



National Union of Public and General Employees' Submission for the Pre-budget Consultations for the 2024 Federal Budget

August 3, 2023



Recommendations

1. Ensure that budget spending is consistent with commitments to reduce GHG emissions and the Paris Agreement goal of limiting global temperature rise to 1.5 °C.
2. Invest in climate action through a strong public sector, including investments in key areas like renewable energy, green building retrofits, and public transit.
3. Invest in expanding high-quality, universal, and inclusive public services to support adaptation, including addressing the disproportionate impacts on marginalized communities.
4. Phase out fossil fuel subsidies.
5. Invest in a Just Transition at a level sufficient to minimize the impact on workers and communities affected by the transition to a green economy.
6. Increase contributions to international climate finance.
7. Tie increases in the Canada Health Transfer to increased health care spending at the provincial/territorial level and to adhering to the *Canada Health Act*, with the goal of a minimum sustained rate equivalent to 35% of total provincial/territorial health care costs.
8. Create a pan-Canadian health human resources strategy that includes the support health professionals need to provide quality health care.
9. Bring long-term care under the *Canada Health Act*, and fund it to the level needed to provide care to all who require it.
10. The federal government must act on its commitment to increase wages for Personal Support Workers.
11. Increase federal funding for the care sector, including health care, home care, elder care, social services, supports for people with disabilities, child care, and education, and make such funding conditional on meeting national standards.
12. Provide funding to assist with the provision of medically assisted consumption sites for safe personal use, and a regulated safe supply.
13. Increase funding to provincial and territorial governments to support public access to services for addictions and mental health that are on demand through the public health system.
14. Provide funding to improve services for inmate mental health and addictions.
15. Provide funding to assist provincial and territorial governments in providing free menstrual products in schools, shelters, community centres, and other public buildings, making them available in gender-neutral washrooms, and in washrooms of both sexes, ensuring transgender and non-binary people have access.

16. Increase funding for affordable housing, and direct it towards building and maintaining housing units that are public, co-op, or nonprofit.
17. Apply an Indigenous lens when looking at all areas of federal responsibility, from affordable housing to growing the economy to affordable dental care.
18. Provide provincial and territorial governments with the funds to assist in the development of additions to public school curriculums that focus on the residential school system and the impacts it has on the present day. The transfer of funds should be contingent on the provincial governments working with Indigenous peoples when developing the curriculum
19. Implement the tax fairness measures required to ensure large profitable corporations and wealthy individuals pay their share, including an annual wealth tax, closing tax loopholes that disproportionately benefit corporations and wealthy individuals, and increasing income tax rates for individuals and corporations with high incomes.

Last month, Statistics Canada warned that wealth inequality had increased, widening the gaps at the “fastest pace on record.” This continues the pattern we saw during the pandemic where low- and middle-income Canadians faced job losses or workplaces that had become dangerous, while billionaires saw their wealth increase to record levels.

If this trend is allowed to continue, many Canadians will be left behind. Growing inequality has also been linked to problems like lower rates of economic growth, increased crime rates, and poorer health outcomes.

The 2024 federal budget is an opportunity to take action to stop income inequality from getting worse. Measures like investing in public services that Canadians rely on, Just Transition programs that ensure no one is left behind by the transition to a low-carbon economy, and tax fairness will all help make Canada a stronger, fairer country.

Tackling the Climate Crisis

The climate crisis is the biggest challenge we face and must be a top priority for government. Climate change is having devastating impacts on our ecosystems, our communities, and our workplaces. These impacts disproportionately affect Indigenous communities, BIPOC communities, people with disabilities, women and gender-diverse people, people living in poverty, seniors, and youth.

Canada must invest in key areas like renewable energy, green building retrofits, and public transit. Doing so will help reduce emissions and support more sustainable infrastructure and communities. Investments should go hand in hand with strong regulations, such as changing building codes, regulations, and policies to support retrofits and energy-efficient building.

In addition to strengthening the *Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act*, the legislation, and the Just Transition plans and programs, must be backed up by appropriate funds.

Because public services play a key role in responding to the effects of the climate crisis, which are projected to intensify, investing in expanding high-quality, inclusive, and universal public services will be a fundamental part of climate change adaptation as well.

Health care

The COVID-19 pandemic proved why Canada needs a strong public health care system. That means one with the necessary resources and health care professionals to provide quality care. Canada avoided the worst outcomes of the pandemic because of our health care system. However, the pandemic did expose areas that need to be addressed, and there were areas of failure, such as in long-term care (LTC).

Unfortunately, because our health care system has been suffering under austerity policies for some time, we leaned heavily on dedicated health care professionals to work even harder to get us through the pandemic. This demand that health care professionals go above and beyond what is reasonable has continued after the pandemic ended.

Health care professionals being overworked is adding to the crisis in health human resources. Mental health remains inadequately addressed, and the need for more supports

is growing due to the impact of the pandemic. Workers' pay is not keeping up with inflation, so they are effectively taking a pay cut relative to the cost of living.

Health care spending is not keeping up with the rising demand and the costs of providing care, so workers are being asked to do more with less. Programs that would allow us to save money and provide better care, such as pharmacare, are promised, but little is being done to implement them.

Underfunding and the health human resources crisis are being made worse by privatization. Governments are not properly enforcing the *Canada Health Act* (CHA) and are even expanding private health care delivery under the false claim that it will improve access.

There is also a danger that increasing privatization of health care will result in Canada drifting into a 2-tier health care system where low- and middle-income Canadians aren't able to get the health care they need. Recently there has been an increase in for-profit facilities charging user fees, or selling "memberships" that allow those with money to buy their way to front of the line.

The federal government has the ability to address the problems with our health care system, but it is failing to act. Improving funding is only part of the solution. When funding is increased, the federal government needs to have the backbone to require that increased funding be conditional on the funds being spent on health care and on health care being public and universal.

It is time to bring long-term care under the CHA and fund it to the level needed to provide care to all who require it. The federal government must act on its commitment to increase wages for Personal Support Workers.

Valuing care

The pandemic shone a light on the value of care—for our households, our families, our communities, our workplaces, and the economy. It also exposed the gaps in our care systems.

These services below, which make up the care economy, face common challenges:

- early learning and child care
- elder care
- health care
- supports for people with disabilities
- home care
- education
- community social services

Though workers in the care economy face diverse challenges, common are low wages, poor working conditions, precarious employment, and high turnover. Staffing shortages that predated the pandemic are worsening due to overwork and burnout.

At the same time that demand is increasing, care systems are in crisis due to decades of underfunding, neglect, deregulation, and privatization.

To ensure care is properly valued, we need sustained public investment to ensure high quality care and decent work for all care workers. We need publicly funded and publicly managed systems that are delivered through a unionized workforce.

Opioid-Related Poison-Drug Overdose Crisis

For many years, Canada has faced a serious public health crisis of drug overdoses. In some provinces it has killed more people than COVID-19. New national data reveal that more than 7,300 people, or 20 individuals a day, died because of an opioid overdose in Canada in 2022.

To reduce harm and save lives, the federal government and provincial/territorial governments need take action in the follow areas:

- Stop the illicit market: amend the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* to remove opioids as an indictable offence and legalize small amounts for personal use.
- Introduce harm-reduction strategies.
- Improve recovery and treatment.
- Guarantee pan-Canadian equal access to supplies and programs by bringing them under the *Canada Health Act*.
- Stop workplace exposure: improve services for inmate mental health and addictions, and stop poison drugs from entering facilities in the first place.

Period Poverty

People who menstruate spend a great deal of money on the products they need, like tampons, pads, liners, and menstrual cups. The cost of those products is continuing to increase. Some people simply can't afford to buy these products or in sufficient quantities. This is referred to as *period poverty* and governments concerned about the impact of their policies on gender equality need to respond to the problem.

Affordable housing

Housing is a fundamental need. It's time to start treating it as one.

The last 3 decades have shown that the private sector cannot provide rental housing at the levels of affordability that most people need. It's time to learn from what has worked in the past, such as in the 1980s, when the federal government was funding an average of 18,688 units of nonprofit and cooperative housing every year.

Justice for Indigenous Peoples

The final report from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls are but 2 of a long string of studies and reports into the harms and crimes inflicted on Indigenous people by colonial powers. It's time to turn those findings into concrete action.

There is also a need to combat the ignorance and disinformation about how Indigenous people in Canada have been treated. For instance, the denial of the abuses inflicted on Indigenous people by the residential school system points to gaps in our education system that need to be rectified.

Tax Fairness

Tax fairness measures that ensure that wealthy individuals and large corporations pay their share are essential to reducing income and wealth inequality. They will also help provide new sources of revenue to fund climate action and tackle inequality.

While governments frequently talk about the need for tax fairness, too often they have failed to deliver. Measures that could have made a difference were steadily watered down to minimize the impact. That needs to change.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was low- and middle-income Canadians who were forced to make the biggest sacrifices. Front-line workers in sectors like health care, retail, manufacturing, and construction had to keep working outside the home during the early part of the pandemic, facing the risk of getting seriously ill or dying. Layoffs resulting from the pandemic disproportionately hit workers who had modest wages.

But, while low- and middle-income Canadians were making sacrifices, many wealthy individuals and profitable companies became even richer. Now, as we work to rebuild and to respond to the climate crisis, it's time for them to do their share.