



THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF CANADA
LE CONSEIL NATIONAL DES FEMMES DU CANADA

January 2021

Canada's Response to COVID-19

National Council of Women of Canada

- Patricia Leson, President

Canada

Canada is the second largest country in the world and occupies approximately the northern two-fifths of the North American continent.



(Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc.)

This size comes with its own special challenges, especially during a pandemic such as this. As you will note from the map, Canada has ten provinces and three territories, each with their own governments. The federal government is in Ottawa, Ontario.

Despite Canada's great size, it is one of the world's most sparsely populated countries. As of July 1st, 2020, Canada's population was listed as 38,005,238 million; women accounted for 19.12 million of this number and there were 4.8 million seniors over the age of 65.

This fact, coupled with the grandeur of the landscape, has been central to the sense of Canadian national identity. Although we are comparatively few in number, we have crafted a model multicultural society, welcoming immigrant populations from every other continent. In addition, Canada harbours and exports a wealth of natural resources and intellectual capital equaled by few other countries.

Canada is officially bilingual in English and French, which reflects our history as ground once contested by two of Europe's great powers. The French and British influences are supplemented by the cultures of our Indigenous people. Indeed, the name 'Canada' is derived from the Huron-Iroquois word 'kanata', which means a village or settlement.

To honour these original ancestors of our land, we, and most other organizations, begin our meetings with a 'land acknowledgement'. Here is the one the NCWC uses:

Today as we join together, it is important to begin our meeting by acknowledging the Indigenous Peoples of all the lands on which we have a presence.

We acknowledge the importance of the land, which we each call home. We do this to reaffirm our commitment and responsibility in improving relationships between nations and to improving our own understanding of local Indigenous peoples and their cultures.

From coast to coast to coast, we acknowledge the ancestral and unceded territory of all the Inuit, Métis, and First Nations people who call this nation home.

We acknowledge our activism role in reconciling the ninety-four Calls to Action established by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada as well as the Final Report of the National Inquiry into the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

Let us take a moment of reflection to acknowledge the harms and mistakes of the past and to consider how we can each, in our own way, try to move forward in a spirit of reconciliation and collaboration.



(Northern Saskatchewan)

The National Council of Women of Canada

The NCWC was founded in 1893, shortly after Canada became a federation in 1867. Much has occurred since this time; we now have local councils in cities from Halifax to Vancouver, and provincial councils across the nation. These local, provincial, and national organizations are closely connected with issues at all levels while also having a firm grasp of international issues and Canada's commitment to them. For this reason, the NCWC is uniquely qualified to approach our Governments with suggestions and recommendations which are based on carefully researched and democratically approved policies for improving the quality of life for Canadians. This has become especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The operations of governments at all levels changed dramatically over the past months. COVID19 has shifted the focus of the government to immediate day to day, week to week, month to month, response scenarios. We were cognizant of this, so we were even more diligent in ensuring our responses to the COVID-19 outbreak would not reproduce or perpetuate inequality. We strongly urged the government to take action on each of the issues that are impacting vulnerable people and communities; they must not be shoved aside.



(Canadian Broadcasting Corporation)

Yes, we are all in this together, but we are not all being affected equally. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to unfold, we are acutely aware that the current crisis amplifies existing gender, racial, economic and political inequalities. Those most impacted are the marginalized – Indigenous women, racialized women, LGBTIQ+ individuals, people with disabilities, the elderly, the poor, lone parents, and the displaced. The current crisis has a distinct and disproportionate impact on women, whether it is due to the increasing risk of gender-based violence, lack of access to necessary sexual and reproductive healthcare, greater caregiving responsibilities, losing employment or working without adequate protective equipment. Women who can least afford care are at the greatest risk. They will also have the greatest difficulty recovering after the crisis.

We are at a fundamental turning point; **we must take gender into account.** If it is not addressed now, we run the risk that sexism, racism, and other current societal inequities will be indelibly woven into the fabric of our society.

These are indeed difficult times; but they will not destroy us; we will emerge stronger and more committed to caring for each other and working together to improve societal conditions in our communities, our provinces, and our country. While each of our lives have been altered and

perhaps even forever changed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the NCWC remains vigilant in supporting those who have, and are, facing even more dire consequences than others.

As President of the NCWC, I am pleased to include these reports from our Past Presidents, Board members, and Convenors which will highlight the issues, the solutions, the innovations, and the remarkable resilience, fortitude, kindness, caring, and optimism of Canadian people. We truly believe that, as one of our friends, Lorna Marsden, stated, *“As WWI led to the right for Canadian women to vote at the federal level following the suffrage movement prior to the war; as the Depression led to some changes in economic security with the institution of government pensions and economic plans; as so many crises in Canadian history have led to changes - often improvements - in the status of women in Canada, so COVID-19 has, and will, change the lives of women across the nation. The NCWC was there all the way....and will continue to be there, working to ensure the legacy of the pandemic is an improvement in the lives of Canadian women, children, and families.”*

The NCWC continues its work to expand opportunities for all women, and we continue to be the voice for those who have neither the courage nor the strength to do so for themselves. Throughout these difficult times, we proudly continue to advocate for women from coast to coast to coast, pressing those in leadership positions to weave the strong tapestry of supports and programs necessary to improve the lives and living conditions for women, children, and families across Canada. Pandemic or not, the tradition of the NCWC continues – strong, proud, and bold.



(Huffington Post)

Gracia Janes, 1st Vice President, NCWC, Environment

In times like these, as climate change threatens our future and COVID-19 drastically impacts our health, the pandemic has provided some respite for the air, water, and land. The National Council of Women of Canada can be proud of its role over the last one hundred and twenty-eight years in advocating for nature. However, in the years ahead we must work even harder to secure an environmentally sound future for coming generations.

With this in mind, I bring to your attention some examples of our past environmental concerns and achievements, one with a link to the present COVID-19 crisis, and then, a very recent email glimpse of hopes, fears, and challenges to us all, from my son Peter, a skilled musician, photographer and film person, who is isolating alone in a tiny apartment in Toronto.

It seems amazing that as far back as 1910, the Local Councils of Women of Montreal and Toronto lobbied successfully for municipal water purification systems and in the 1920s for the formation of National Parks such as Jasper.

In the 1930s, the NCWC expressed grave concerns regarding leaking oil tankers and in 1955 were ahead of the times in warning about the dangers of nuclear power (atomic energy as it was called). In addition, in the 1970s, the NCWC was one of the first groups to speak out about the impacts of acid rain.

Since then, the NCWC has sent countless cautionary letters to the Government of Canada and presented briefs to a variety of federal Boards and Commissions regarding environmentally destructive projects and practices. Some examples are the shipment by highway of high level very dangerous liquid nuclear waste from Chalk River near Ottawa, to the Savannah River site in South Carolina, nuclear reactor life-extensions, the Northern Gateway pipeline, off-shore drilling in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the urgent need to turn off dirty, costly, extremely dangerous nuclear financial investments and dramatically increase investments in energy efficiencies and conservation and alternative forms of energy in order to combat global warming.

Coincidentally, in mid-to-late April as we were in perhaps in one of the initial stages of the COVID-19 epidemic, world news began to report of clear skies, waters, and air due to the current restrictions on travel. I learned of whale protection advocate Elizabeth Hewitt, an NCWC member in the 1920s, whose husband, Charles Gordon Hewitt, was a scientist, public servant and Canadian environmental hero. He was the architect of the 1917 Migratory Bird Convention treaty between Great Britain and the USA, which banned wildlife markets such as those found today in Wuhan, China, the epicentre of the COVID-19.

Speaking of our avian friends, here is what my son, Peter, wrote to me from Toronto:

“Nice to watch birds fly from here. 'Ralph', the resident hawk from Hawk's Hill in High Park floating on the air currents. Searching no doubt for mice. The pigeons are very wary as are seagulls. Two pigeon chicks have hatched in the nest on my balcony. Earlier in the spring I tried to shoo the adults off, but with the distractions of the pandemic they of course took full advantage of my absence, as we are seeing the world over. Turtles launching onto beaches unhindered by humanity. The condors I imagine soaring freely without airplanes blocking their travel routes. Mountain tops of the Himalayas visible for the first time in thirty years. No Mount Everest expeditions littering its slopes with spent oxygen and propane tanks. No cruise ships dumping their holding tanks or tossing garbage into the oceans. Perhaps for the first time since the forges of the industrial revolution began over two hundred years ago, has the ozone layer begun to close up. We are able to see a dramatic increase in air quality in major cities around the world.

Will we, as a species, be able to look at the positive net effect to realize that it's possible to curb climate crisis and change our global behaviours to make a dramatic turn in conditions which ensure survival of life on earth? I really hope so. It's worth the try. The future depends on it!”

Economics Report

- **Karen Dempsey, Past NCWC President, Honourary Life Member, Economics Convenor**

Several major advocacy organizations in Canada, including the National Council of Women of Canada and many of its affiliates, fifty Senators, and other parliamentarians have been advocating vigorously for a Basic Income Guarantee in Canada. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the current inequities in our society and brought them into sharp focus. Women have been the hardest hit as they simultaneously work from home, help teach their children, do child-care, sometimes having to live in lock-down with their abusers. Women have also made up a huge percentage of front-line workers including those in healthcare. Instead of stop-gap measures, having a basic income guarantee in place permanently would assist in our economic recovery and cushion any further economic disasters.

The Government of Canada has an Economic Response Plan which is available to all on their internet site and is continually updated. Starting last year at the beginning of the pandemic, our Prime Minister did daily updates on television and Canada's Chief Public Health Officer, Dr. Tam, also did updates. The updates continue on an as-needed basis.

Efforts to Mitigate the Results of Covid-19 through the Government of Canada's Economic Response Plan

The federal government's Economic Response Plan addresses many areas, but those that affect women and families most directly are those dealing with individuals and organizations helping Canadians, as well as their support to provinces/territories.

Individuals, (programs available to):

- **Employment Insurance (EI)** – temporary changes were made to the program to help support Canadians who needed financial assistance. As of September 27/20, the minimum benefit rate is \$500/week before taxes in most cases.
- **Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB or CERB)** – provides \$500/week for up to 26 weeks for workers who have stopped working or had their incomes reduced by at least 50% due to COVID-19 and who are not eligible for EI.
- **Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit (CRSB)** – provides \$500/week to a maximum of two weeks for workers who have contracted COVID or are required to self-isolate, or have conditions, etc., which would make them more susceptible to contracting the virus.
- **Canada Recovery Caregiving (CRCB)** – provides \$500/week for up to 26 weeks per household for workers:
 - a) Unable to work for at least 50% of the week to care for a child or family member due to schools, day-cares, or care facilities being closed
 - b) Whose child or family member is sick, required to quarantine, or is at risk of serious health implications if they were to contract the virus.

Seniors: Government programs supporting the delivery of items and personal outreach.

Organizations providing support to Canadians:

- Individuals and families who are homeless

- Women and children who are experiencing violence in the home (exacerbated by having to stay home with their abuser)
- Youth and individuals who need mental health support
- Support of public health efforts through the Red Cross

Support for Provinces and Territories

- a)** Providing temporary wage top-up for low-income essential workers (many of whom are women)
- b)** Supporting critical health care needs
- c)** Helping provinces and territories to restart the economies
- d)** Ensuring safe return to school

Additional Efforts:

The military sent medical staff to several long-term care facilities in situations where extra help for seniors was urgently required.

The military also delivered food, supplies, and other assistance to northern communities.

Efforts were made to ensure that all segments of our diverse population were informed of the federal response to the pandemic (efforts to mitigate, etc.). A Federal/Provincial/Territorial Public Health Response Plan ensured that Canadians had a coordinated response across Canada.

A Special Advisory Committee was established to advise Federal/Provincial/ Territorial Deputy Ministers of Health across Canada in the coordination, public health policy and technical content related to this pandemic.

The Public Health Agency of Canada is working closely with partners, domestically and around the world, including the World Health Organization (WHO), to respond to the pandemic.

Canadian researchers are working to support international efforts:

- Testing anti-virals and other treatments
- Developing vaccines
- Supporting clinical trials

Canadian Council of Muslim Women, NCWC Federate

- **Nuzhat Jafri, President**

Life in the time of COVID-19: Let's keep on keeping on!

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW) decided to hold virtual board meetings. During normal times, we meet in person every two months or so and work very hard from Friday evening until Sunday afternoon.

One of the reasons we love to gather together in person is to share our sisterhood, our lives and our challenges and accomplishments. The personal presence of each and every board member attending from different parts of Canada is worth every minute. Now, we shared all of it without gathering together around a single table. We gathered together through fiberoptics, cable

transmission lines, Internet, and cyber connections that are invisible yet ever present. The remarkable thing was that we still did what we always do. Technology, you are a God-send!

As we worked through our ambitious agenda to discuss current projects and working at home during the time of COVID-19, we shared once again our sisterhood, our lives and our challenges and accomplishments. Some of us are cooking more and probably packing on some additional pounds around the waist, some are taking long walks in our backyards or decks, some are learning how to home school our children without tearing our hair out completely, and some are dancing at different intervals in their day to their favourite playlist or virtual dance party organized by famous DJs on the web. Some are reciting comforting verses from the Qur'an and prayers recommended by wise elders in our families. We also shared that we are connecting more often with friends and family on the phone or the Internet.

It sounds heartless to say but there is a silver lining to this pandemic. We're not distancing socially, we're distancing physically to save each other's lives. We continue to share our work, safety tips and information about the pandemic – our social connections being stronger than ever. Humans are learning to be the social beings they were always meant to be and expressing gratitude with humility and awe to God and all those who are looking after other humans around the globe.

Let's also think about all those millions all over the world, including here in Canada, who have no access to technology, healthcare, food, shelter and basic necessities of life. Let's use the resources we're blessed with to help and support them.

Life in the time of COVID-19 reminded me of a song from the '60s by Len Chandler, Keep on Keeping on. Let's keep on keeping on. You can listen to Len right here!



A Tribute to our Elders

As the news of outbreaks of COVID-19 in large numbers in long-term care facilities reaches our news feeds and television screens, we are experiencing a myriad of emotions, not the least of which are sadness and grief at losing the most precious people in our lives.

Not long ago, when spring was making its presence known through a burst of crocuses and daffodils, I began to keep my Father company at the side of his hospital bed in Scarborough. Our father was admitted to the hospital and moved to palliative care because my siblings and I could no longer take care of him at home. He was in the 95th year of his life.

My Father had Alzheimer's and engaging with him required patience and perseverance. Days and weeks passed. He began to withdraw from eating and drinking and slept most of the time. On my laptop I played verses from the Qur'an and some of his nostalgic music, Urdu poetry recited by his favourite narrators, and occasionally an old Bollywood historical movie. Most of the time he did not recognize any of the visitors, including his children and grandchildren. With each passing day, he ate less and less and slept more and more. That was the beginning of my Father's end in this life.

Before his admittance to the hospital for the last time in his life, we had struggled to find care for him at home. Services provided through the local Community Care Access Centre were sporadic, with constantly changing caregivers, inconsistent care practices, and absences without notice.

Five years earlier, we had gone through this with our Mother. At that time, it was my Father who lovingly took care of my Mother at home with the help of some reliable personal support workers. In each of our parents' cases, care at home prevailed because care in long-term facilities looked precarious.

We were fortunate to be with our parents towards the end of their lives. There were, indeed, the most precious people in our lives, and the struggles for their care were no match for what had given us in love and sacrifice.

Today, in the wake of an invisible killer virus, thousands of seniors are dying alone in long-term care facilities. They are deprived of the company of their loved ones by their sides, and their caregivers, themselves, are in peril of COVID-19. Surely, our elders deserve than this. They have given so much to their children, grandchildren, and to this country. Can we please not let them die so mercilessly – alone, without dignity. Their lives are just as precious, if not more, as all the others who are suffering with this disease.

Let's urge our governments to accelerate the provision of personal protective equipment, better pay for caregivers, and healthcare commensurate with the best as that is what our elders deserve. We owe them our lives.



Dr. Ugur Sahin, left, and Dr. Özlem Türeci, who are Muslim, are the couple who founded BioNTech and teamed up with Pfizer on a vaccine that is more than 95% effective.

Congratulations, and thank you!!

Canadian Hadassah WIZO (CHW), NCWC Federate

- Elyana Latsky, President

Canadian Hadassah- WIZO (CHW) is a non-political, non-partisan national network of dedicated volunteers and professionals who strongly believe the advancement of child-care, education, healthcare and women's issues transcends politics, religion, and national boundaries.

CHW has discovered some very innovative and successful fundraising ideas during the lockdown due to COVID-19!

The wildly popular Gila Gourmet Celebrity Chef Zoom Series presented by CHW Toronto Gila Chapter kicked off on September 9, 2020, where guests were treated to demonstrations by chefs over the course of 10 sessions split into two series. The chefs came from a diverse background of specialities and cooked dishes from around the world. World renowned chef and fish expert Uri Buri even presented all the way from Israel!



(Photo: Uri Buri Gila Gourmet Screen Shot)

Alla Reed, an amazing, multi-talented singer, kicked off the CHW Vancouver Light Up The Night Series last Sunday. Alla was delighted to donate her time and voice, working with CHW Vancouver beforehand to get the music just right. The series continues through the winter and spring, featuring musicians from around the world.



(Photo: Vancouver light up the night)

CHW Montreal Centre will soon be launching an incredible Jewish Tour of 4 major cities in South America through February and March! Each city has its own history and culture to explore with a personalized tour guide.

Children
Healthcare
Women

CHW MONTREAL CENTRE PRESENTS

**JEWISH TOUR OF
SOUTH AMERICA**

TRAVEL SERIES IN SUPPORT OF
THE SHAMIR MEDICAL CENTRE (ASSAF HAROFEH)

Register now:
CHW.CA/SOUTHAMERICA
Or Call: **514-933-8461**

Laplanche
First 25 people to SIGN UP
for the FULL SFORBS will receive a
beautiful sterling silver Hamsa
necklace! Value \$45

(Photo: Montreal Travel Series social card)