



Actions to Close the Employment Gender Gap in Alberta

The Issue

Alberta women want careers that align with their skills and goals. Yet, they experience many compounding barriers to progressing in their careers and contributing to Alberta's economy.

The COVID-19 pandemic made these barriers worse. Alberta women still feel the impacts of lost wages and work disruptions.

Alberta needs solutions to improve pay equity, childcare, training, business investment, and non-profit supports to close the employment gender gap in Alberta.

Women & Work in Alberta

- ▶ **35%** of Albertan women are out of the workforce, compared to **26%** of men.¹
- ▶ On average, Albertan women earn **80%** of what men make working a similar job.²
- ▶ Albertan women aged 15 to 24 earn **29%** less per year than same-aged men.³
- ▶ Women with children 12 and under lost **twice** the work hours as men did during the pandemic.⁴
- ▶ **79%** of women-owned businesses operate without employees, compared to **67%** of men's businesses.⁵

The Opportunity

Alberta's community non-profits have on-the-ground knowledge that can help increase the number of Alberta women in the workforce. They have the unique ability to develop nimble and innovative solutions.

Governments and industry can leverage these strengths to support women's employment by collaboratively partnering with community non-profits. These partnerships can ensure policies and programs strengthen supports for women and improve gender equity in Alberta's workforce.

Working with non-profits can connect women with employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, promoting gender equity, strengthening the economy, and supporting family and community well-being. It can also help fill Alberta's 87,000 job vacancies.⁷



34% of managers in Alberta are women.⁶

Local Data & Actions

At PolicyWise for Children & Families, we work to enhance practices and policies that support well-being. For the past two years, we have sought local solutions to close the gender gap in Alberta employment and entrepreneurship. This work has involved analyzing data and engaging with diverse women and community non-profits across the province.

Based on our research, we organized an event in October 2023 to workshop potential solutions to close the employment gender gap. We invited community non-profits, government policy specialists, researchers, and finance sector representatives to connect and collaborate in supporting women's employment and entrepreneurship.



Five Policy Priorities

Through our research, we have identified five policy priorities for the government to support women's economic participation and close Alberta's employment gender gap.

1. Enhance Childcare Systems

- **Collaborate with the childcare sector** to ensure [the \\$10-a-day childcare deal](#) is successfully implemented and to strengthen sustainability, quality, and access to licensing for childcare businesses.
- **Diversify childcare options** by expanding daycare schedules and programs, including offering culturally responsive childcare and supporting industry and non-profit partnerships.
- **Attract and retain Early Childhood Educators** by increasing wages, improving benefits, and supporting professional development.

2. Build Jobs & Training for Women

- **Partner with community non-profits** to design and deliver employment programs by determining training priorities through community engagement, supporting wraparound employment programs, and investing in women leaders.
- **Foster equitable, safe, and respectful workplaces** by enacting pay equity legislation, growing awareness of the [Duty to Accommodate](#), and building Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion capacity.

3. Invest in Women Entrepreneurs

- **Improve access to capital** by increasing low-barrier grants for women, streamlining grant application processes, increasing transparency in business investment through disaggregated data, and providing incentives for investing in women's businesses.
- **Increase access to business supports** by partnering with community non-profits to provide networking opportunities and affordable navigation and skills-building programs.

4. Embrace Newcomer Women's Full Potential

- **Welcome global expertise** by streamlining foreign credential recognition, creating opportunities for newcomers to build Canadian work experience, and improving labour protections for temporary foreign workers.
- **Fill job vacancies** by supporting community non-profits to match industry partners with skilled newcomer women and offer on-the-job language courses and mentorship opportunities.

5. Mobilize Community Solutions

- **Provide stable funding to community non-profits** focusing on sustainability, service continuity, and flexible wraparound supports available when and where women need it most.
- **Strengthen communication** between the government, non-profits, and industry to enable collaborative and wraparound care.

Moving Beyond the Binary

Canada lacks publicly available data about transgender, non-binary, and gender-diverse people. Some data sources use binary sex to classify respondents. Others put gender-diverse people in binary categories. We focus on women in this policy brief to align with the available data. Gender-diverse people have unique needs. To inform the development of inclusive policies and programs, public agencies must improve how they handle gender in their research.

The next section details the **Five Policy Priorities**, informed by voices of diverse women and non-profits.



Five Policy Priorities: Local Data and Actions

To close the employment gender gap, Alberta needs to take decisive action.

For each recommended policy, we offer data showing the barriers and opportunities for Alberta women to join the workforce. Then, we provide tangible short-term actions the provincial government can undertake to enact these policies. We also provide actions that need concerted, collaborative, and longer-term efforts to ensure the employment gender gap continues to close. These systemic changes will ensure Alberta women can thrive in the workforce.

1. Enhance Childcare Systems

Affordable, accessible, and quality childcare facilitates women's workforce participation. Women with children 12 and under lost twice as many work hours in 2022 than men (Figure 1).⁴ Overall, women's workforce participation was linked to their children's age. But, this was not the case for men.

% of Total Work Hours Lost by Child Age

Youngest child <13

Women **24%**

Men **12%**

Youngest child >13

Women **14%**

Men **12%**

Figure 1: Percentage of total work hours lost for women and men by age of their youngest child.⁴

Increase Affordability

The [Federal-Provincial Child Care Agreement](#) \$10-a-day deal is improving childcare affordability in Alberta. Yet, it will not be fully implemented until 2026.

Completing this deal is vital to ensure affordable childcare for women in the workforce. It will also support the viability of daycare and day home businesses.^{12,13}

“Childcare centres need to come to the table to talk a little bit more about flexibility. We aren’t going to have that until employers and childcare meet at the table. The stakeholders that need to sit together and say, ‘What do you need? Here’s what we can give you. How do we make this work?’”

—Community non-profit worker

Based on our research, the Alberta government can increase childcare affordability by:

- Working with childcare provider associations to ensure the implementation of the \$10-a-day deal strengthens the quality and sustainability of childcare businesses.
- Consulting with licensing agencies and day home providers to ensure licensing supports the viability, quality, and success of day homes as small businesses.

A longer-term systemic action the government can take is:

- Building capacity in licensing agencies to serve day homes across the province, including rural and remote areas.

- ▶ 24% of Albertan women with children under 6 are out of the workforce, compared to 4% of men.⁸
- ▶ Of the Albertan women not in the workforce but wanting to join, 25% are unable due to personal or family responsibilities, compared to 7% for men.⁹
- ▶ Of the Albertan women over 25 working part-time, 22% are limited to part-time work because they care for children, compared to 4% for men.¹⁰
- ▶ Albertan women and men both lose about 25% of their total employment hours to personal illness.¹¹ However, women lose more hours to personal and family care. In 2023, Albertan women lost 1.3 million employment hours to personal and family care. This represents 25% of their total lost hours, compared to 460,000 hours for men, representing 10% of their total lost hours.

Diversify Childcare Options

We heard from Albertan women that they struggle to find work that accommodates childcare schedules. Most childcare options align with weekday business hours, which are unsuitable for shift and gig work. After-hours childcare is scarce.

Families also need childcare options that respect and celebrate their cultural requirements.

The Alberta government can meet Albertan families' diverse childcare needs by:

- Expanding the childcare deal's implementation to extended hours, drop-in access, and flexible pick-up times to accommodate shift work, unexpected overtime, and school closures.
- Conducting a community-engaged needs assessment to determine priorities for caregivers and childcare providers.

Top 5 reasons why home-based childcare businesses in Alberta are unlicensed:¹⁴

- They want control over their business 64%
- They see no benefit in being licensed 36%
- Licensing is not necessary 33%
- There are too many requirements 30%
- Licensing costs are too high 26%

“The [after school] daycare expects you to bring the kids to their location. They are not arranging transportation from the school to the daycare. So, if I can drive the kids to the daycare, then I don't need daycare, right? It doesn't really work.”

—Newcomer woman entrepreneur



To diversify childcare longer-term systemic actions the government can take are:

- Partnering with school districts to expand school-based childcare and preschool options.¹⁵
- Advocating for new school-building projects to include childcare and after-school care spaces.
- Supporting coordination between school districts and the childcare sector to better accommodate early dismissals and school closures.
- Building awareness with employers about the benefits of on-site childcare programs.
- Support culturally responsive childcare programs developed by Indigenous- and newcomer-led community non-profits and small businesses.

➤ 29% of childcare workers in Canada are self-employed, compared to 15% of workers in other industries.¹⁷

➤ Early Childhood Educators earn 44% of what the median Albertan worker makes.¹⁹

➤ 43% of Albertan childcare businesses are unlicensed home-based businesses.¹⁶

Proportion of Alberta childcare businesses offering programs for:¹⁶

Evenings **5%**

Weekends **9%**

Overnight **4%**

Drop-in Access **22%**

Flexible Access **19%**

Attract and Retain Early Childhood Educators

Improving childcare affordability will increase demand. This means Alberta will need more qualified Early Childhood Educators and resilient childcare businesses.

Early Childhood Educators are a skilled workforce who play an essential role in child development and our province's future. Investing in them is an opportunity to support Albertan women and children.

This investment can improve conditions for a women-led workforce while enhancing access to quality childcare for women in all sectors.¹⁷

The Alberta government can attract and retain more Early Childhood Educators by:

- Creating an online portal for Early Childhood Educators to support and simplify navigation of licensing requirements, educational opportunities, and funding options for education and professional development.
- Streamlining foreign credential recognition for Early Childhood Educators.
- Expanding benefits to childcare operators for paying wages and materials for professional development.¹⁸

Longer-term systemic actions the government can take are:

- Adopting transparent wage grids for Early Childhood Educators.¹⁸
- Establishing programs for self-employed Early Childhood Educators to integrate start-up funding with business mentorship.
- Providing funding to operators so they can offer competitive benefits packages.

2. Build Jobs & Training for Women

Women participating in our research underscored how their career paths improved when they connected with a community-based employment program providing wraparound supports.

Partner with Community-Based Non-Profits to Design and Deliver Employment Programs

A range of employment programs connecting women with well-paying jobs enhances workforce participation. We heard that women want training opportunities that extend beyond entry-level work and support their advancement.

The Alberta government has committed to improving access to training in the skilled trades for under-represented groups.²⁰ The funding program to help more women train for jobs in the trucking industry is an excellent example for investment in community non-profits providing training and wraparound support for women to advance in their careers.²¹ Extending this commitment to additional industries would provide women with several pathways to fulfilling careers.

Community-based employment programs are a worthwhile investment. They provide networking opportunities that support women's mental health, provide guidance, and connect women with employers.

When employment programs provide wraparound supports, such as housing, food, childcare, and mental health supports, they ensure women have what they need to fully participate in training.²² Community non-profits are well-suited to design and deliver employment programs by adapting to the specific needs and priorities of the women they serve.

The Alberta government can create employment programs that centre women's needs and build a vibrant workforce by:

- Spreading and scaling existing community-based training models providing pathways to employment in several sectors.
- Supporting non-profits to expand leadership development programs for women.
- Designing funding for women's employment programs to include a wraparound approach that addresses barriers to employment.

Longer-term systemic actions the government can take are:

- Consulting women and organizations to identify training priorities that meet both labour market demands and women's needs.
- Providing stable funding for community-based non-profits that improve workplace inclusion in women-minority industries.

“I’m coming from Nigeria. It works differently there with how you apply for jobs, and what should be on your resume. There was [a session for newcomers] where they pair you with a mentor in your field in Canada. They actually paired me with someone from my same country. I felt like he could relate, and he really gave me some good advice. I’m hoping that I can be a mentor to someone someday.”

—Newcomer woman

Foster Equitable, Safe, and Respectful Workplaces

Women are more likely than men to work in low-wage jobs.²³ These jobs often lack security, which can lead to abuse and exploitation of the workforce. Supportive and inclusive policies, like paid sick leave for all workers, paid professional development, and anti-discrimination policies, need to be paired with efforts to increase the number of women working in women-minority industries.

Many women experience workplace discrimination due to gender, sexuality, race, or disability. We heard stories of employers rejecting women's requests for accommodation due to pregnancy, injuries, or illness. Women described being unaware of their rights related to anti-discrimination legislation and the [Duty to Accommodate](#).

The Alberta government can ensure all workers

“[Workers] don’t know what their rights are until they’re pushed out. Even if their employer knows, sometimes they are just kind of hoping that the employee isn’t aware of [their rights], just hopes that they go away, and they often do.”

—Community non-profit worker

are safe and respected by:

- Creating accessible resources about employers' Duty to Accommodate and labour standards in multiple languages.
- Spreading and scaling community non-profit initiatives that build employers' capacity to create equity, diversity, and inclusion policies.

Longer-term systemic actions the government

can take are:

- Encouraging employers to enact pay transparency and equity policies.
- Enacting pay equity legislation.
- Legislating paid sick leave and family leave for all workers.

Low-wage workers are:

14% less likely to have their mental health needs met

14% less likely to be satisfied in their lives

2.4 X more likely to have an anxiety disorder compared to higher-wage workers.²⁴

Median Employment Income (\$)

Men

Racialized **\$52,400**

Non-racialized **\$73,000**

Women

Racialized **\$38,400**

Non-racialized **\$48,000**

Figure 2: Racialized women in Alberta earn 53% of what non-racialized men earn per year, representing an interaction between gender-based and race-based wage gaps.³

3. Invest in Women Entrepreneurs

Alberta's passionate women business owners see entrepreneurship as a source of financial independence, cultural expression, community building, and personal development.

Improve Access to Funding and Capital

Women entrepreneurs face barriers to accessing start-up capital due in part to gendered stereotypes about women in business. Racialized, Indigenous, and newcomer women entrepreneurs face additional obstacles to meet the requirements for a business loan.

We heard that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these barriers, especially for women starting a business. Small businesses that shut down lost revenue while accruing debt from expenses and loans. While COVID-19 relief loans and Employment Insurance provided much-needed support to businesses, newer and small women-owned businesses were often ineligible for these programs.²⁶

Before developing funding opportunities, engaging with women entrepreneurs can help address the barriers they face. Targeting support and policies that increase access to capital and funding for women entrepreneurs can help them build and sustain their businesses.

▶ Women own **17%** of Alberta businesses.²⁷

▶ **36%** of Alberta women-owned businesses reported maintaining cash flow, managing debt, and dealing with inflation as their biggest obstacles in the fourth quarter of 2023, compared to **27%** of all businesses in Alberta.²⁸

“Resources [to start a business] are limited. There are so many criteria. It limits you because, if you’re new, you don’t have employees, you don’t have the experience that they’re saying you should have.

I’m thinking to myself, if you’re starting from scratch, where do you begin if you don’t have those resources?”

—Newcomer woman entrepreneur

The Alberta government can support women-owned businesses access capital and funding by:

- Offering low-barrier capital grants for women with integrated capacity-building support.
- Streamlining application processes for accessing funding opportunities.
- Reducing red tape in regulations and services for small businesses.
- Partnering with community-based business development programs to offer start-up funding for program graduates from racialized, Indigenous, and newcomer communities.

Longer-term systemic actions the government can take are:

- Developing government procurement policies that support the growth of women and gender-diverse businesses.
- Providing incentives for those investing in women and gender-diverse-owned businesses, such as tax credits for venture capitalists.

- Creating government-private sector partnerships that increase business investment and reporting transparency by identifying factors like gender, race, Indigeneity, and immigration status.
- Developing culturally sensitive pathways for accessing capital in partnership with Indigenous Communities and women entrepreneurs.

“Being an entrepreneur is wearing hundreds of hats at a time. [...] but we’re not going to be experts in everything. And if we didn’t have the resources and the proper training and coaching from [local community non-profit name], my business probably would not be what it is today.”

—Newcomer woman entrepreneur

Build Strong Business Networks and Programs

Many women entrepreneurs started businesses in sectors hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Women described their need to juggle many tasks on their own. Many of these tasks required different skill sets and a strong support network. These tasks included moving their business online, business planning, attracting investment, managing inventory, promotion, licensing, accounting, and more.²⁶

Most women entrepreneurs also do not have additional help.⁵ This means that work stops when other life circumstances occur, like illness or childcare demands.

To ensure women entrepreneurs are better supported, we heard that it is crucial for them to:

- Connect with mentors and other entrepreneurs.
- Access business and system navigation support programs targeted to them.

The Alberta government can increase access to business supports and networking for women entrepreneurs by:

- Facilitating networking opportunities between women entrepreneurs, mentors, investors, and government sponsors.
- Partnering with community non-profits to create affordable business services for women entrepreneurs.
- Increasing funding for system navigation supports.
- Increasing funding for culturally and linguistically responsive programs.

Longer-term systemic actions the government can take are:

- Creating long-term funding for existing community non-profit programs for women entrepreneurs, especially for those underserved.
- Increasing funding and scholarships for women’s entrepreneurial education.
- Developing and funding programs that integrate access to capital, mentorship, financial literacy, and networking to grow women and gender-diverse owned businesses.

4. Embrace Newcomer Women's Full Potential

Community-based programs play a crucial role in building bridges and navigating employment for newcomer women, including making connections to access job information, supports, training, and employers.

“Most of the time, we cannot even work in the fields that we came for, so we’re doing those little jobs to survive.”

—Newcomer woman

Welcome Global Expertise

Many skilled newcomers in Alberta end up unemployed or underemployed. Newcomer women described a disconnect between the jobs they were promised when immigrating to Canada and their experience in the Canadian job market. Employers often expect newcomers to have Canadian work experience.

Highly educated women newcomers have found it hard to have their credentials recognized. Many are not able to use their education and training. This can lead them into “survival” jobs that they are over-qualified for and do not align with their training.

The Alberta government can connect newcomer women with well-paying jobs in their fields by:

- Supporting partnerships between community non-profits and industry that offer on-the-job language courses and mentorship for newcomer employees.
- Improving labour protections for temporary foreign workers, including paid personal and family-responsibility leave.

- Creating funding programs to broker industry-community partnerships that maximize non-profits’ expertise to match skilled newcomer women with appropriate workplaces.

Longer-term systemic actions the government can take are:

- Streamlining recognition of foreign professional credentials.
- Working with the federal government to extend programs fast-tracking credential recognition for healthcare workers to other industries.²⁹
- Developing employment bridging programs and paid internships with a clear path to licensing.
- Investing in community-based capacity-building programs that challenge employers’ conscious and unconscious bias towards newcomers.

 9% of university-educated immigrant women in Alberta are unemployed, compared to 5% of women born in Canada.³⁰

5. Mobilize Community Solutions

Community non-profits have an in-depth understanding of women’s realities at individual and population levels. They observe in real-time the service gaps and processes that create barriers to women’s participation in the workforce. This makes non-profits critical partners for funders and the government. Non-profits are ideally positioned to help them understand the challenges women face and use their expertise to co-design services that lead women to success. A strong non-profit sector can support working women with wraparound services, navigation and mentorship, and the social network they need to thrive in their careers.

- ▶ 68% of jobs in Alberta community non-profits are held by women.³¹
- ▶ 45% of jobs in Alberta community non-profits are held by racialized people.³¹
- ▶ 46% of roles in Alberta community non-profits are held by people with at least one university degree.³¹

Re-Envision Non-Profit Funding Models

Short-term, competitive, project-based funding is challenging for non-profits. This type of funding makes it difficult for community non-profits to sustain programs, maintain a skilled workforce, and collaborate and coordinate with others.

Average Annual Income (\$)

No diploma or high school diploma

Non-profit **\$31,266**

All Alberta **\$39,906**

Trades certificate or diploma

Non-profit **\$47,194**

All Alberta **\$69,200**

College certificate or diploma or university certificate

Non-profit **\$41,720**

All Alberta **\$58,779**

Bachelor's degree or higher

Non-profit **\$52,347**

All Alberta **\$79,400**

Figure 3: Albertan non-profit workers earn less than the provincial average for the same level of education.^{31, 32}

If stable operational funding is provided to community non-profits, they can get out of the grant-to-grant cycle, focus on designing programs that align with emerging needs, like a global pandemic,³³ and serve communities better.

The Alberta government can create funding opportunities that promote long-term sustainability for community non-profits by:

- Increasing grant management capacity to support organizations with qualification and eligibility.
- Hosting networking and peer support sessions for grant writing.
- Increasing project funding lengths to ensure service continuity and collaboration across sectors.
- Designing grants with flexibility for eligible costs so organizations can respond to intersectional barriers and urgent needs to enable women to advance in their careers.
- Designing grant funding to include staff time for evaluation and impact sharing.
- Diversifying reporting to include stories and culturally responsive modes of demonstrating impact.

“Funding is set up to be competitive and not to be collaborative. So, if they could change the way the funding is given, so that organizations can actually work together without being penalized for it, I think that would make a huge difference.”

—Community non-profit worker

Longer-term systemic actions the government can take are:

- Designing grants to provide funding integrated with mentoring and professional development.
- Developing a sponsorship model that reduces barriers to funding application requirements.
- Providing operational funding so non-profits can attract and retain a skilled workforce to create innovative programs, expand services, and reduce barriers to women's employment success.
- Developing infrastructure to attract private sector investments.

“I think it’s important that governments are more involved with non-profits and community agencies because we are the ones that are working with these people. We know their stories, and there is kind of a disconnect between the government, whether it’s about funding or income support grant or any of that.”

—Community non-profit worker

Increase Capacity for Collaborative Support

A collaborative, systems approach can support women's career goals and participation in Alberta's economy. Community non-profits' knowledge and experience are critical for understanding and responding to the needs of communities. They are essential to mobilizing information about available programs and supporting women accessing them.

They also have the relationships and the trust in the community to get information and access to those with intersectional barriers. Community non-profits and policy makers can work together to create environments and supportive structures for women to fully participate in the Alberta workforce and economy.

The Alberta government can support collaborations across the social sector by:

- Leveraging cross-ministry roundtables to improve communication and collaboration.
- Improving information mobilization between government supports and service users in partnership with community non-profits.
- Funding the coordination of wraparound services supporting basic needs within workforce readiness, business development, and financial literacy programs.

Longer-term systemic actions the government can take are:

- Leveraging cross-sectoral working groups to innovate wraparound solutions.
- Investing in government-community partnerships to design training, employment, business, and bridging programs.



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We acknowledge and thank all women and community non-profits who contributed to this project.

To cite this document:

PolicyWise for Children & Families. (2024 March). Actions to Close the Employment Gender Gap in Alberta: Policy Brief. Edmonton, AB.

PolicyWise for Children & Families is a non-profit organization that supports the development of policies, programs, and services to benefit the well-being of Albertans. We conduct research, evaluations, and data analyses to ensure children, youth, families, and communities can thrive.

To connect with us or learn more about these policy opportunities, please contact communications@policywise.com.

This project is funded by:



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