

Voters guide on women's issues – Election 2015 ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

PDF voters guide ^[2]

Background

We envision this brief voter guide to be used as a tool to inform voters about issues regarding women in Canada and to provide focused questions to pose to candidates. Our hope is that voters will use the questions in all candidates meetings, election forums, social media, or by emailing or phoning their candidate to engage them on issues that matter. We also hope that the guide will provide a lens towards women's issues in politics that are often overlooked during elections. By realizing how integral and intersecting women's issues are to broader electoral topics like the environment or the economy, our aim is to help Canadians voting in the 2015 Federal election to highlight women's issues before they cast their vote as well as to hold those elected accountable after the election. Each issue provides some pertinent background information, examines the current situation, discusses possible solutions, and briefly reviews party positions. It is hoped that this guide can elevate the importance of these issues in the public sphere and drive public policy. This guide is intended to be accessible and equip individual voters with the necessary tools they need to engage with their candidates and make an informed decision on Election Day that will enhance and support women's equality rights in Canada. Please use and adapt this guide as you need to for your region or specific issues, with acknowledgement. Thank you!

Federal Election Information and Questions

1. Early Childhood Education and Care: Access and Cost

Affordable access to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is essential to women's equality and the development of future generations. The Canadian government does not have a national childcare strategy, instead placing the responsibility on parents to find spaces for their children. Due to the lack of federal focus, care costs vary across the country from as low as \$152 a month in Gatineau, Quebec, to as high as \$1,676 in Toronto, Ontario. This disparity leads to regional inequality that affects families. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) has determined that women spend more than 36% of their incomes on childcare, further compounding the inequity felt through the pay gap.

Not only is childcare unaffordable, but it is often unregulated and difficult for families to find spaces. The CCPA has highlighted the devastating shortages that exist in Indigenous and rural communities. Parents of children with disabilities are also left with few options, as many service providers are too underfunded to accommodate them. While there are some subsidized childcare options for low-income families, the spaces have "essentially remained static since 2001," but the child poverty rate in Canada has increased to 19.1%. The issue is exacerbated by the fact that early childhood educators are poorly valued and underpaid, leading to a national shortage of trained professionals. Instead of taking action to increase the affordability and accessibility of childcare, the current government has focused instead on direct payments and tax credits. Since 2006, the Conservative government has spent \$20 billion on the Universal Child Care Benefit. Parents of children under six receive \$160 monthly, and parents of children 6-17 receive only \$60 monthly. Given the median costs of childcare, this does not remotely offset the costs that parents face, and it does nothing to train new professionals or open up more spaces. Additionally, the federal government's Child Care Expense Deduction costs nearly \$1 billion annually, and "does nothing to build a childcare system." The federal government has also introduced a new income splitting policy at a cost of \$2 billion annually, which "benefits higher income two-parent families" with great income disparity; it does nothing to help low and middle income Canadians.

The Conservatives have opted for a market-based approach that assumes that direct payments to parents – in combination with tax credits – will placate parents enough to forego a national childcare plan. At the most recent national childcare conference, ChildCare2020, delegates rejected these market-based approaches suggesting that they run contrary to the premise "that public management of childcare" is a "more effective and fair way to deliver services." At the time of drafting, the Liberal Party of Canada has not signaled its policy intentions though a resolution adopted at its 2014 Montreal Convention has called for a "Universal ECEC Program with national standards and monitoring." The New Democratic Party (NDP), meanwhile, has unveiled a plan that aims to "create or maintain a million childcare spaces over the next decade," and ensures that no parents pay more than \$15 a day per child. Affordable and accessible childcare is integral to creating a more equitable society, and providing parents with the peace of mind that their children are well taken care of.

Questions for Candidates:

The cost of childcare continues to disadvantage women across the country. Do you support a universal Early Childhood Education and Care Program?

Many families do not have access to childcare in this country. How do you intend to create more childcare spaces in Canada?

Indigenous women and women in rural communities have some of the greatest difficulty accessing affordable childcare. How would you make childcare more affordable and accessible for these groups?

There is a lack of trained childhood educators, particularly for children with disabilities. How would you attract more people to the profession, and what would you do to ensure that children with disabilities have equal access to Early Childhood Education?

Region: Canada ^[3]

Tags: federal election ^[4]

Women ^[5]

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