

YWCA Toronto Policy Priorities 2022/2023



YWCA TORONTO WORKS WITHIN THREE BROAD PUBLIC POLICY AREAS

- **Gender equity**
- **Poverty reduction**
- **Racial justice**

We are committed to a radical transformation of society where all women, girls and gender diverse people can thrive. Underpinning all of this work is our commitment to anti-racist action and reconciliation. Our advocacy agenda is driven by the experiences and needs of the communities we serve and the expertise of our frontline staff. It is also shaped by our strategic plan, the political climate, what our partners are calling for, our programmatic needs, and past policy positions.

To engage in advocacy work at YWCA Toronto means amplifying the voices of the community members we serve, drawing attention to the issues and barriers they face, and pushing for progressive policy solutions. Recognizing that Indigenous women, Black women, racialized women, immigrants, people living with disabilities, seniors, trans people, and youth are impacted by policy choices and systems of power differently, we strive to incorporate an intersectional gender equity lens in all of our work as we broadly advocate for gender equity, racial justice and poverty reduction.

WE ADVOCATE BY

1. Amplifying and setting priorities through internal consultations with staff, YWCA Toronto leaders, and program participants/residents.
2. Providing policy analysis by way of research, reports, submissions, deputations and op-eds.
3. Cultivating community by working alongside coalition partners, our YWCA movement and program participants.
4. Building influence with government, media, stakeholders and the public via subject matter expertise and thought leadership.

For a more detailed look at our policy priorities, [click here](#).

INCOME SECURITY

YWCA Toronto believes that all women, girls and gender diverse people must have access to adequate income, shelter, food, transportation and personal necessities. We advocate for adequate social assistance rates that ensure the health and dignity of women and gender diverse people on low and fixed incomes – rates that can protect and support families. We recognize that our society and economy are built on the unpaid care work of women and that this unpaid labour is a source of poverty for women. We urge political parties to develop, publicize and commit to more responsive and equity-based social assistance programs that are tailored to the real needs of recipients.¹

DECENT WORK

YWCA Toronto advocates for meaningful action to address gender and racial pay disparities and investments that ensure care work, a feminized industry, is decent work. We advocate for enhanced wages and better working conditions for frontline and nonprofit workers, a largely feminized and racialized segment of the workforce. We believe *good* jobs can offer a path out of poverty for women who are able to work – not all jobs are created equally. We also recognize some people will not be able to engage in paid work for various legitimate reasons. People who are unable to engage in paid work are deserving of lives free from violence, poverty and discrimination. YWCA Toronto is proud to champion the decent work movement.

EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

YWCA Toronto advocates for the implementation of decent work conditions for women. We call for dedicated funding towards gender-inclusive upskilling and other employment programs focused on the diverse needs of women and gender diverse people. We call on all orders of government to invest in women-focused employment and training programs that are funded on a multi-year or permanent basis.

CHILD CARE

YWCA Toronto believes in the value of a high-quality, accessible and affordable national child care plan. We believe that access to child care is foundational to women's labour market participation, and universal child care is a key tenet of gender equality. We have always believed that no woman should be forced to choose between a career or having a family. And, that no child care worker should be paid an inadequate wage.²

BASIC INCOME

Several [YWCA Toronto submissions](#) have pointed to the need for basic income. We advocate to keep women, girls and gender diverse people out of poverty and believe that a strong basic income scheme could remedy some entrenched gender disparities rooted in the devaluation of women's care work.³ We believe there is a compelling feminist argument to be made in favour of a guaranteed livable income scheme for all residents of Canada. Social assistance programs can be stigmatizing and, as such, a guaranteed income would remove the stigma of means-tested programs.

AFFORDABLE AND SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

YWCA Toronto advocates for a continuum of housing options for women and gender diverse people – including safe, affordable housing, emergency shelters, and transitional and supportive programs.⁴ We believe that the human right to housing must be upheld by the federal government and that every order of government plays an important role in ensuring accessible, affordable, safe and adequate housing for women, girls and gender diverse people. We urge all orders of government to recognize access to housing that is affordable and dignified as a critical pillar of poverty reduction and to find innovative ways to accommodate the countless women and gender diverse people living in shelters.

REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

YWCA Toronto is a pro-choice organization. We believe women and gender diverse people have the right to make their own reproductive health decisions – to decide what happens to their bodies and when. After witnessing the erosion of abortion rights in the United States, YWCA Toronto recognizes that it is important to continue advocating for reproductive justice and supporting organizations that advocate for women and gender diverse people and their rights. Access to free, safe, timely and quality abortion care is a healthcare necessity and should be protected at all costs.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

YWCA Toronto advocates for a world free from gender-based violence (GBV). We know that ending GBV requires deep systemic change. We demand more than piecemeal investments in preventing and responding to this type of violence: We urge all orders of government to invest in eradicating GBV by providing economic support to survivors, ensuring permanent, multi-year operating funding for frontline organizations supporting survivors and their families, and spending billions, not millions on ending GBV. We support the full funding of a re-conceptualized National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence, which would center on Black, Indigenous, racialized, newcomer, immigrant and refugee women, women living without status, and women living with disabilities.

GUN VIOLENCE AND HARM REDUCTION

As a founding member of the Coalition for Gun Control, YWCA Toronto has a long-standing history of advocacy for greater gun restrictions on firearms. In more recent years, we have worked to address the intersectional impacts of gun violence on a very local level – the impact on mothers, women and girls in Toronto. Gun violence is an important social issue with gendered dimensions. We believe communities need deeper investment in affordable housing, youth programming, social assistance programs, and decent work and pay. A permanent government funding stream is urgently needed for programs that support women and girl co-victims of violence. In particular, this funding needs to prioritize the needs of Black women, girls and youth who are disproportionately impacted by gun and community violence.

MENTAL HEALTH

Income is a social determinant of health and poverty is linked to poor mental health outcomes. The stress of survival can produce anxiety, depression and may aggravate existing conditions such as schizophrenia. However, limited mental health services exist for people on fixed incomes and the working poor.⁵ Women who have experienced gender-based violence or lost a loved one to gun violence are susceptible to mental health decline. Self-isolation caused by COVID-19 has also led to increased mental health concerns. We must expand the public health care system to include a range of culturally-responsive, accessible and intersectional mental health services.

GIRLS'/YOUTH PROGRAMMING

YWCA Toronto believes that investing in the future begins with investing in our youth. Supporting youth who face poverty, marginalization and other systemic inequities will ensure that, in the long run, youth who experience challenges today are given the opportunity to become successful, happy and healthy adults. We lobby all orders of government to invest in youth programming, specifically in programs for girls and gender diverse youth.

ADVANCING THE NONPROFIT SECTOR

YWCA Toronto is a proud member of the nonprofit workforce. We recognize the nonprofit sector as a critical pillar of society, an important part of our economy, and a protector of democracy. We believe nonprofit organizations need to be funded adequately by all orders of government to ensure we are stable enough to operate our programs, even in times of economic downturn, and to respond to growing and emerging community needs. We believe nonprofits need a home in government, both federally and provincially.

MIGRANT RIGHTS AND PRECARIOUS STATUS

YWCA Toronto believes in ending Canada's two-tiered society and providing permanent status to all of those living and working here. We recognize the dignity and intrinsic rights of all human beings. We believe that no one should have to live in fear of being detained and deported – or lack legal recourse if workplace discrimination/harassment or housing discrimination/harassment occurs and/or legal rights are transgressed. Precarious immigration status leaves women particularly vulnerable to intimate partner violence, sexual trafficking, and economic exploitation. We believe the Canadian government should recognize that all people living in Canada have social capital and contribute to the social and economic tapestry of our society, and, as such, should create ongoing and flexible pathways to regularize those in Canada with precarious or no status.

SOURCES:

- 1 <https://maphealth.ca/social-assistance-living-standard-letter/>
- 2 <https://www.ywcatoronto.org/TakeAction/additional/ywca-torontos-statement-on-the-canada-ontario-child-care-deal>
- 3 <https://www.ywcatoronto.org/Assets/YWCA/Documents/YWCA%20Toronto%20PRS%20Submission%202020.pdf>
- 4 <https://www.ywcatoronto.org/Assets/YWCA/Documents/YWCA%20Toronto%20PRS%20Submission%202020.pdf>
- 5 <https://www.ywcatoronto.org/Assets/YWCA/Documents/YWCA%20Toronto%20PRS%20Submission%202020.pdf>



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