

# Post-pandemic, women can't go back to the same old discrimination<sup>[1]</sup>

Closing the gender pay gap is not just about how individual women navigate the workforce. It's about how our society undervalues women's work.

**Author:** Faraday, Fay & Borowy, Jan

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## EXCERPTS

Tuesday is Equal Pay Day, an international event dedicated to raising awareness of the gender pay gap. It symbolizes how far into the year women, on average, must work to catch up to what men earned, on average, the entire previous year.

Equal Pay Day is marked in mid-April because Ontario women need to work an extra three and a half months to catch up to men's pay.

But this is just 2022's first Equal Pay Day. While on average Ontario women face a 32 per cent gender pay gap, the gap widens dramatically for women with disabilities (56 per cent), immigrant women (55 per cent), Indigenous women (45 per cent), and racialized women (45 per cent). Their Equal Pay Days come later.

Women are told they have to fix the gender pay gap themselves. We're told we just need to negotiate better salaries. Don't take maternity leave. Go into STEM fields.

This advice puts the burden on women, individually, to fix discrimination that is embedded throughout our social, educational, political and economic systems.

Closing the gender pay gap is not just about how individual women navigate the workforce. It's about how our society undervalues women's work.

To shift that, we need our governments to implement policy solutions that are intentionally targeted to closing the gender pay gap. And it's crucial to make that big shift now because women's inequality has deepened during the pandemic. But women are returning to the workplace only to encounter the same discrimination they faced before the pandemic. And that has to change.

The policy solutions are well-known. They have been demanded for decades by labour experts and workers alike.

We must raise the minimum wage so workers can make ends meet. A study released last week by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives revealed that Black women benefited most from the 2018 increase to the minimum wage, followed closely by racialized women.

We must mandate paid sick days, implement the Pay Transparency Act, establish affordable, accessible public child-care with decent wages and conditions for child-care workers, and rebuild the economy by funding public services and providing health, community services, and education workers with decent wages and working conditions.

These approaches are highly popular among Ontarians. In March 2022, the Equal Pay Coalition worked with Environics Research to explore Ontarians' knowledge of women's pay inequalities, and to gauge their opinions on proposed policy solutions to address this economic disparity.

Fully 85 per cent of Ontarians said the Ontario government should do more to promote women's economic equality, with 60 per cent saying it is very important. Also, 88 per cent wanted to see decent wages and working conditions for women doing publicly funded care work and community and social services.

Women doing care work, particularly in the broader public sector, face the deepest sex discrimination that undervalues and underpays their work. They are the ones we called heroes throughout the pandemic. But their wages have suppressed by Bill 124 which prevented them from negotiating pay increases to even match the cost of living, driving escalating job shortages.

Now they face Bill 106. The provincial government is currently rushing an omnibus bill through the legislature that overrides public sector workers' pay equity and collective bargaining rights. The government is again giving itself the power to widen gender pay gaps, while removing the legal recourse women and their unions have to address them. And all that may become law on Equal Pay Day.

Tuesday night, Ontario's party leaders Andrea Horwath (NDP), Steven Del Duca (Liberals), and Mike Schreiner (Green Party) will participate in our historic provincial Party Leaders' Debate on Women's Economic Equality, where they'll share their approaches to alleviating the gender pay gap. Doug Ford, meanwhile, has told us he has a "scheduling conflict."

This Equal Pay Day, let's stop telling women to make different choices. Let's value and protect their work. Let's demand better from our politicians. It's time for political leaders to show up for women with policy solutions that raise the floor for all marginalized workers.

**Region:** Canada <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** gender wage gap <sup>[4]</sup>

equal pay <sup>[5]</sup>

care economy <sup>[6]</sup>

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