

Standing Committee on Finance (FINA)

Pre-budget consultations 2012

Weight Watchers Canada Ltd.

Responses

1. Economic Recovery and Growth

Given the current climate of federal and global fiscal restraint, what specific federal measures do you feel are needed for a sustained economic recovery and enhanced economic growth in Canada?

2. Job Creation

As Canadian companies face pressures resulting from such factors as uncertainty about the U.S. economic recovery, a sovereign debt crisis in Europe, and competition from a number of developed and developing countries, what specific federal actions do you believe should be taken to promote job creation in Canada, including that which occurs as a result of enhanced internal and international trade?

3. Demographic Change

What specific federal measures do you think should be implemented to help the country address the consequences of, and challenges associated with, the aging of the Canadian population and of skills shortages?

4. Productivity

With labour market challenges arising in part as a result of the aging of Canada's population and an ongoing focus on the actions needed for competitiveness, what specific federal initiatives are needed in order to increase productivity in Canada?

As Canada's population continues to age, it is anticipated that the government will need to shift funding to programs addressing the retirement age bracket, such as health care. Now, more than ever, it is imperative for the government to make every health care dollar they spend as efficient as possible. By decreasing Canada's childhood and adult obesity rates, the government could improve the efficiency of its health care spending. The rate of obesity in Canada is rising and increasingly becoming a burden on Canadian health care costs, threatening to swamp the affordability and viability of our cherished universal, publicly funded health care system. Recent economic studies have estimated that Canada spends \$7.1 billion annually on health care costs treating obesity and chronic diseases associated with it. A Federal initiative to combat obesity would reduce these direct costs to Canada's health care system, while also improving the efficiency of our labour force by improving the health of workers. At the same time it would reduce the indirect costs of obesity including unemployment, disability or other social costs to government, health care and efficiency costs to employers. Costs to employers include increased health care benefit costs and decreased work force productivity, as obese adults are more likely to be absent from work and have higher average disability or work injury days than their healthy

weight counterparts. While the Canadian labour market is preparing for the retirement of a large segment of its aging workforce, it needs to ensure the health and productivity of the remaining labour force. A strong, healthy workforce, with an active lifestyle will help keep Canada's labour market productive and competitive, while limiting the strain on the health care budget. The federal government should extend the proposed Adult Fitness Tax Credit to also include a healthy eating and behaviour modification component, creating the "Healthy Eating and Fitness Tax Credit". This initiative would be a long term preventative strategy, focusing on a balance of physical activity and healthy eating education. Exercise and physical activity must accompany healthier eating and learning strategies to help Canadians achieve and sustain a healthy weight; these go hand in hand. Such an initiative would motivate and incentivize behaviour change towards healthy eating, physical activity, long term weight loss and maintaining healthy weight. Furthermore, it is important to note that healthy parents are more likely to provide healthy habits and environments to their children, thus reducing rates of both adult and child obesity. Lowering these rates would ultimately ease the burden, caused by obesity, on the Canadian health care system with both an immediate and a long term impact.

5. Other Challenges

With some Canadian individuals, businesses and communities facing particular challenges at this time, in your view, who is facing the most challenges, what are the challenges that are being faced and what specific federal actions are needed to address these challenges?