

**CASW Pre-Budget Submission
to the Standing Committee on Finance:**

**From Aspiration to Implementation:
The Tools to Put Humanity First**

**2016 Pre-Budget Consultation
August 5, 2016**



Founded in 1926 the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) is the national association voice for the social work profession.

CASW has adopted a pro-active approach to issues pertinent to social policy/social work. It produces and distributes timely information for its members, and special projects are initiated and sponsored. With its concern for social justice and its continued role in social advocacy, CASW is recognized and called upon both nationally and internationally for its social policy expertise.

The mission of CASW is to promote the profession of social work in Canada and advance social justice. CASW is active in the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW).



Introduction

CASW is tremendously pleased that your government's first year of leadership has brought about many long-sought changes and commitments: from the introduction of the new Child Benefit to the early stages of a national affordable child-care strategy, and many encouraging promises in terms of restoring equity to the Canadian justice system, this government is taking concrete steps toward a better Canada.

Despite this renewed federal leadership, there remains no pan-Canadian vision for social policy, and no common standard of outcomes or performance indicators for the delivery of social services across Canada.

CASW is encouraged by the dialogue around the social determinants of health and the links between health and economic prosperity. Researchers, stakeholders, and those with lived experience alike affirm the remarkable economic impact of eliminating poverty by addressing the social determinants of health. As proud members of the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (CAMIMH), CASW is especially concerned with the undeniable relationship between poverty and mental illness in Canada.

With this government's many large initiatives still in the early stages of development, the time is now to ensure that all decisions made put people first by addressing the social determinants of health, ensuring equity across Canada, and making children a priority.

Executive Summary

CASW looks forward to working with this government to bring compassionate and cost effective policies to Canada.

The following recommendations would greatly improve the quality of life for all Canadians while also controlling federal expenditures:

- 1) Adopt a *Social Care Act for Canada* to support equity across Canada, renew federal leadership, and develop mechanisms for benchmarking of outcomes and for information sharing between provinces;
- 2) Put children first with a basic income for families and an accessible, affordable national plan for child care;
- 3) Develop targeted strategies that address Canada's most pressing concerns, such as our ageing population, the ongoing need to support Canadians mental health, the importance of achieving reconciliation with Canada's Indigenous people, and the development of a national strategy for homecare: all issues that could be addressed, in part, by the development of a National Affordable Housing Strategy.

CASW'S Recommendations:

1) Adopt a *Social Care Act for Canada* to guide social investments

CASW proposed the adoption of a *Social Care Act for Canada* with principles similar to those of the *Canada Health Act* to help guide the Canada Social Transfer (CST) and other social investments, making possible a national strategy with shared performance indicators.

Ten Principles of a proposed Social Care Act for Canada

1. Public administration
2. Comprehensiveness
3. Universality
4. Portability
5. Accessibility
6. Fairness
7. Effectiveness
8. Accountability and Transparency
9. Rights and Responsibility
10. Comparability

Such an *Act* would help guide the provinces and territories in developing policies that best fit their unique needs, while helping the federal government better understand where dollars are being spent – and, in turn, where more targeted investment might be needed. This would help not only to foster dialogue around shared issues, best practices, and evidence-based programs, but also aid in producing comparable outcomes across Canada. Without federal leadership guiding social transfers and investments, dialogue on progressive social policy stagnates.

For example, while CASW greatly appreciates the new Canada Child Benefit (CCB), the program is weakened by the lack of a mechanism to protect recipients from claw backs at the provincial level. Instead of relying on an unspoken commitment to protect recipients of this benefit from claw backs, Canadians should celebrate our restored compassion driven policy ethos and make these decisions official with a *Social Care Act*.

The proposed *Social Care Act for Canada* can be read in full on CASW's website, www.casw-acts.ca .

2) Put Children and Seniors first with a Basic Income and an Accessibly to Affordable Child Care

In gearing the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) to income, the Government of Canada took a bold step towards developing a comprehensive basic income for low income families with children. Budget 2016 enhanced the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) which, combined with Old Age Security (OAS), moves forward basic support for seniors. CASW welcomes the enhanced GIS and as with low income families receiving maximum CCB, we encourage the federal government to continue progressively moving forward with targeted affordable basic income for both these vulnerable populations.

Low income families and seniors should be ensured a basic income to allow them to live in dignity regardless of labour market status. With a basic income, society can stop much involvement in the child welfare system before it begins, and prevent many costly acute health care interventions for seniors. Additionally, we know that children and seniors living in poverty are exponentially more likely to develop chronic health conditions including concerns around mental health and addictions.

CASW recommends that the federal government initiate a process to review and renew the income security system in Canada with a view to the possibility of developing an affordable basic income. It should be targeted initially to provide income support families with children, and for all seniors who are economically insecure and vulnerable. As a measure that would significantly reduce poverty in Canada, a targeted basic income also reduce the long term social and financial costs of poverty in areas such as health care, education and criminal justice.

Parentetically, CASW cautions that not all basic income or guaranteed annual income models are made equal: the implementation of a basic income should not be cause to eliminate all other social assistance programs and strategies.

In addition, and specific to children, CASW echoes the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada's recommendations that a new national framework for early learning and child care must include:

- A commitment to build universal, affordable, inclusive, high-quality child care systems across Canada.
- A commitment to provide long-term sustained federal funding to ensure affordable, high-quality services together with a planned expansion of child care programs so that, by 2020, child care can become accessible to every child whose family chooses it.
- A commitment to work together to strengthen family supports including better and more equitable family leave from work and study, as well as access to more flexible work arrangements.

- Commitment to use data and policy research to make evidence-based child care policy decisions¹

3) Humanity First – Continue Restoration of Federal Leadership in Health and Social Investments

Mental Health:

CASW is a proud member of the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (CAMIMH), the national voice for mental health in Canada. Established in 1998, CAMIMH is an alliance of 16 mental health groups comprised of health care providers and organizations that represent people with mental illness, their families and caregivers.

Analysis by the Mental Health Commission of Canada suggests that mental health funding should be increased from 7 to 9 per cent of total public health spending, while the most recent estimates place provincial and territorial government spending on mental health and addictions at 7.2 per cent. CAMIMH agrees that 9 per cent is the minimum level of public investment required to improve access to a range of mental health programs and services, and get better health outcomes.

CASW agrees with CAMIMH that the federal share should be increased to 25 per cent, the annual federal investment to support increased access to mental health services would be an additional \$777.5 million. While such dollars could flow to the provinces and territories via the Canada Health Transfer, CAMIMH strongly recommends the funds be earmarked through a Mental Health Transfer, or a dedicated envelope to maximize accountability, transparency and impact.

Social Finance:

In terms of the development of a Social Finance and Innovation Strategy, CASW urges this government to carefully consider different social finance tools and their potential impacts. CASW is strongly in support of social enterprises and other initiatives and models that return benefits, and surpluses, to community. On the other hand, CASW is deeply concerned about Social Impact Bonds and other tools that would allow private interests to profit off of vulnerable populations, or compromise service delivery due to profit incentives.

Addressing Home Care:

CASW supports the Canadian Home Care Association's Harmonized Principles for Home Care, which emphasize:

- Family- and Client-Centred Care
- Equitable and consistent access to appropriate care
- Accountable Care - A shared vision and clear strategy for managing, delivering and reporting on client, provider and system outcomes
- Evidence-Informed Care - Care is informed by clinical expertise, patient values and best available research evidence

¹ Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada <https://ccaac.ca/2016/06/22/what-we-want-in-an-early-learning-and-child-care-framework-for-canada/>

- Integrated Care - Coordinated planning, delivery and alignment across multiple health and social care providers
- Sustainable Care - Provision of care that improves the client experience and achieves health and system outcomes in a cost effective manner.

Any future home care strategy in home care should adhere to these principles.²

Affordable Housing:

CASW supports the CHRA's asks to continue and increase direct supportive housing investments, noting that the 2016 federal Budget introduced targeted funding programs to increase affordable housing for seniors and shelters for victims of violence. CASW recommends that the federal government continue these programs beyond their two year mandate, and extend the program to include other forms of supportive housing such as housing targeted at seniors, LGBTQ*, veterans housing, and transitional housing for previously incarcerated individuals. Funding for these targeted supportive housing programs should be set at a minimum funding level of \$150 million per year. Ideally, these funds would flow through a social policy framework established by the Social Care Act.

Make Reconciliation a Priority:

CASW appreciates the promises to enact Jordan's Principle and put an end to the unequal funding child welfare services on reserve. However, CASW shares the First Nations Family and Caring Society's concerns that, because over half of the dollars earmarked for children on reserve will not be spent until the final year of this government's mandate, many of those currently in need will be ignored. CASW urges this government to take immediate action to bring equity of services to all Canadians on and off reserve.

Welcoming Refugees:

CASW has been an outspoken advocate for refugees' rights in Canada for many years, denouncing the previous administration's decision to allow the provinces and territories to impose a minimum residency requirement on refugees to access social assistance. We urge this government to reverse this change immediately.

CASW looks forward to working with this government toward a more compassionate, cost-effective, and innovative Canada.

To learn more about CASW, visit www.casw-acts.ca.

²Canadian Home Care Association, <http://www.cdnhomecare.ca/content.php?doc=259>