

# Equal pay day: Show women the money <sup>[1]</sup>

The gender wage gap isn't new. And it's not inevitable. It's a product of systemic discrimination sustained by employer and government choices. The solutions to close the gap have been known for decades. It's time for bold action.

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**Source:** Toronto Star

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 9 Apr 2018

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## EXCERPTS

April 10 is Equal Pay Day this year, an event that marks the size of the gender pay gap. It reflects how far women on average need to work into the New Year to earn what men earned by Dec. 31 of the previous year.

The latest census data show that Indigenous women in Ontario face a 43 per cent gender pay gap. Racialized women face a 38 per cent gap. Immigrant women face a 34 per cent gap.

On average Ontario women earn 29.3 per cent less than men.

The gap isn't new. And it's not inevitable. It's a product of systemic discrimination sustained by employer and government choices. The solutions to close the gap have been known for decades. It's time for bold action.

It's time to show women the money. Ontario can do that by taking three bold steps on pay transparency, child care and funding of public services.

Ontario is introducing a Pay Transparency Act (Bill 3). But the Bill must be strengthened so all employers with at least 10 employees must prove they are complying with the existing laws that prohibit pay discrimination.

Pay transparency laws require employers to disclose anonymized wage data by sex showing pay for each occupation, employment status, and distribution throughout the company hierarchy.

A strong law can expose when women and men are paid differently for the same work; when female-dominated jobs are underpaid relative to men's work of similar value; when women are concentrated in precarious employment; and when women encounter glass ceilings and sticky floors that deny them career progression.

In the U.K., all employers with 250 or more workers had to file pay transparency reports by April 4. The reports show that 78 per cent of U.K. employers have a gender pay gap.

While Ontario wrestles with who should be subject to pay transparency, Canadian companies — and transnational companies that operate in Canada — must already file such reports in the U.K. and elsewhere around the globe.

For example, RBC's U.K. report shows that women's average pay is 51 per cent lower than men's, and women are concentrated in the

company's lowest income quartile. Similarly, Blackberry's report shows women's average pay is 33.8 per cent lower than men's. Even at a female-dominated company like Blue Cross, where women outnumber men at all income quartiles, women's average wage is 25.5 per cent lower than men's.

While revealing, the U.K.'s law is the least comprehensive global model because it applies only to the largest employers.

Pay transparency in Iceland, Denmark and Belgium applies to employers with 25, 35 and 50 employees respectively. Australia's law applies to employers with 100 employees.

Canada's federal government has promised a pay transparency law that will apply to all employers with 10 or more workers. Ontario's Bill 3 must keep pace.

Ontario also needs to show us the money by investing in child care.

As early as 1970, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women called for a national child-care plan, noting that "the equality of women means little without such a programme." Ontario's 1985 Green Paper on Pay Equity also recognized that closing the gender pay gap requires a comprehensive strategy with child care as a cornerstone. For more than 40 years, the Equal Pay Coalition has called for universally accessible, affordable, public child care for infants, preschool and school age kids, with decent wages for child care workers.

Ontario recently announced a plan to extend publicly funded child care to preschool children as of 2020.

This is an important first step toward building a comprehensive system. But we've known for more than two generations that a deep investment in child care is needed. It's time for bold action that delivers.

Finally, government must ensure that public services are funded to provide pay equity wages now. Women delivering important public services through community and social agencies have waited for pay equity wages since 1994. Because pay equity is being phased in so slowly, many of them will continue to wait decades before their pay gaps are closed. Public services shouldn't be subsidized by women's undervalued and underpaid labour.

Women are done waiting. Show us the money.

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-reprinted from Toronto Star

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