

Submission to the 2024-2025 pre-budget consultation

About the New Brunswick Women's Council

The New Brunswick Women's Council is an independent advisory body for study and consultation on matters of importance, interest, and concern to women and their substantive equality. Its objectives are:

- a) to be an independent body that provides advice to the Minister on matters of importance to women and their substantive equality;
- b) to bring to the attention of government and the public issues of interest and concern to women and their substantive equality;
- c) to include and engage women of diverse identities, experiences and communities, women's groups and society in general;
- d) to be strategic and provide advice on emerging and future issues; and
- e) to represent New Brunswick women.

In delivering on these objectives, the Women's Council may conduct or commission research and publish reports, studies, and recommendations. The Women's Council is directed by an appointed volunteer membership that includes both organizations and individuals. The work is executed by a small staff team.

Gender Impact Statement

Gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) is a tool used to assess how specific populations may experience policies, programs, and initiatives differently than others. GBA+ that is tailored to the budget process is sometimes called gender budgeting. GBA+ goes beyond sex and gender to consider intersecting factors that shape individuals' experiences, including age, location, race, ethnicity, culture, disability, and language. GBA+ is important because, for much of modern history, institutions like governments have not considered how their work may impact specific demographic groups, such as women, differently than others. GBA+ is an essential part of developing public policy that is evidence-based, equitable, and effective.

Since 2021, government has provided a [Gender Impact Statement \(GIS\)](#) alongside its Main Estimates to provide information “about the GBA+ impacts of specific measures on the budget.”¹ In its first iteration, the aim of the GIS was to “highlight how key initiatives have gender and diversity considerations.”² It also provided demographic data to contextualize challenges and barriers for specific populations in the province. After [feedback from Women’s Council](#) and other organizations working on gender equity in the province, the [2022-2023 GIS](#) showed a marked improvement in terms of the depth of information provided. It included 17 impact assessment reports that outlined the GBA+ done on policies programs, services, and initiatives. The [2023-2024 GIS](#) took another step forward by providing 40 impact assessment reports, all of which were more detailed than those provided in previous years.

Despite these improvements, the GIS has continued to lack information on whether GBA+ was applied to the budget as a whole. A budget is more than the sum of its parts and understanding how GBA+ influences the process of resource allocation to one department, program, or policy rather than another is essential to ensuring that GBA+ is not only being done but done well and affecting decision-making. This is part of ensuring that GBA+ is being treated as an integral part of policy development, not as a box that must be given a perfunctory checkmark by individual departments.

The Women’s Council hopes to see a 2024-2025 GIS that clearly demonstrates that GBA+ was a foundational part of the entire budgeting process—from the level of programs, services, and policies, through departmental budget submissions, up to the final budget as a whole.

Evidence- and equity-based policy

The provincial budget is where government clearly sets and resources its priorities. Given that, the Women's Council wants to take this opportunity to once again recommend that government commit to a policy development process that is evidence- and equity-based. The Women’s Council is concerned that twice during the current fiscal year, government has advanced policy that is harmful to marginalized and often

¹ Government of New Brunswick, Gender Impact Statement 2021, p. 2.

² P.4.

misunderstood populations. These policies are not evidence- or equity-based and may violate *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

The first instance is the [changes](#) to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's Policy 713 on sexual orientation and gender identity in schools and school-related activities that clawed back the rights of trans students. The second instance is the proposed [Compassionate Intervention Act](#), which would allow judges and hearing officers to order individuals with Substance Use Disorder (SUD) who are not meeting their basic needs into involuntary treatment. [There is no convincing proof that involuntary treatment is an effective means of addressing SUD](#); rather, it has been demonstrated to be less effective than voluntary treatment and [may increase the risk of overdose and death](#).

These policies are likely to cause immediate harm to marginalized population while also increasing stigma toward them. This will contribute to increased social isolation, reluctance to access support, and more challenges in the future.

In addition to being harmful to marginalized and vulnerable people, these policies don't align with government's goal of fiscal responsibility. The immediate and long-term effects of these policies will need to be addressed by government, likely once they have become more complex and will require crisis intervention, which is typically more expensive than early intervention. These policies also may violate *Charter* rights, as well as the codes of conducts of regulated professions that they impact, and thus may lead to lengthy and expensive court cases for government. The changes made to Policy 713 are already the subject of [legal action](#) and the *Compassionate Intervention Act* [may well also be challenged](#).

It is not only the policies themselves that are concerning, but the way that government has presented and defended them in the face of criticism. The Premier and Ministers have publicly dismissed reputable research on the issues that these policies address, baselessly [questioned](#) or [undermined](#) the work and credibility of relevant subject-matter experts, and at times [repeated misinformation](#) or [significantly misrepresented alternate policy proposals](#). These are all actions that erode the public's trust in government, which is extremely concerning during this time of rising far-right extremism. The Women's Council has previously provided government with advice on far-right extremism, and its unique impacts on women, in its [Submission to the Commissioner on Systemic Racism](#) and its brief [The rise in organized anti-2SLGBTQIA+ activities in New Brunswick](#).