



STEPS TOWARDS AN EQUITABLE RECOVERY FOR WOMEN

Data Implications & Policy Recommendations

THIS IS A SECTION OF A LARGER REPORT. READ THE FULL REPORT AT [WOMENOUTOFWORK.CA](https://womenoutofwork.ca)





**“Gender inequality is real.
COVID has highlighted it.
I am trapped.”**

- a survey respondent

DATA IMPLICATIONS

Full economic recovery is not possible if women are not included. Nor is it possible if women are not provided with fair and equitable opportunities for workforce participation. Our data has shown women in all sectors are experiencing barriers to entry and sustained participation within the Hamilton labour market. Some of these barriers are unique to the COVID-19 pandemic, however some are long-standing and have become exacerbated by this crisis.

This final section of the report provides an overarching analysis of these barriers, the trends found within female-dominated sectors, and the implications that they have for our labour market. It concludes by looking ahead to how Hamilton can address its employment disparities and work towards an equitable and inclusive recovery.

BARRIERS TO ENTRY AND SUSTAINED PARTICIPATION

1

Increased caregiving responsibilities due to inaccessible/unaffordable childcare

A majority of respondents (60%) indicated that they are the primary caregiver for their children. For those with school-aged children, 69% of respondents indicated they are either a lone parent or primarily responsible for homeschooling/virtual school. Only 22% indicated that they share the role equally with their partners. Furthermore, as a result of their children being out of school or childcare due to the pandemic, 69% of respondents reported that they were feeling overwhelmed trying to balance work and caregiving responsibilities.

It is clear that women are serving as their family's primary caregivers, shouldering more childcare and homeschooling responsibilities than their partners, and overextending themselves in the process. This theme was echoed loudly within the survey and focus group comments, highlighting it as an undeniable barrier to both entry and sustained participation.

While parents across all female-dominated sectors have been forced to extend their capacity, healthcare workers reported the highest rate (83%) of feeling overwhelmed with trying to balance work and childcare. As a result of their children being home, 49% also reported reduced productivity, and 19% were required to reduce their hours.

Unless women have access to childcare that is accessible and affordable, the higher levels of unpaid domestic work will inhibit them from being able to equitably participate in the workforce.

2

Workplace safety and physical wellbeing

This past year has highlighted the importance of physical workplace accommodation and the role it plays in workforce participation and retention - particularly for workers in service-sector female-dominated industries, and especially for under-represented groups.

When asked if they have considered reducing their hours or stopping work altogether due to workplace health and safety concerns, 48% of respondents with disabilities and 43% of Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) respondents said yes - indicating a clear barrier to sustained participation. The perception and reality of unsafe workplaces has also served as a barrier for those looking to enter/re-enter the workforce. Within a key informant interview with a service provider, it was reported that many women have been apprehensive about partaking in in-person skilled trades training opportunities due to health and safety concerns.

Within female-dominated sectors, retail workers reported the highest percentage of respondents who considered reducing their hours or stopping working due to workplace health and safety concerns (60% compared to 34% of all respondents).

While the threat of the virus begins to decrease, the continued adoption and expansion of health & safety measures can help ensure employee wellbeing, diversification of the workforce, and sector health. Conversely, retraction could lead to the opposite effect.

3

Emerging mental health concerns

Aside from physical concerns, emerging mental health challenges arose as a strong theme. 64% of respondents indicated that they were worried or somewhat worried about their ability to perform well at their jobs due to their mental health. 83% of respondents were worried or somewhat worried about new or increased feelings of anxiety. 72% of respondents were worried or somewhat worried about the long-term impacts of the pandemic on their mental health. The need for affordable and accessible mental health services and support was flagged repeatedly throughout this study and from women occupying all female-dominated sectors analyzed.

This raises serious concerns about not only the current wellbeing of women in female-dominated sectors, but the health and wellbeing of the greater Hamilton workforce. While mental health could be serving as a current barrier to workforce entry, it has the potential to intensify and prevent sustained participation.

THE NEED FOR AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AND SUPPORT WAS FLAGGED REPEATEDLY THROUGHOUT THIS STUDY AND FROM WOMEN OCCUPYING ALL FEMALE-DOMINATED SECTORS ANALYZED.

4

Exacerbation of pre-existing inequalities

As evidenced by the intersectional analysis, the pandemic has more heavily impacted Black women, Indigenous women, and People of Colour (BIPOC), younger women, women with disabilities, and low-income workers. BIPOC respondents were also twice as likely as white respondents to indicate they were struggling financially in January 2021. For both Indigenous and disabled respondents, the proportion of respondents who said they were struggling financially tripled between February 2020 and January 2021.

Prior to COVID-19, many of these women were already facing disproportionate challenges and additional barriers to both entering and remaining in the workforce. They include, but are not limited to, access to technology, workplace health & safety concerns, childcare and language barriers. The pandemic has worked to further prevent them from being equal participants.

A workplace culture that is not inclusive and welcoming to all women, but especially to those with disabilities, and those who are Black, Indigenous, and racialized, will further marginalize these groups of women from equal participation in the workforce.



“It is so important that all workplaces understand the value of needing mental health days off.”

5

Career uncertainty

A majority of women have debated changing their careers due to the pandemic (61%) and have considered learning a new skill or trade (59%). This could lead to high levels of sector transfer and increased need/desire for reskilling and upskilling opportunities. Indications of career uncertainty are especially prevalent within lower-wage female-dominated sectors that have experienced higher levels of negative job impacts (hospitality, retail, arts & culture, etc).

Of all sectors analyzed, hospitality workers reported the highest percentage of respondents who indicated that they had thought about changing their career (85%). Should the workers within these key sectors continue to view working in them as unattractive or unsustainable, it could lead to larger-scale talent shifts and industry challenges.

The uncertainty around career viability is a potential barrier for sustained workforce participation that also extends to those who are self-employed. 50% of business owners operating with employees indicated that their business is struggling due to COVID-19. By January 2021, 36% of them had to reduce their staff by at least 25% and 22% reported that they did not believe their business would survive the next year. These numbers were higher for entrepreneurs who operate without other staff. 55.5% indicated that their business was struggling due to the pandemic and 26% believed they wouldn't survive to 2022. While the extent of this potential barrier is speculative until further research can be done, a decline in women-owned businesses would hinder our city's economic recovery efforts.

ADDITIONAL LABOUR MARKET IMPLICATIONS FOR FEMALE-DOMINATED SECTORS

Aside from the implications that the identified barriers to entry/sustained participation will have on the labour market, the following should also be considered.

Sectoral recovery and growth

Workers in hospitality, retail, and arts, culture and recreation suffered high levels of negative job impacts due to the pandemic (laid off permanently or temporarily, hours reduced, or left job entirely). Our findings on hard hit sectors echo recent findings from Statistics Canada that show the accommodation and food services and arts, culture and recreation sectors suffered large job losses and have been the slowest to recover thus far.

Given Hamilton's emerging identity as an arts and culture hub, the negative impacts experienced by its workers and potential career shifts could affect the growth of these sectors and revitalization of key Hamilton neighbourhoods (such as the downtown core).

Current and potential skill gaps

With many Hamilton businesses being forced to pivot and adapt their operations throughout the pandemic, it is likely that many skill gaps and opportunities will emerge. While the upskilling/reskilling needs for each specific female-dominated industry will become more pronounced over time as companies navigate the 'new normal', we can in the meantime look to overarching trends and their impact on the labour market.

The first trend is digitization, and the demand for computer literacy and digital skills. According to Workforce Planning Hamilton's Business Impact Survey, 46% of local employers indicated that increasing their online presence is a business priority for 2021²². While increased digital activity and trade opens opportunities for export and broader market participation, it may also require many front-line workers to upskill to remain successful and relevant within the industry (particularly within retail).

The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of both hard and soft skills - not only in female-dominated sectors, but across Hamilton industries. According to Workforce Planning Hamilton, insufficient soft skills were the second highest reason that employers found jobs hard to fill (insufficient work experience being the first). In particular, wholesale trade, accommodations and food service, and finance and insurance showed a higher than average gap in soft skills. Insufficient technical skills among applicants also rank high as a reason jobs are not being filled. In particular, construction, manufacturing, and professional/scientific/technical services were identified as having the largest gaps in technical skills.

Flexible work

Within some female-dominated sectors, the pandemic has challenged the idea that working from home is not possible and/or productive. While 36% of respondents were unable to work from home, 52% either chose to work at home, were told that they needed to work from home, or split their time between home and working on-site. Furthermore, many women, specifically parents, were forced to deviate from their traditional working hours to better balance work and domestic responsibilities.

While it is unclear how many of these roles will fully revert back to their pre-pandemic operations, our labour market will likely see shifts in the demand for job flexibility. This could be very impactful for key demographics (such as those with disabilities who often requested or required at-home work) and create more options for workplace participation.

Sectoral value and expectations

Workers in education and healthcare had far fewer lay-offs and less reduction of hours, but saw increased workloads and new demands on their workers. Those working in education specifically identified that their additional demands did not result in additional compensation. Early childhood educators repeatedly commented that they felt their efforts were not given enough support and respect.

²² Workforce Planning Hamilton, Business Impact Survey - EmployerOne, 2021 <http://workforceplanninghamilton.ca/publications/443>

Prior to the pandemic, workers within female-dominated caring professions, specifically those that focus on our community's most vulnerable populations, such as childcare workers and personal support workers, have seen lower-wages, less job security, and less union protection.²³

While the pandemic has not worked to alleviate these concerns, it has helped to spotlight them. Women within these sectors are now more than ever demanding that their value be appropriately recognized. Supporting improvements to these female-dominated sectors will not only provide more equitable work for those who occupy them, but better support these key industries as a whole who play a vital role in our community/labour market.

MOVING TOWARDS RECOVERY

Given the scope and impact of the challenges created and exacerbated by the pandemic, an equitable Hamilton recovery cannot be achieved overnight or through the efforts of one decision-making body. Recovery will require a focussed, ongoing, and collaborative response between employers, government, educational institutions and unions - at all levels.

It also requires ongoing understanding of the barriers that are preventing women from entering, remaining in, and thriving within our labour market. For this to happen, we need to continue to provide platforms for women to have their voices heard.

Within this study, we listened - and we heard the following. All participants were asked about what supports would be helpful during the pandemic. From the survey the most commonly cited supports included the need for:

1. Mental health support that is affordable and accessible
2. More financial support
3. Schools and childcare centres to be open
4. Paid sick days

All focus group participants were also asked what a fair and equitable recovery would need to look like within Hamilton. Within these conversations, it was evident that there is no one size fits all solution. Some individuals will need the support of universal income, some will need sick days, some will need childcare. An equitable recovery will require us to not only provide more immediate solutions that allow workforce participation, but to also look at the cracks in our society and address the systematic ways in which women have been excluded.

We can no longer avoid shining the light on unequal pay for equal work, the devaluation

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²³ Canadian Women's Foundation et al. *Resetting Normal: Women, Decent Work and Canada's Fractured Care Economy*, July 2020.



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of feminized care work, and the lack of a provincial/Canadian childcare system that incentivizes work.

Some impactful thoughts from women surveyed highlights the need for more support and mental health resources in the COVID-19 recovery:

- 
- "Prioritize keeping schools open, offer care options for working parents, try to make recreational options available and safe to keep kids busy and active. Day camp needed in the summer even if we're still dealing with Covid."
 - "It is so important that all workplaces understand the value of needing mental health days off (breaking down stigma of mental health in the workplace is critical in this crisis)."
 - "Mental health & academic support for my children. I don't have time or energy to deal with everything."
 - "Programs for children need to be available. Sports, recreational activities etc. Both for our children's mental health and for parents to have a break."
 - "Paid sick time. I don't have any as a part time worker."
 - "More acknowledgment for the work RECEs do. I hear about teachers in the news but often thought 'what about us?'"
 - "I think more of a dialogue about the impossible dilemma that we face at this time to be professionals with a career, parents, teachers 100% at all times. The discussion that it isn't going to look pretty or feel easy because it is not. This has been a major discussion between my spouse (who thinks I should take another leave) and I (who sees work as a coping mechanism at this time) an area that is hard to see eye-to-eye on."



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are designed to provide guidance on how to best encourage women to successfully re-enter and remain in the workforce as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. They have been developed through feedback from Hamilton women, consultation with project partners, and conversations with key local informants. They are designed to advocate for women occupying all sectors, at all stages of their employment journeys.

Our hopes for these policies are threefold. We hope that they can be utilized to improve Hamilton's capacity to meet the identified needs of our labour force. We hope they provide tangible solutions to community organizations actively looking to support gendered recovery efforts in Hamilton and within their own municipalities. We hope that they strengthen ongoing recovery efforts at all levels - adding to research that has been done and reinforcing collective calls to action.

EQUITY & ACCESSIBILITY

Women-Specific Support Services/Programming

With many social issues continuing to challenge women's ability to participate in the labour market, further targeted support is needed. There currently exists a multitude of social service providers and programs serving the broader Hamilton community, however, opportunities still remain to enhance program offerings to specifically address the unique needs and challenges of women. These include, but are not limited to, escaping domestic violence, increased access to affordable housing, women-led employment mentorship, and flexible working arrangements. It is essential that intersectional, gender-based analyses inform all future social programming and address differential impacts between groups.

It is recommended that all levels of government implement an equity, anti-racism, diversity and inclusion lens and conduct gender-based analyses when developing new supportive programming. These tools should additionally be utilized to review and improve existing policy programs. Moreover, when government conducts such analyses, it is also recommended that women's organizations are included in all consultations and decision-making around programs that are designed for women. The wealth of experience and expertise contained within these organizations is currently underutilized in current approaches to policy design, and providing them with opportunities to inform program structure and deliverables will enhance the user experience and ultimate outcomes. It is recommended that all levels of government make a concerted effort to collaborate with women's organizations in an iterative process to design long-term program solutions that go beyond project-based funding.

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Recommendations:

- All levels of government ought to apply intersectional, anti-racism, and diversity lenses to inform policy decisions to ensure differential impacts are minimized and addressed;
- All future policy must be designed in accordance with gender-based analysis (GBA+) principles to improve gender equity;
- To improve program design and deliverables, government must invest in organizations who are experienced in advancing gender equity, promoting broader recognition of intersectionality, and improving women's rights in Canada through multi-year funding arrangements;
- Government must collaborate with women's organizations to tap into their expertise and collective experience to improve outcomes for women.

A Centralized Women Community Resources Network

While there are a number of service providers and programming opportunities specific to women in Hamilton, it can be overwhelming to know where to start looking for the information and resources available. Due to the complexity often involved in navigating program offerings and challenges associated with accessing those resources, there exists an opportunity to consolidate these community programs and offerings into one digital resource. The City of Toronto has two resources aimed to achieve this goal: the Community Partners Portal and Service & Benefit Finder Tool. A combination of these two resources for Hamilton would be ideal.

A centralized repository of Hamilton service providers, program offerings, and community resources would eliminate some of the challenges associated with identifying the appropriate program to meet a given social need. Hamilton ought to explore adopting a centralized digital resource for women that will not only serve to meet the needs of women in our community, but also serve as a networking resource for Hamilton-based service providers to better serve their clients and identify which offerings best meet their needs. This resource should be interactive and made available in multiple languages in an effort to be inclusive and support newcomer women and families.

IT IS AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT TO DESIGN POLICY AND PROGRAMMING BASED ON THE INPUT AND FEEDBACK FROM THOSE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCES.

Recommendations:

- Establish an interactive women's community resources hub that provides a one stop repository of information on service providers and their specific offerings for women in our community;
- Work together with service providers to ensure all community program offerings are included and detailed, along with information related to accessing community services;
- Collaborate with equity-seeking organizations to ensure barriers to accessing services are considered and addressed to ensure widespread community availability and adoption.

Representation in Decision-Making

Representation in decision-making matters. It is crucial that all levels of government and private sector organizations acknowledge a duty to act when it comes to incorporating principles of equity, diversity and inclusion and anti-racism in decision-making practices that take into account the lived experiences of marginalized groups. This includes, but is not limited to, the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and racialized (BIPOC) women, Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ people, and women with disabilities that are essential to informing equitable decision-making.

Moreover, beyond representation within high-level, executive decision-making circles, opportunities for constructive collaboration with equity-seeking groups is paramount to correcting social, economic and legal inequities that many in our community face. It is an essential component to design policy and programming based on the input and feedback from those with lived experiences. This results in the greatest likelihood to deliver progressive program improvements based on program learnings and iteration.

Where and when possible, government ought to establish strong accountability measures to ensure diverse representation and consultation occurs in all decision-making. Mechanisms such as the Hamilton Status of Women Committee can serve as important feedback tools to inform equitable policymaking. Policymakers should receive feedback in good faith and see it as an opportunity rather than a rebuke. Social procurement opportunities are also worth noting as an opportunity to consider alternative approaches to traditional decision-making whereby equity, diversity and inclusion are intrinsically linked to any decisions made.

HAMILTON SHOULD ALSO CONSIDER ESTABLISHING A GENDER ADVISORY COUNCIL AIMED AT INFORMING POLICY DECISIONS WITH AN INTERSECTIONAL, GENDER-BASED ANALYSIS LENS.

Recommendations:

- Ensure decision-making bodies include representation among those groups impacted by policy decisions;
- Pursue gender balance and diverse representation in decision-making circles, and particularly, consider the establishment of additional authoritative committees and subcommittees that focus on improving equity, diversity and inclusion outcomes;
- Assess the local benefits of implementing a social procurement policy whereby a percentage of public procurement spending can be earmarked for businesses led by women or other equity-seeking groups to build capacity for women and diverse entrepreneurs to participate in public supply chains.

Tracking Status of Women in Hamilton

By the spring of 2020, decades worth of progress towards gender equality came to a halt and workforce participation has not fully recovered. While initiatives such as this study have worked to assess the municipal level impacts of the pandemic, without ongoing tracking of key socio-economic indicators such as employment, average wages, workforce participation, housing insecurity or childcare access, the results of program interventions are speculative at best.

All levels of government are making historical investments in improving the lives of women across the country, however, without any metrics established it is difficult to report on the efficacy of programs dedicated to increasing women's workforce participation. It is recommended that all levels of government recognize the need for tracking the status of women in Canada, and particularly, that the City of Hamilton establish a dashboard mechanism that can track and update key socio-economic indicators for women in our community.

Hamilton should also consider establishing a Gender Advisory Council aimed at informing policy decisions with an intersectional, gender-based analysis lens. Consisting of project partners that represent the diversity of our community, this council could act as an accountability partner to the City of Hamilton. Without any mechanisms in place to measure the success or shortcomings of policy interventions, it is difficult to ensure change is occurring. Additionally, this would provide a mechanism through which policymakers can be updated regularly on the efficacy of their interventions.

WITHOUT ANY METRICS ESTABLISHED IT IS DIFFICULT TO REPORT ON THE EFFICACY OF PROGRAMS DEDICATED TO INCREASING WOMEN'S WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION.

Recommendations:

- Establish a framework for tracking the status of women in Hamilton that includes key socio-economic indicators such as employment, average wages, workforce participation, housing insecurity, childcare access, etc.;
- Work together with local women's organizations, employers, unions, post-secondary institutions and other stakeholders to collect, monitor and review datasets and seek policy improvements where possible as informed by data;
- Support the development of evidence-based strategies to advance the status of women in Hamilton;
- Consider establishing a Gender Advisory Council to help inform policy decisions and act as an accountability partner to the City of Hamilton.

Addressing (Un)Affordability

From our survey, it was clear that women are struggling financially. They are worried about the cost of bills and food, the cost of childcare, the cost of housing, and the ability to live and work in Hamilton. All levels of government need to address the affordability crisis in Hamilton, which recent research has shown to be one of the most unaffordable cities in North America.

Of particular note, there is a demonstrated need to increase spending on the development of new affordable housing. This funding will necessarily stem from upper levels of government, but municipalities also have opportunities to address local affordable housing supply. Municipalities need to leverage inclusive zoning where

possible and to incentivize developers of affordable housing through municipal subsidies. These already exist, but uptake remains relatively low when compared to the number of new developments year over year. Municipalities also must sustain their collective voice and pressure on upper levels of government to demand further and sustained investments in increasing Canada's available affordable housing supply.

Related are considerations on fair and liveable wages. Low wage positions often force individuals into taking on multiple employment positions to meet their basic needs. This only creates further strain on families who may already find themselves in precarious living circumstances by placing additional demands on their schedules. The federal and provincial governments must both study the true costs of living today and establish a living wage policy. No Canadians working 35+ hours per week should be struggling to make ends meet for themselves and their families.

Similarly, the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) served as a lesson in supplementary income support that brought stability to many Canadians' lives at a time of economic, social and public health uncertainty. Moreover, Ontario's former Basic Income Pilot provided a further look into the potential benefits of basic income on improving the lives and outcomes for marginalized individuals in our communities. As per the Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis, a basic income program guaranteeing individuals an annual income of \$24,000 and could lift 3.2 million families out of poverty and moreover could make positive contributions to Canada's economy²⁴. These are clear opportunities and lessons that can help to inform a national universal basic income study that ought to be considered. Particularly, there is a need to communicate the societal benefits of such a program when weighed against its costs to the average taxpayer.

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Recommendations:

- All levels of government need to urgently recognize the need for expanded, long-term, dedicated supports for affordable housing development – these include financial resources, subsidies and incentives;
- Review federal and provincial minimum wage policies to reflect a modern, living wage policy;
- Study and communicate the potential benefits of a national Universal Basic Income strategy, as per Hamilton Chamber of Commerce policy recommendations endorsed by the Canadian Chamber of Commerce;
- The Ontario Provincial Government should restart its Basic Income Pilot to truly understand the impacts of such a program.

²⁴ Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis, *Potential Economic Impacts and Reach of Basic Income Programs*, December 2020, <https://www.cancea.ca/publications/ubi>

CHILDCARE & CAREGIVING

Increasing Investments in Childcare at All Levels

The federal government's commitment to convene a Secretariat on Early Learning and Childcare is welcomed and will hopefully lead to the establishment of a Canada-wide early learning and childcare system. Pending the outcomes of the investigation, there will be an unprecedented demand for childcare providers and early childhood educators. These careers are often filled by women, struggle with employee retention and also are well-known for having relatively low wages. In order to ensure the success of a national childcare program, the government will have to ensure affordable access for users, but also incentivize providers to enter the fold and maintain operations.

It is estimated that a national childcare program will reduce overall costs by fifty percent, which is great for working families, but also leaves questions about how service providers will be compensated. The federal government will need to explicitly detail how families can access the subsidized programming as well as determine how service providers can expect to maintain and potentially grow their operations. It is well known and understood that early childhood education results in better outcomes for families, but it is imperative that access to new Canada-wide programming serves all Canadians, and not just those who work traditional nine-to-five jobs. There is an opportunity to rethink how childcare centres operate, and moreover, how government can best ensure all Canadians have access to affordable and high-quality childcare and early childhood education.

In the meantime, as childcare costs and access to childcare spaces remain an ongoing challenge in terms of accessibility, there are certainly opportunities for the government to make targeted investments into addressing these shortcomings. Rather than allocating childcare funding to parents that may not be utilized for that purpose, government ought to dedicate additional funding to service providers to help subsidize costs and increase capacity. Additional funding to this sector would also allow the City of Hamilton to expand the number of providers it supports without diluting its current level of support.

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Through this support, families are able to take advantage of the Childcare Affordability Plan, which provides the help of a \$10/day childcare subsidy. It also allows parents to avoid paying for COVID-19 related absence days where their children are not able to attend due to illness or isolation requirements. These efforts have been appreciated by Hamilton parents but beyond this crisis we need to ensure that these programs for affordability increase and continue.

Increased and long-term, predictable funding for childcare and early childhood education will deliver the development benefits of these services to more young Hamiltonians and increase the options available to families. It is recommended that all levels of government focus on the return on investment from investing in childcare

service providers versus funding allocated directly to families. The establishment of a Federal Secretariat on Early Learning and Childcare serves as a crucial step towards assessing what a truly Canada-wide program could look like, including details about how service providers can expect to be funded to deliver their essential programming.

Recommendations:

- The federal government should immediately establish the National Child Care Secretariat to monitor, coordinate and evaluate existing child care measures across Canada to ensure intergovernmental collaboration to achieve the best possible program outcomes for Canadian women, children and families;
- Government must seek to explore how expanded childcare offerings can help facilitate further employment opportunities within the sector and increase childcare capacity. Further it should understand the vital role that affordable and accessible childcare and early childhood education plays in workforce participation;
- Consultations on childcare reforms must include input from parents, providers, employers and other stakeholders to prioritize equitable and informed policy outcomes;
- Ensure that considerations on affordable and accessible childcare informs future economic recovery initiatives and is considered an integral component of all economic development activities;
- Canada ought to adopt the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) benchmark of allocating at least 1% of country GDP to early learning and childcare to improve outcomes for all Canadian families.

Supporting Sector Growth & Retention

With there being an increased need for childcare, it is important that the sector continues to grow and that the workers who work within it be supported and compensated fairly. The sector cannot retain workers and grow if the low pay persists. The provincial government has offered a wage enhancement grant of up to \$2 per hour since 2015 for RECES, which is welcome but is not sufficient.

Increasing childcare spots is not possible without attracting and retaining enough people to staff them. Part of attracting people to the sector includes paying a living wage, and providing job security.

As our survey has shown, close to 80% of childcare workers experienced negative job impacts during the pandemic. They feel like they are not supported by pandemic pay top-ups and recognition as essential workers. All levels of government need to work together to build a strategy to recruit, retain, and properly recognize this important group of workers.

An important part of this strategy should be supporting bridging programs to better enable experienced newcomer women to find work as RECEs. This would not only foster diversification of this sector, but could also aid families who need or want multilingual or culturally-responsive childcare.

Recommendations:

- Government should promote further professionalization of the sector by subsidizing a living wage, enabling better working conditions and increased employee retention;
- Seek to expand and enhance sector-specific bridging programs to reduce barriers to entry and increase the availability and diversity of experienced labour in childcare and early childhood education.

Community Contributions Recognition: “Helping the Helpers”

The COVID-19 crisis has been a grueling time for workers in caring and service professions. There is a growing, overdue and welcome recognition for the contributions that essential workers make in our communities. This support and recognition needs to continue after the pandemic is over.

The crucial work that childcare and early childhood education workers, personal support workers, and others provide to care for our community’s most vulnerable citizens will continue after the pandemic, and the outpouring of community support needs to be sustained. This serves to demonstrate the value placed on these careers that are often otherwise underrecognized and underpaid. Government’s previously offered pandemic pay for many essential workers, however, many childcare workers were not included in these offerings. This cannot be the case in the future, and moreover, government’s need to consider how to attract more talent into this sector to ensure capacity exists for high quality programming. Fair wages are essential to supporting these underpaid caregiving workers who have supported all of us through this crisis.

In terms of community recognition opportunities, governments should explore national, provincial and municipal days of recognition for the contributions and efforts of workers in caregiving sectors throughout the pandemic. Broad communication campaigns about the historical devaluation of care work in the community could serve as useful educational resources to provide insight into the valuable contributions they have made to society. Additionally, local vouchers and subsidies to public spaces, goods and events ought to be implemented for applicable essential workers in partnership with other local businesses and organizations.

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Recommendations:

- Governments must sustain the recognition and support for those involved in frontline, essential workplaces to demonstrate the widespread community thanks for their often-uncelebrated contributions to the social and economic well-being of our community;
- Consider implementing community recognition days and designing broad communication campaigns about the historical social and economic contributions of caregivers;
- In order to ensure long-term viability and employment attraction to the sector, all levels of government must commit to implementing a living wage across all sectors of the economy, but even more so for those essential services that have been historically under-appreciated.

Family Caregiving Resources & Support

As evidenced during the pandemic, many families struggled with the challenges associated with providing full-time childcare in addition to balancing regular employment and household responsibilities. While experiences with working from home are mixed for different people, it is fair to say that no one was properly equipped to take on the challenges of balancing work and home life when government shutdowns forced families to stay-at-home. In light of this, there exist opportunities to improve the family caregiving experience through the development of a centralized parent resource centre at the municipal level. In a focus group discussion with working mothers, the group all agreed with a sentiment shared by one of the women: “Help me by helping my kid.”

Similar to a community resources network, a parent resource centre would serve as a single point of contact for an inventory of resources available to address some of the challenges of home caregiving - helping to alleviate the burden on parents. Here, governments could develop and establish a list of activities, educational resources, and other supports that would benefit parents who may continue to work from home with young children present after the pandemic. These resources could include early childhood education resources, mental health supports, at-home activities, and public opportunities offered by service providers and local organizations (such as the Royal Botanical Gardens). Similar resources already created during the pandemic for online programming could be repurposed, enriched or expanded upon and made publicly available for wide community access. This resource would also need to be accessible and made available in a variety of languages.

GOVERNMENTS, POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS, AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR OUGHT TO EXPLORE INITIATIVES TO SUBSIDIZE TUTORING OPPORTUNITIES FOR FAMILIES AND TO INCENTIVIZE OTHERS TO BECOME TUTORS.

Additionally, as many students struggled with fluctuations in their education during the past year and a half, there will likely be a swell of demand for tutoring to assist children with meeting their academic expectations. Governments, post-secondary institutions, and the private sector ought to explore initiatives to subsidize tutoring opportunities for families and to incentivize others to become tutors. This could serve as a pandemic job creation opportunity as well as to address the needs of families and their children.

Recommendations:

- Establish a local family caregiving community resources network that will provide families and caregivers a single point of access to supports for home caregiving that include early childhood education resources, mental health supports and other at-home activities provided through service providers;
- Broader governmental recognition and conversations around the challenges and inequities that may exist in family caregiving, particularly how marginalized groups experience further barriers to accessing available resources and supports;
- To address gaps in educational attainment during the pandemic, tutoring subsidies that meet the needs of families and create youth employment opportunities should be explored by government, PSIs, and the private sector.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT TRAINING

Maximizing Micro-credential Opportunities

Canadian governments are increasingly exploring micro-credentials as part of their workforce development strategies. This is evidenced in the federal Skills for Success program and the Ontario Provincial Government's Micro-credential strategy that both seek to equip job seekers with relevant and in demand skills to meet employer needs. Micro-credentials are a relatively new concept, and they serve to bridge the gap between labour market demand and labour market supply with bite-sized training modules that can equip participants with the tools they need to thrive in a modern workforce.

Micro-credentials serve as an exciting opportunity for government and private sector employers to coordinate programming to provide training opportunities for women seeking to upskill, enter or re-enter the workforce with in-demand skills. While traditional high school, college and university programs generally lead to specialized skills and employment outcomes, completing these programs often takes years and requires full-time participation in many instances. Micro-credentials, on the other hand, are intrinsically designed to establish core competency in a given skill set within a matter of weeks. These programs are particularly beneficial to tentative learners who may face barriers to education, such as childcare, and can work to help them better access and build the confidence needed for lifelong learning.

In order for the recent push towards micro-credentials to succeed, and particularly achieve better employment outcomes for women, general awareness and education around their offerings and benefits needs to be enhanced. Potential participants need to be made better aware of how they can capitalize on these offerings - whether serving as stepping stones to career advancement or gateways to career changes. Employers need to better understand how these opportunities can enhance their capacity and the value that micro-credentials bring to their organization. Employers play a vital role in ensuring program success - as they need to be involved in all steps of the micro-credential development, implementation, and policy creation process. Private-sector partnerships are required to assess skill gaps, identify core skills, and to facilitate training and onboarding for participants who complete a given course. Government, employers, service providers, unions, and post-secondary institutions all have roles to play within this proposed educational push.

EMPLOYERS PLAY A VITAL ROLE IN ENSURING PROGRAM SUCCESS - AS THEY NEED TO BE INVOLVED IN ALL STAGES OF MICRO-CREDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION, AND POLICY CREATION PROCESS.

It is important that the government maintain an adaptive lens on these programs to assess strengths and weaknesses of current offerings and to promote ongoing upskilling through layering of micro-credentials for those interested in further training. Ideally, depending on the nature of a given course, completion of the program could be utilized towards college or university credits or towards hours contributing to a particular employment designation. Ongoing consultation should also continue to ensure employment outcomes, particularly for marginalized groups, are being met.

Recommendations:

- All levels of government need to ensure that gender-focused micro-credentialling strategies and programs are designed and informed by inputs from women and women's organizations;
- For programs to be successful, enhanced awareness around micro-credential opportunities and their value needs to be communicated, especially to employers who ultimately determine if the micro-credential holder has the necessary skill set;
- In order to ensure long-term benefits are derived, government, employers and service providers need to engage in an iterative dialogue through multiple program cohorts to understand how best to design and improve outcomes for women job-seekers, and particularly those experiencing further community marginalization;
- Expand micro-credentialling opportunities for women to not only permit more immediate skill acquisition, but foster an accessible pathway to life-long learning.

Youth Training and Workforce Development Strategies

It is important to note the opportunities associated with improving employment outcomes for women in our community through youth workforce engagement strategies. By middle school, youth are often already set on a given track related to post-secondary trajectory based on their individual performance to date, but also reliant upon those employment opportunities that are presented to them. If youth are under the impression that certain post-secondary programming trajectories have a greater societal value ascribed to it, government needs to address ways to correct this misunderstanding. Oftentimes young women are encouraged to follow a trajectory that may not suit their skill set nor their own desires. By creating a level playing field for employment opportunity perceptions, there exists the potential to set youth up for success based on their own valuation of a given vocation's contributions to society.

It is recommended that government consider re-evaluating how it structures its post-secondary streaming to incentivize young women into traditionally male-dominated sectors of the economy, improving diversity and overall productivity. Incentives for young women could include ensuring an internship or temporary position upon enrolment in a skilled trade, providing women-specific mentorship and employment attraction campaigns, and other financial incentives for participating in women-specific programming. Long-term benefits of such an approach include establishing successful examples of women excelling in traditionally male-dominated careers and facilitating connections between former and current program participants.

Attracting diverse audiences into a variety of careers requires a concerted effort and the need for women-specific programming. Government and service providers ought to explore opportunities to facilitate initiatives that seek to diversify otherwise generally homogenous workplaces. Moreover, programs that can guarantee an entry-level position will go a long way to attracting young women who may wish to temporarily test out a career path prior to making any long-term commitments. Completion of a temporary contract could then inform decisions to pursue further education in the field, stay on with the employer, or to discover that the opportunity was not the right fit. Regardless, these demonstrate some potential opportunities to facilitate further diversification of those workplaces historically dominated by males.

PROGRAMS THAT CAN GUARANTEE AN ENTRY-LEVEL POSITION WILL GO A LONG WAY TO ATTRACTING YOUNG WOMEN WHO MAY WISH TO TEMPORARILY TEST OUT A CAREER PATH PRIOR TO MAKING ANY LONG-TERM COMMITMENTS.

Recommendations:

- Establish targeted program interventions for young women in secondary school that tap into mentorship opportunities from established women in a given field, namely those in traditionally male-dominated sectors of the economy;
- Seek guaranteed entry-level positions or internship opportunities with flexible terms to attract more women into a diversity of careers without feeling as though they must commit fully without any on-the-job experience;
- Support evidence-based programs that advance women at an early age through school outreach, mentorships, apprenticeships and counseling that highlight the opportunities alternative career paths may present.

Women-Specific Reskilling Programming

Women-specific reskilling programs create a unique opportunity to attract more women into more sectors of the economy, all the while improving socio-economic outcomes for participants and diversifying the pool of talent available to employers. It is recommended that all levels of government continue to pursue women-specific programming opportunities and better assist with the communication of such funded programs to help service providers direct clients and reduce duplicated marketing efforts for similar programs.

It is also important to note that when government issues requests for proposals to establish or host a given skills programme, the money flows to the appropriate organizations with a proven track record in delivering social programming to women. To get the best results from these programs, governments need to consult with and fund women's organizations on the development and implementation of skills acquisition resources.

Through project consultations it was clear that the short-term nature of many funded skills acquisition programs needs to be re-evaluated in preference for longer-term, sustainably funded programming. These programs should be viewed as investments in women, not short-term projects. Extending program durations would allow service providers to build stronger programs that better serve their participants and better utilize their staff resources. Through creating opportunities for sustained engagement, participants will have the option to better preserve their built relationships and support networks. Longer-term funding also allows service providers to better retain staff and better reallocate the staffpower needed to consistently seek funding.

Accessibility to these programs should also remain a key component. Through the pandemic, many programs successfully utilized a combination of virtual and in-person training. While it is important that hands-on, in-person learning safely takes place, virtual components allow for increased flexibility for participants.

Lastly, there is an essential need for robust communications between employers and service providers to understand what skills gaps exist and how they can work together to fill those positions and increase their organizational diversity at the same time. Long-term funding assists in establishing productive relationships between employers and service providers that permit ongoing collaboration to reskill and upskill employees who may be interested in further training. There is a need for further incentivizing employers and service providers to work together on long-term training solutions to diversify the skilled labour available in our community.

EXTENDING PROGRAM DURATIONS WOULD ALLOW SERVICE PROVIDERS TO BUILD STRONGER PROGRAMS THAT BETTER SERVE THEIR PARTICIPANTS AND BETTER UTILIZE THEIR STAFF RESOURCES.

Recommendations:

- Government must enable women to explore career pathways through financially supporting re-skilling and re-training programs that are implemented by those organizations with a proven track record of delivering women-specific programming and consider establishing gender and diversity targets within funded re-skilling initiatives;
- Long-term funding arrangements are recommended over short-term upskilling programs as they provide for the establishment of stronger community networks and create the opportunities for program learnings and improvements through iterations of upskilling cohorts;
- Government should also seek to explore standardized certification criteria for popular re-skilling programming that will also permit foreign credential recognition should the newly established standards be met;
- Design training opportunities to address skills shortages by utilizing labour market data, employer input, and the feedback from job-seekers in equity-seeking groups, including through flexible formats, customized support and wraparound services;
- Improve access to career pathing resources and ensure financial supports are available for those enrolled in upskilling programs.

Women's Participation in Employment Recruitment

Similar to strategies suggested for attracting young women into traditionally male-dominated sectors of the economy, there are equal merits to be noted on women-targeted employment recruitment efforts. Presenting opportunities that are to be specifically filled by women offers a new approach to recruitment that can diversify sectors that currently experience low levels of employee diversity. The federal government's New Opportunities for Skilled Tradespeople program, for example, will provide \$10,000 for employers who hire those underrepresented including women, racialized Canadians and persons with disabilities. There are opportunities to explore further incentive programs for other sectors of the economy as well that will provide targeted opportunities to not only find suitably skilled employees, but also diversity workplaces at the same time. SkillsAdvance Ontario programming continues to evolve, and service providers are increasingly looking at how they can, in partnership with private sector employers, shape programming to specifically attract women into their workforce.

While recruitment is one particular challenge, employee retention is another. Of course, the employment needs and supports required by women vary on a case-by-case basis, however, there are opportunities for government and private sector companies to explore equity, diversity and inclusion principles, gender-based analysis and anti-racism strategies in the development of workplace policies. Assessing one's own current workplace policies through these filters will often reveal shortcomings and inequities in treatment, and how they negatively impact some workers. If women and/or racialized and/or disabled workers are not made to feel safe and welcome in a workplace, that workplace will not retain them.



As the pandemic has revealed, there are opportunities for creative workplace policies that permit flexibility in employment contracts that would allow greater flexibility for women, particularly those who may also be parents. Insofar as employees are capable of completing their work, employers ought to permit flexible working schedules where possible and explore additional equity-seeking policy changes to their existing portfolios.

Recommendations:

- All levels of government should pursue financial incentives for organizations that seek to diversify their workforce, particularly among male-dominated sectors of the economy, to provide incentives for equitable employment practices;
- Engaging with employers and job-seekers can help to inform funding decisions into upskilling programs where employment wants and employment needs intersect;
- Government ought to create and provide standardized educational materials for employers on principles of equity, diversity and inclusion, anti-racism, intersectionality, and gender-based analysis to educate employers on the benefits of such policies;
- Employers ought to explore flexible working arrangements where possible, to further incentivize women to seek employment within their organization.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Women's Entrepreneur Support Networks & Mentorship Opportunities

A common theme throughout the information gathering for this report concerns the lack of networking opportunities for women. Women entrepreneur networking opportunities organized locally allow for government, service providers, employers and business owners to connect, establish relationships, and break down barriers often experienced by women across the workforce. While there are providers who offer networking opportunities for entrepreneurs within Hamilton, the municipality, service providers and private sector partners should explore ways in which to create additional opportunities within the community. In the pursuit of equity, diversity, and inclusion, opportunities for participation should be created for under-represented groups, such as BIPOC entrepreneurs and those entrepreneurs living with disabilities.

In addition to networking opportunities, these groups should consider extending their support to offer educational programming and mentorship opportunities that assists women and other under-represented entrepreneurs with the tools they need to run a successful business.

Recommendation:

- Establish additional women's entrepreneurship support networks to create more, networking, mentorship and information sharing opportunities.

BIPOC & Women Owned Business Development Supports

Investing in entrepreneurs is a commonplace practice by governments of all levels, however, there are opportunities to create specific streams of funding to advance the entrepreneurial potential of under-represented groups in our community, including women. Of particular note and benefit would be a dedicated BIPOC-owned and women-owned business development or start-up grant or loan backed by the government with favourable payback terms and low interest rates. From our key informant interviews we found that funding that minimizes risk (e.g., grants) is key to supporting women's efforts to start-up and scale-up businesses. Further, these funding opportunities need to be properly promoted to ensure their target audiences are empowered to capitalize on the support.

Local municipal business services should assess the opportunities to enhance services to their women clients and make them more accessible both in the wake of the pandemic and going forward. Further, increased promotion and continuation of government-funded digitization support programs (such as Digital Main Street) should continue.

Lastly, when governments seek to understand how they can better support entrepreneurial ecosystems, they have to ensure that they seek a diversity of opinions and input. This includes convening women-specific opportunities to express their thoughts on how governments can better serve women entrepreneurs. There is no one size fits all solution, but rather, targeted and tailored interventions need to be informed by the lived experiences of women entrepreneurs. The entire entrepreneurial ecosystem needs to ensure equality of opportunity for any new business, and in many cases, this will require specialized funding supports to help get projects off the ground.

Recommendations:

- Determine funding arrangements for a dedicated women-owned and BIPOC-owned business development start-up loan with favourable payback terms and low interest rates to spur interest and de-risk some entrepreneurial ventures;
- Consider additional targeted support to underrepresented groups in the form of grants, loans and subsidies, but also in the form of essential business skills training and mentorship;
- Support women-led businesses with financing, legal advice, financial literacy, digital literacy, and other supports essential to running a successful business;
- Ensure gender-based analysis occurs in all programs designed to foster women entrepreneurship and improve access to start-up capital;
- Assess the local benefits of implementing a social procurement policy whereby a percentage of public procurement spending can be earmarked for businesses led by women or other equity-seeking groups to build capacity for women and diverse entrepreneurs to participate in public supply chains.

Access to Talent

A hurdle for many burgeoning entrepreneurs concerns accessing available talent. A recommendation from a focus group involved the creation of a job portal specifically for entrepreneurs and small businesses looking to hire professionals that are in need of part-time flexible work, due to childcare needs or otherwise.

Additionally, there is an opportunity to better connect and support entrepreneurs looking to hire post-secondary students. With many small business owners being unaware of how to capitalize on student talent, more education around workplace integrated learning opportunities and the creation of streamlined talent pipelines could be of great benefit. This reciprocal relationship would allow entrepreneurs to build capacity and the students to gain valuable experience in a relevant field. To achieve this, there are opportunities for stronger and more targeted collaborations between post-secondary institutions and service providers who work with or provide employer support.

Moreover, many entrepreneurs experience challenges with upstart costs and administration that prevent them from taking on additional employees. Employment incentives for new businesses serve as a valuable policy instrument for burgeoning businesses that need labour support, but otherwise need to tend to operating costs and investments into their own success. These could include incentives available to BIPOC-owned and women-owned businesses for a set number of employees insofar as other eligibility criteria is met such as a proof of concept through demonstrated growth, for example.

**MORE EDUCATION
AROUND WORKPLACE
INTEGRATED LEARNING
OPPORTUNITIES AND
THE CREATION OF
STREAMLINED TALENT
PIPELINES COULD BE
OF GREAT BENEFIT.**

Recommendations:

- To further connect employers with job seekers in need of part-time, flexible work, establish a job board designed specifically to foster those connections;
- Development of a talent pipelines that better educate entrepreneurs on the benefits of workplace integrated learning, and better support them as they look to hire post-secondary students;
- To further incentivize and support the success of women and BIPOC entrepreneurs, government ought to consider employment incentives and subsidies for hiring, training and onboarding new employees.

WORKPLACE POLICIES & EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

Mental Health in the Workplace

The conversation on mental health in the workplace has evolved significantly over the past decade, yet many workplace policies do not often reflect the current conversations around supporting employees during challenging times. Employers and unions need to step up and ensure that conversations about mental health take place in the workplace and that resources are made available to staff should they be experiencing any difficulties. Human resource policies need to address mental health challenges and actively seek to reduce workplace stigma associated with common mental health challenges such as depression, burnout, and anxiety.

In survey comments, respondents were grateful when they had understanding and supportive managers. A positive managerial response is needed to ensure that employees feel supported, so employers need to ensure that managers are equipped with the tools and the support they need to make that happen. During the pandemic, we saw that a supportive manager can make a huge positive impact on an employee's mental health.

There are opportunities for government to create standardized trainings, resources, and draft policies that business leaders can utilize for their own workplace. This includes policies that permit and support mental health days without penalty, access to affordable mental health support from trained professionals, self-help resources, and information on accessing local community supports. Without bringing the conversation up about mental health through strong human resource policies and a supportive workplace culture, employees often feel pressure not to bring up personal matters, regardless of their potentially detrimental impacts. This needs to change, and establishing a standardized set of human resource policies and resources goes a long way towards de-stigmatization and acknowledgment of the very real consequences associated with mental health challenges.

HR POLICIES NEED TO ADDRESS MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES AND ACTIVELY SEEK TO REDUCE WORKPLACE STIGMA ASSOCIATED WITH COMMON MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES SUCH AS DEPRESSION, BURNOUT, AND ANXIETY.

Recommendations:

- Mental health policies and considerations on accommodations are essential and it is encouraged that all employers establish a mental health policy – government should provide draft policies that account for best-practices and allow employer flexibility to adapt accordingly;
- Governments need to provide subsidized training opportunities for managers at all levels on inclusive human resources policies and procedures, which include essential considerations on mental health supports;
- Sustain the conversation on mental health well beyond the pandemic to destigmatize and acknowledge the potential consequences of mental health challenges.

Inclusive Human Resource Policies

Related to the conversation on mental health supports, there is an additional suite of inclusive workplace policy considerations that could go a long way to improving working conditions for women specifically. Those companies that choose not to adopt inclusive approaches to their human resource portfolio will find themselves in a challenging situation when it comes to attracting diverse talent.

Some of these human resource policies include considerations on caregiving, where parents may be permitted flexibility in the working hours to allow for drop-off and pick-up from childcare or school. For larger employers, there are even opportunities to explore in-facility care or partnerships with childcare providers to establish relationships and to coordinate provisions. Anti-harassment and anti-racist policies need to be developed and implemented to help support a safe workplace culture for all women, but especially those working in some male-dominated industries.

It will remain imperative for all organizations to establish a frequent review of existing human resource policies and to create a framework for measuring whether existing policies are meeting employee needs. This is particularly necessary as workplaces

begin to reopen where flexibility may be required among employees when it comes to adjusting to new post-COVID anxieties and shifts towards work-from-home models where possible. As previously mentioned, any framework ought to include considerations on principles of equity, diversity and inclusion, anti-racism and gender-based analysis. Through these lenses, employers have the opportunity to facilitate inclusive workplace policies that meet the needs of their employees, particularly when addressing the needs of historically marginalized groups.

Recommendations:

- Inclusive approaches to human resource policies are necessary and the government ought to provide standardized materials detailing what a suite of updated human resource policies cover and how they improve employee performance;
- Anti-harassment, anti-racism, mental health, sick-leave and equity, diversity and inclusion policies must become commonplace human resource requirements;
- Governments and employers ought to evaluate demand for workplace-based childcare, and if deemed appropriate, incentivize employers to offer on-site child care or mobile child care for long-term infrastructure projects in remote areas;
- Evaluate the impacts of flexible work on productivity and mental health and review mechanisms such as tax incentives or regulation to support employers who choose to adopt flexible work opportunities;
- Encourage the private sector to maintain flexible working arrangements established during the pandemic and support programs that develop skills and capacity among employers and workers to take advantage of new working arrangements.

Workplace Culture, Advancement and Retention

Employers need to foster a culture that supports their employees beginning at the time of recruitment and hire. Onboarding policies that help an employee feel welcomed, supported, and valued within their new role will set them up for success and aid in retention. These policies need to be iterative and responsive and extend beyond safety protocols to help foster an inclusive culture - especially in male-dominated sectors where women and marginalized groups are often not set-up for success. While employers can invest in the creation of their own policies, industry associations and unions should look to establish suites of onboarding programming for specific careers. This would provide employers with free resources that do not impact their operational bottom lines, which then frees up resources for other purposes such as enriched human resources offerings, fairer wages, and mental health days.

ANTI-HARASSMENT AND ANTI-RACIST POLICIES NEED TO BE DEVELOPED AND IMPLEMENTED TO HELP SUPPORT A SAFE WORKPLACE CULTURE FOR ALL WOMEN, BUT ESPECIALLY THOSE WORKING IN SOME MALE-DOMINATED INDUSTRIES.

This employer support should extend into the employee's career by offering training, growth and advancement opportunities. This could include pursuing skills acquisition partnerships where possible to provide additional training opportunities for their employees. Programs such as SkillsAdvance Ontario can be utilized to upskill existing employees should they be interested in growing within their current roles. Moreover, through the renewed focus on micro-credentials, employers have the opportunity to create credentials for specific positions within their workplace, thereby incentivizing and encouraging employees to learn additional skills and scale their responsibilities accordingly. A theme that came through the focus group discussions was the idea that, "If you invest in your employees they will invest in you".

**ONBOARDING POLICIES
THAT HELP AN EMPLOYEE
FEEL WELCOMED,
SUPPORTED, AND
VALUED WITHIN THEIR
NEW ROLE WILL SET
THEM UP FOR SUCCESS
AND AID IN RETENTION.**

Without effective leadership, employees will not be inspired to learn, adapt or grow within their current roles. Culture change starts from the top. Leaders need to model inclusive behaviours and ensure safe and supportive workplaces. The adoption of value-based leadership and participation in leadership training can better enable employers to recognize the humanity of their employees and better support them.

Related, representation matters, and employers need to actively pursue diversity and representation among corporate leadership teams. When organizations seek to diversify their leadership, it will require a concerted effort to make those interested know that they are welcome and celebrated regardless of their gender, race, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, or any other demographic measure. Furthermore, access to senior leadership via mentorship opportunities can be extremely helpful in career progression, especially for underrepresented communities. Should employers look to offer internal mentorship opportunities for their employees, assigning metrics is a way to ensure that opportunities not only continue, but remain of value to all parties involved.

Recommendations:

- Industry associations and unions should seek to establish a suite of iterative and responsive onboarding materials for specific careers to provide employers with free resources that foster inclusive workplaces and better retention;
- Encourage employers of all industry to consider pursuing micro-credentialling opportunities where possible – equipping their employees with upskilling and advancement opportunities;
- Provide incentives to employers to participate in further managerial training that seeks to educate on the benefits of equity, diversity and inclusion in team building, gender-based analysis in creating a safe and inclusive workplace, and to foster progressive leadership qualities among managerial staff;
- Provide incentives for employers to develop internal mentorship opportunities, allowing employees to better access and connect with senior company leadership.