

Equality budget 'a good start' but with one big omission, says Women's Network PEI ^[1]

Author: Campbell, Kerry

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Women's Network PEI is applauding Tuesday's federal budget, which includes measures to help women enter the workforce and train for higher-paying jobs in the skilled trades, along with a commitment to legislate pay equity within federally-regulated industries.

But the group's executive director Jillian Kilfoil says the budget fell short in the one area that matters the most when it comes to helping women enter or re-enter the workforce.

"If we're talking gender equality and getting women back to work, a national childcare strategy is really what would be the most important thing, and would have the biggest impact," said Kilfoil.

"And so it was disappointing not to see that in the budget today, although we certainly see lots of great initiatives to support gender equality."

Deal with Ottawa to create more P.E.I. childcare spaces

The budget included details on the nine bilateral agreements signed so far between Ottawa and the provinces and territories to provide childcare funding.

According to the budget, P.E.I.'s agreement, signed last year, will create up to 200 more spaces for infants and pre-school children, along with specialized care for up to 100 children whose parents work non-standard or seasonal hours.

Kilfoil said the extra spaces are welcome, but don't help parents who can't afford them.

"To get more women back to work, we really need to heavily subsidize daycare spaces," she said, referring to Quebec's system, where parents can be charged as little as \$8 per day, depending on income level.

"Provinces need major investments from the federal government to be able to subsidize daycare."

Pay equity leaves "vulnerable workers" behind, group says

Kilfoil said a promise to legislate pay equity in federally-regulated workplaces "is a great first step," but won't help many of "the most vulnerable workers ... [in] industries that aren't as regulated or aren't unionized and don't have the same types of supports."

Kilfoil said increasing the minimum wage and bringing in a basic income guarantee are measures that would support those vulnerable workers.

"Many are newcomers or immigrants, or workers living with disabilities. So I think in terms of increasing what the floor is would be really important and would really benefit some of the most vulnerable female workers in Canada."

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