable childcare system for all (Parliament of Canada, 2022). To promote the recovery and participation of women in all their diversity in the Canadian workforce, in ensuring access to affordable universal quality child care, attention must be given to building a strong and stable childcare workforce strategy (BPW Canada, 2021). Like many challenges that the broader “care economy faces”, fair compensation and working conditions are paramount to a sustainable national childcare strategy (The Canadian Women’s Foundation et al., 2020).



Resolution #3: National Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Standards for Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access

Development of the ELCC Strategy must employ inclusion, diversity, equity and access strategies to ensure that the diverse needs of communities are reflected in policy development, service planning and implementation.

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Resolution #4: Improving the Reproductive Health Services Process Across Canada

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW Canada) urges the Government of Canada and relevant ministries to:

1. Establish a process through the Canada Health Transfer system that sets out standards of service related to reproductive health and abortion information and services using the Canada Mental Health Transfer model developed for mental health services as a template; and
2. Ensure that the Canada Health Transfer system includes a reporting requirement so that reproductive health and abortion services data can be collected to keep updating the standards of service and maintain equities in the delivery of the services covered; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that BPW Canada urges the Government of Canada and relevant ministries to provide permanent funding in future budgets to continue the existence of The Health Canada Sexual and Reproductive Health Fund and its related initiatives that provide access to reproductive information, services and procedures.

Ministries to include: Finance; Indigenous Services; Women and Gender Equality and Youth; Mental Health and Addictions; Health and Families, Children and Social Development.

Rationale

Provinces and territories receive funding for abortion services through Canada Transfer Agreements, however each distributes these services differently. Differences include the availability of qualified abortion providers, limits on the number of weeks at which abortions can be performed, and facilities where abortions occur may vary from hospitals only to private clinics or none (National Abortion Federation Canada, 2023). Women in rural areas and provinces that do not offer sufficient access to centers can experience delays, which can increase the risk of severe maternal morbidity (Schummers, 2019). The use of Mifegymiso, also known as the “abortion pill”, has not increased access to either medical or surgical abortion services and is not readily accessible, e.g., the pill must be prescribed by a doctor in person (Long, 2022).

Both the National Association of Women and the Law (NAWL) and Action Canada support the Canada Mental Health Transfer model, as this transfer system can “incentivize” action to provide better services and also to penalize provinces and territories that do not meet standardized care and services (Action Canada, 2022).



Resolution #4: Improving the Reproductive Health Services Process Across Canada

Rationale (cont'd):

BPW Canada commends the Government of Canada for including an additional \$36 million over three years in Budget 2023, starting in 2024-25 to Health Canada, which will renew the Sexual and Reproductive Health Fund (SRH) and improve access to Sexual and Reproductive Health.

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Resolution #5: Strengthening Access to Abortion and Other Reproductive Services Across Canada

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW Canada) urges the Government of Canada and relevant ministries to:

1. Urge the provinces and territories to initiate a program of education and training for registered health care professionals in areas that do not provide abortion services within underserved rural and urban, remote and Indigenous areas that would enable patients seeking abortion services to consult on abortion information and options, and be prescribed a medical abortion option without the necessity of meeting a doctor in person as currently required, if available within the necessary time frame; and
2. Allow trained nurse-practitioners, physician assistants and midwives to prescribe a medical abortion option in the consultation process and increase access in underserved rural and urban, remote and Indigenous areas; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that BPW Canada urges the Government of Canada and relevant ministries to:

1. Complete the development of the Health Canada portal to include information on abortion options and related reproductive health information so that all women searching for information and facing reproductive health decisions have a safe and reliable tool to assist their connection to reliable information and educated and informed medical staff; and
2. Utilize new and ongoing technologies and infrastructure upgrades to increase access through the internet and use of mobile devices.

Ministries to include: Public Services and Procurement; Indigenous Services; Innovation, Science and Industry; Housing, Infrastructure and Communities; Health; Women and Gender Equality and Youth; Mental Health and Addictions; Families, Children and Social Development.

Rationale

Although decriminalized in 1988 by the Supreme Court of Canada *R Vs Morgentaler* [1988] 1 SCR 30 and provided as a publicly-funded service under the Canada Health Act, abortion remains inequitably accessible. In 2016, a United Nations Human Rights Commissioner's report expressed concern that access to and the number of abortion providers was inconsistent across Canada and that women in rural and northern areas could experience a "serious ordeal" accessing abortion services (United Nations, 2016). Indigenous women experience additional barriers as they have experienced stereotyping and racism in health care (Action Canada, 2021;2022).



Resolution #5: Strengthening Access to Abortion and Other Reproductive Services Across Canada

Rationale (cont'd): Delays in obtaining an abortion increase the risk of severe maternal morbidity from complications and severe adverse reactions to surgical abortion (Canadian Medical Association Journal, 2019). Mifegymiso, a drug regime more commonly known as the “abortion pill”, is a much less invasive option for abortion but continues to present challenges because of the conditions attached to its prescription, including the necessity for an appointment with a medical doctor (Stoat, 2022).

In December 2022, Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights, reported a 184% increase in calls (during 2022 over 2021) from those looking for information on abortion and other reproductive health services. In December 16, 2021, the Prime Minister of Canada’s Mandate letter to the Minister of Health directed the development of a Health Canada portal for sexual and reproductive rights information that would be available to Canadians no matter their locality. It is imperative that the Government of Canada continue to support access to abortion, among other reproductive services.

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Resolution #6: Updated Health Related Risks and Consequences of Alcohol Use and Abuse in Women

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW Canada) urges the Government of Canada and relevant ministries along with the Canadian College of Physicians and Surgeons to:

1. work in partnership to develop a comprehensive, evidence-based prevention campaign strategy aimed at counteracting misinformation and giving consumers of alcohol, especially women, an informed choice;
2. ensure prevention campaign strategies be aimed at influencing a person's decision to drink and/or reducing alcohol consumption levels; and
3. provide research and evidence based information on i) what constitutes the volume of a standard alcohol drink; ii) the number of standard drinks in a bottle or glass; iii) an outline of the standard drinks not to be exceeded to avoid significant health risks; and iv) an illustration of the causal link between alcohol consumption and the development of fatal cancers, i.e., breast cancer, specifically targeting groups most vulnerable to the effects of alcohol; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that BPW Canada urges the Government of Canada and relevant ministries to support research on the sex and gender differences of the effect of alcohol, specifically on the impact of “binge” drinking on the health of females.

Ministries to include: Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs; Labour and Seniors; Health; Women and Gender Equality and Youth; Mental Health and Addictions; Families, Children and Social Development.

Rationale

At the 63rd session of the World Health Assembly, the 193 Member States adopted resolution WHA63.13, a historical consensus to reduce the harmful use of alcohol (WHO, 2010). Currently, alcohol has been classified as a leading preventable carcinogen and linked to at least seven types of cancer, including in the breast, colon, rectum, mouth, throat, liver, esophagus and larynx (CCSA, 2023).

Health Canada has lowered low-risk alcohol consumption to 1-2 drinks per occasion and 3-6 drinks per week for both men and women. Above the six standard drinks “*the health risks increase more steeply for females than for males*” (CCSA, 2023). The Canadian Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES, 2018) indicates that the death rate from cirrhosis in women is now up by 57% among women ages 45-64, and rose 18% among women ages 25-44 (from 2000-2015).



Resolution #6: Updated Health Related Risks and Consequences of Alcohol Use and Abuse in Women

Rationale (cont'd): The majority of Canadian women are unaware of the health risks of alcohol consumption, nor do they understand what is considered a standard drink of alcohol or the alcohol content of a standard drink. Senate Bill #S-254 (4-1) (Parliament of Canada 2021) would require the labelling of alcohol to inform the public of alcohol's links to cancer. Research on prevention strategies indicates warning labels may not solely stop or reduce alcohol use, but when combined with other actions, warning labels can increase awareness and discourage risky alcohol use and behaviours (WHO, 2022).

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Resolution #7: Supporting Education for Girls and Women in Afghanistan

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW Canada) urges the Government of Canada and relevant ministries to advocate the United Nations to prioritize the education of girls and women in Afghanistan and to hold the current Afghanistan regime accountable for ensuring school curricula are inclusive and in compliance with international human rights laws;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that BPW Canada urges the Government of Canada and relevant ministries to insist that restoration of girls' and women's education in Afghanistan should be a precondition for foreign aid or removal of sanctions; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that BPW Canada urges the Government of Canada and relevant ministries to collaborate with the United Nations and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) to adopt practical initiatives to assist Afghan girls and women in the immediate term by supporting regional countries to host female Afghan students and develop a digital learning platform for Afghan girls and women to access.

Ministries to include: Foreign Affairs; International Development; Women and Gender Equality and Youth.

Rationale

After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, girl's secondary education rates across Afghanistan rose from 6.3% (in 2003) to 40% (in 2018). Despite these rapid gains, in 2017, the Afghan government reported that 3.5 million children were out of school, with 85% being girls. For girls from low-income families, living in rural areas or with disabilities, even lower rates of school enrollment were reported. Social norms, tradition and religious beliefs encourage the early marriage of girls. In 2017, 35% of Afghan girls before the age of 18 and 10% before the age of 15 were forced into child marriage, accounting for another obstacle in obtaining an education (UNICEF & UNGEI, 2019).

On August 15, 2021, Taliban leaders shut secondary schools for girls. On December 20, 2022, the Taliban further extended the education ban for girls and women by denying access to universities, making Afghanistan the only country in the world to prohibit education based solely on gender (OHCHR, 2022).

Educating girls increases public health, boosts workforce participation, and reduces conflict. The Government of Canada is a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which all name girls' education as a fundamental human right. Both the Qur'an and Hadith—core Islamic texts—stipulate that girls should participate in education.



Resolution #7: Supporting Education for Girls and Women in Afghanistan

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Resolution #8: Addressing Workplace Harassment in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW Canada) urges the Government of Canada and relevant ministries to work in unison and commission an independent review of the RCMP to identify systemic barriers in place that may prevent women from succeeding in the RCMP; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that BPW Canada urges the Government of Canada and relevant ministries to implement the recommendations put forward within the “Broken Dreams Broken Lives” (BDBL) Report, specifically starting with Recruitment, Training and Leadership development recommendations.

Ministries to include: Finance; Public Safety; Emergency Preparedness; Indigenous Services; Labour and Seniors; Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages; Health; Women and Gender Equality and Youth; Diversity, Inclusion and Persons with Disabilities and Justice.

Rationale

Women in the RCMP workplace have been subject to sexual harassment, bullying, sexual assault, and gender-based discrimination (GBD) for over 30 years. Together, the Broken Dreams Broken Lives’ (BDBL) Report (Bastarache, 2020) and the Final Report on the Tiller/Copland/Roach (TCR) RCMP Class Action (Kirkpatrick, 2022) examined over 3600 workplace harassment claims and found a toxic, misogynistic, and homophobic workplace culture (Bastarache, 2020). Victims of workplace sexual harassment and gender based discrimination (GBD) suffer significant psychological distress, physical health ailments, and career disruptions leading to ongoing financial stress (McLaughlin et al., 2017).

Embedded organizational misogyny manifests itself in poor handling of sexual assaults, gender-based violence, and missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and it has led to calls from the United Nations and Human Rights Watch, among other organizations (Misra et al., 2022).

With women constituting only 21.8% of regular RCMP members, increased female membership can catalyze greater changes and benefits for Canadian society; female officers are shown to improve policing success, trustworthiness, and community reputation (Fritsvold, 2022).



Resolution #8: Addressing Workplace Harassment in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)

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