



submission

Submission by
the National Union of Public and General Employees
(NUPGE)
to the Budget 2021
Consultations

February 2021

The National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) is a family of 11 Component and 3 affiliate unions. Taken together, we are one of the largest unions in Canada. Most of our 390,000 members work to deliver public services of every kind to the citizens of their home provinces. We also have a large and growing number of members who work for private businesses.

The office of the National Union of Public and General Employees is situated on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg people and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities.

We recognize and acknowledge the crimes that have been committed and the harm that has been done.

And, we dedicate ourselves, as a union, to moving forward in partnership with Indigenous Peoples in a spirit of reconciliation and striving for justice.

Larry Brown, President

Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer

Recommendations

1. As part of the process of bringing long-term care under the *Canada Health Act*, and having the 5 principles in the act apply to long-term care, Budget 2021 should make provision for increases in federal transfers for health care so funding long-term care is at the same level as other health care services covered by the act.
2. Include funds to back up the commitment to a national child care system. Federal funding transfers must move Canada towards a national system that is universally accessible, publicly funded, not-for-profit, and high quality, and that fairly compensates and meaningfully supports its workforce.

Overview

To ensure Canada recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic with minimal loss of life, and without leaving people behind, the federal government has an enormous role to play.

The pandemic has exposed, and further exacerbated, preexisting gaps and inequities. Marginalized and vulnerable communities have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic itself, and by its economic and social impacts. We've seen widening income and wealth inequality during the pandemic.

Furthermore, the pandemic has also exposed serious gaps in public services and social programs that need to be closed. New and expanded public services, like a national pharmacare program, are needed to help ensure that large numbers of Canadians are not excluded from the recovery from COVID-19.

If the government is genuinely committed to building back better, we cannot return to "normal." The government must take long-overdue action to address the existing issues and gaps, and to ensure that the post-pandemic recovery is a [Just Recovery](#). We hope to see a federal budget that not only addresses the urgent public health crisis, but also plays a role in building a more just, equitable, and sustainable future. This means investing in child care and long-term care, as well as improving access to affordable housing, addressing gender-based violence, implementing national pharmacare, and supporting a just transition to a greener economy.

The federal government must also play a greater role in building a strong economy. For the last 35 years, the prevailing view has been that the only role for governments is to hand out tax breaks and sign trade agreements. But, during the pandemic, the resulting loss of manufacturing capacity has left Canada vulnerable, as we are currently seeing with the lack of facilities for manufacturing vaccines in this country.

There will be pressure on the federal government to take a very different approach. It is already being suggested that there should be drastic cuts to public spending when the pandemic ends. But implementing austerity policies would be disastrous.

For the millions of people who are already struggling to get by as a result of COVID-19, drastic cuts to public services would be devastating. Many public services that people rely on have not fully recovered from the funding cuts of the late 1990s. A repeat of that approach would mean a growing number of people would not be able to get the supports they need.

Drastic cuts would also harm the post-pandemic economic recovery and, depending on the extent of the damage done to the economy, could actually increase the deficits of the federal, provincial, and territorial governments. Other problems that come with austerity policies are a rise in income inequality and that Canada will be less prepared for future health emergencies.

Instead, to fund measures needed to ensure a full recovery and that we are better protected in the future, changes to the tax system are needed. Such changes would include measures to increase taxes on large corporations and the wealthiest 1%; neither one is currently paying their fair share. Measures should also include improvements to laws, regulations, and enforcement to making tax dodging more difficult, including public reporting of who controls companies registered in Canada.

While action is needed on a wide range of items, there are 2 areas of particular concern to our members that need to be addressed in this budget. In both cases, the federal government would be helping to fix some of the more serious problems revealed by the pandemic.

Long-term Care

In the Fall Economic Statement, the federal government announced a Safe Long-Term Care fund, with \$1 billion over 2 years and its intent to work with provincial and territorial governments to establish new national standards.

While this is a step forward, it is nowhere near what is needed.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic started, over 12,000 people who lived or worked in long-term care facilities have died. This should not have been a surprise. For years, long-term care workers, their unions, and the families of residents in long-term care homes have been raising concerns about serious problems with long-term care in Canada.

Among the problems facing long-term care are staff shortages, high staff turnover, outdated facilities, and facility owners trying to cut corners on food and other vital supplies. These problems are a direct result of underfunding and privatization.

The funds provided to long-term care facilities are not enough to allow long-term care facilities to provide the level of care that research has shown residents need. The problem of underfunding has been made worse by the privatization of long-term care in many provinces, which means that funding is instead going towards profits for long-term care company owners and the additional administrative costs that come with privatization.

A clear example of the impact of underfunding and privatization is the hours of direct care residents of long-term care facilities receive each day. Underfunding means most facilities are not providing the number of hours of direct care per resident per day that research suggests is needed. And to make matters worse, for-profit facilities are providing significantly less direct care than public or not-for-profit facilities.

The lower level of care that for-profit facilities provide is repeated in other areas. For-profit facilities spend less on food, with one for-profit facility spending as little as \$4.34 per resident per day. In another facility, where food services had been contracted out to a multinational for-profit company, residents were served energy drinks instead of meals.

Most recently, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic were more serious in for-profit long-term care facilities than in public or not-for-profit facilities. While many not-for-profit and publicly owned long-term care facilities were also hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, in most provinces, a disproportionate number of the deaths in long-term care were in ones owned by for-profit companies.

What has contributed to the underfunding of long-term care and the problem of privatization is that long-term care does not have the same status as other health care services in Canada. The principles of the *Canada Health Act* don't apply, which means there are no barriers to privatization. When federal transfers for health care were established, the cost of funding long-term care was not considered, and that has contributed to the problem of underfunding.

If the problems with long-term care are to be fixed, long-term care needs to be included in the *Canada Health Act*. To reflect the fact that long-term care would be a full part of the health care system—and to get provincial and territorial agreement—federal transfers for health care need to be increased.

Budget 2021 provides an opportunity to ensure that what happened in long-term care facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic is not repeated.

Making provision for the funding required for long-term care to be brought under the *Canada Health Act*, and for national standards to be put in place, would help address the underfunding and privatization of long-term care. And by taking that action, the federal government would be showing that it is serious about fixing problems with long-term care.

Child Care

NUPGE has long advocated for a national child care system in Canada. The evidence is clear: child care provides an enriching environment for children, enables working parents, especially women, to participate in the workforce, and contributes to a strong economy overall. A well-funded system would provide fair compensation to its critical workers. The COVID-19 pandemic has made the value of child care clearer than ever.

NUPGE represents workers in the child care sector. NUPGE also represents working parents and caregivers, many of whom are critical services workers that have been on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic. NUPGE members across the country have been experiencing first-hand the impacts of the pandemic on the child care sector, on families, and on workplaces and communities.

It has become clear that these impacts, and the pandemic broadly, are disproportionately impacting women. [Data show](#) that women's labour force participation dramatically declined, as many women reduced their hours, or left their jobs entirely, to care for children.

Early childhood educators and child care staff, the majority of which are women, who continue to work through the pandemic have been faced with the enormous challenge of continuing to provide safe and nurturing environments for children amidst a pandemic. The many child care providers that had to close, or remain closed, have faced uncertainty about their future. The sector also saw widespread layoffs. [Staff are concerned](#) about health and safety, financial and staffing resources, and children's well-being.

NUPGE has welcomed this government's commitments to establish a Canada-wide early learning and child care system. But NUPGE and its members are expecting to see the federal government deliver on this commitment in the upcoming budget.

As NUPGE President Larry Brown has written to Minister Hussen and to Deputy Prime Minister Freeland in recent months, we believe a national child care system must be universally accessible, publicly funded, not-for-profit, and high quality. It must meaningfully support its workforce, which means fair compensation, training, recruitment, and retention. Unionization must also be expanded in the sector.

A [November 2020 poll commissioned by NUPGE](#) and conducted by Abacus Data found that 86% of Canadians said that it is important to them that all families have access to child care, regardless of income. Furthermore, 84% of Canadians said that access to affordable child care is essential for Canada's economic prosperity. We believe that a universal, public, not-for-profit, and high-quality child care system across Canada would meet these desires and needs of Canadians.

The poll results show that public opinion echoes what early childhood educators and experts have long known about the numerous benefits of child care.

While child care is not solely a women's issue, a universal public child care system would make a valuable contribution to advancing gender equity. The pandemic has disproportionately affected women and, [as researchers and gender equality advocates have shown](#), child care must be part of a feminist approach to the recovery.

Furthermore, [a recent report by economist Jim Stanford](#) found that a universal national child care system would, simply put, pay for itself. The report outlines the numerous economic benefits of a national child care system—in the short and long terms. Benefits include job creation, additional government revenues, increased employment and earnings (especially for women), and long-term economic and social benefits from enhanced capacities of children who participate in high-quality early learning and child care. This system would particularly benefit women, families with low incomes, racialized families, and rural communities.

Now is the time to make universal, public, not-for-profit, high-quality child care a reality in Canada. It is also time to address the systematic undervaluing of the child care workforce and the long-standing workforce issues.

NUPGE has endorsed the [Strategy for Recovery](#) developed by Canada's national child care organizations in response to the pandemic. The strategy provides a concrete roadmap to support the sector through the pandemic, and beyond, towards an accessible, affordable, inclusive, and high-quality system of early learning and child care in the long term.

For example, it outlines the amount in federal funding transfers to the provinces, territories, and Indigenous communities that would be necessary. It also outlines the need for legislation, similar to the *Canada Health Act*, that would outline principles, conditions, and accountability mechanisms for federal transfer payments to the provinces and territories. The Strategy for Recovery builds on the [Affordable Child Care for All](#) Plan, which outlines how to make child care affordable and accessible, and how to improve quality in large part by addressing workforce issues in the sector.

As the federal government is developing the 2021 budget, which we expect will include funds to back up the commitment to a national child care system, NUPGE points the government's attention to the Strategy for Recovery, the Affordable Child Care for All Plan, and the work of other experts referenced in this submission. Experts and advocates have long been calling for a national child care system, and are well positioned to inform the federal government's approach.

Furthermore, developing a national child care system must involve those on the front lines and with expertise in the field. Early childhood educators and other child care staff, along with their representatives, must be at the table.

The market-based approach to child care in Canada is, quite simply, not working. The resulting patchwork across the country has long been clear, but became glaring during the pandemic. Now is the time for a universal, public, high-quality national child care system. Not only are the evidence and public support undeniable but also the roadmap exists to make it a reality.

Conclusion

The pandemic has caused immense devastation and hardship in Canada and worldwide. The federal government has an important role to play in preventing further tragedy and in ensuring that nobody is left behind.

We must learn the lessons from this pandemic. It has shown us that it is possible for governments to mobilize the resources, and inject the necessary funds, to address a crisis. This shows that it is also possible to address the other pressing crises in Canada—systemic racism, climate change, gender-based violence, precarious work, lack of access to affordable housing, and income and wealth inequality.



NATIONAL UNION OF PUBLIC AND GENERAL EMPLOYEES

- B. C. Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU)
- Health Sciences Association of British Columbia (HSABC)
- Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA)
- Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union (SGEU)
- Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union (MGEU)
- Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU)
- Canadian Union of Brewery and General Workers (CUBGW)
- New Brunswick Union of Public and Private Employees (NBU)
- Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (NSGEU)
- PEI Union of Public Sector Employees (PEI UPSE)
- Newfoundland & Labrador Association of Public and Private Employees (NAPE)

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