

Canada's unions encouraged by federal budget commitments on pharmacare and pay equity ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Canada's unions say they are pleased to see this year's federal budget commit to moving forward on universal pharmacare and pay equity.

Today's federal budget commits to setting up an Advisory Council on the Implementation of National Pharmacare headed up by former Ontario health minister Dr. Eric Hoskins.

"We are very pleased to see the government committing to a pathway that will finally establish a universal prescription drug plan for all Canadians, regardless of their age, income or where they live. We hope to see the promise of universal pharmacare fulfilled before the next federal election," said CLC president Hassan Yussuff.

The federal budget also promises to deliver long overdue proactive pay equity legislation in the Budget Implementation Act.

"Women in Canada have waited far too long for fairness, and Canada's unions look forward to working with the government to get this legislation right," said Yussuff. "That means ensuring, for example, that it establishes both a distinct Pay Equity Commission and a Hearings Tribunal – two essential components of a proactive pay equity regime."

Yussuff was also encouraged to see implementation of a long-standing call for dedicated leave for second parents, but had hoped that child care would be more of a priority in a federal budget focused on boosting participation of women in the workforce.

"The evidence is very clear that the most effective way to remove barriers to women's participation in the workforce is with a universal child care system," said Yussuff. "That's why we had hoped to see this budget commit to increasing child care spending – over time – to reach the internationally recognized benchmark of one percent of GDP."

Yussuff said he was happy to see the budget commit to expanding protections to workers under the Wage Earner Protection Program Act.

The budget increased the maximum limit so that workers' final paychecks, severance and vacation pay are better protected when companies go bankrupt.

"It's unfortunate, however, that the government didn't go further, ensuring that pensioners have the same protections and are prioritized in bankruptcy situations," said Yussuff.

Yussuff highlighted other positive announcements in today's federal budget, including:

- New apprenticeship and training initiatives including incentive grants for women entering the Red Seal trades, pre-apprenticeship programs targeting under-represented groups, additional supports for women in trades and investments in skills building for women new to Canada.
- Extending Working While on Claim provisions to those on maternity and sick leave.
- Making Status of Women Canada an official government department and providing it with \$100 million over five years to enhance the Women's Program.
- A commitment of an additional \$86 million over five years to the Gender Based Violence Strategy and additional commitments to combat workplace harassment and violence.
- A commitment to five days of paid leave for victims of domestic violence.
- Funding to combat anti-black racism.
- Moves to close tax loopholes and crack down on tax evasion, including the imposition of a \$50,000 threshold on passive income.
- A pledge to replace the beleaguered Phoenix pay system.

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