

## *Prudent budget fails to repair the economic conditions confronted by women*

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The budget speech was presented to the Canadian people on Tuesday afternoon with claims by conservatives that it reflected a “prudent” prescription to help heal Canada’s economy. It seems, however, that the prescription did not contemplate the economic conditions confronted by women.

Women can be encouraged by the minor extension of EI benefits and increased spending in the renovation of social housing. But there is little else to celebrate. The budget ignores the needs of women and the most marginalized in our communities by failing to provide EI reform, child care infrastructure spending, a viable public pension plan to support low-income women seniors or pay equity at the federal level. And more egregiously, the tax relief will be of no benefit to 40 percent of women who fall below the lowest income bracket (while granting significant relief to Canada’s highest earners).

The unwillingness of the government to increase EI benefits for part-time, contract, and self-employed workers shuts out thousands. Although women pay into EI, most women - due to the type of employment they hold - don't qualify for benefits. More than 70 percent of part-time workers and almost two-thirds of minimum-wage earners in Canada are women. With wages far below the poverty line already, many can't live on little more than half of their salary, even for a short period of time.

The government’s failure to address the woefully inadequate childcare subsidy is shortsighted and counter-productive to its efforts to stimulate the economy. Escalating childcare costs and the lack of spaces keep many women who want to work unemployed or underemployed. The \$100 monthly taxable Universal Child Care Benefit cannot serve as a replacement for a childcare program that allows real choice to women. Canadian families, especially households run by single parents, need a national childcare program.

As women age, their economic situation remains or becomes increasingly dire. The poverty rate for senior women in Canada is almost double that of men, yet the government has ignored the need to create a universal pension plan for the 60 percent of seniors who don’t receive a pension.

We hope that the political parties see that until we collectively address the crises facing women in Canada and make real investments toward the substantive equality of women, our “prudent

prescription” will do nothing to heal the economic ills for a majority of Canadians in these difficult times.

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