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Chair: Mrs. Karen Vecchio



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• (1205)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number four of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women. To begin, I would like to thank all of the members for being here today. To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules to follow.

Occupational health and safety staff have requested that we limit our movement in the room and wear masks unless seated. Anyone who has their mask on right now is able to take their mask off if they wish. It's a little warm.

Floor markings indicate the path of travel around the table counter-clockwise. Individuals should respect physical distancing and remain two metres from one another, particularly when unmasked. I know for our committee that's very hard because we actually really do care about one another. Try to stay away from one another today.

Seats and microphones have been placed in a manner that respects physical distancing. Therefore, I'm asking that they remain in the same location throughout this meeting.

To minimize health risks, you will note that personnel attending today have been limited. Staff have received a phone number and they can listen in on the proceedings in real time. You will note that no paper documents have been distributed. All documents have been distributed electronically to members. Should you require a copy of a document, please advise the clerk of the committee by emailing her at fewo@parl.gc.ca.

Today we're going to begin on the motion from Jag Sahota to begin a study today on the effects of COVID-19 on women.

I'm going to pass this over to Jag to read her motion.

Ms. Jag Sahota (Calgary Skyview, CPC): The motion reads as follows:

That the committee commence a study of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women on Tuesday, July 7, 2020, for a total of six hours to begin an examination of: a) how the COVID-19 pandemic has uniquely impacted women; (b) what supports women need in preparation for a potential second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic; and, (c) to consider the specific challenges that women in Canada are facing, namely: (i) women's physical safety and security as it relates to evident increases in domestic violence, human trafficking, and overarching health-related concerns for vulnerable demographics, such as seniors; (ii) women's economic stability as it relates to the closure of workplaces across the country, reduced family income, and the inability for many women-owned and operated small businesses to conduct business as usual; and (iii) social pressures or obstacles due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including caregiving for

children, elderly parents; or other family members; and that as a part of the study, the Minister of Women and Gender Equality and the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, as well as other witnesses appear before the committee on July 7, 2020 to discuss the government's response to COVID-19 and how it relates to women.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Jag.

Is there any discussion from that motion? Seeing no discussion, do we all agree with this motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: That's unanimous. Thank you very much.

Beginning at 12:30, the committee will commence a study of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women for a total of six hours. We will hear from the ministers tomorrow from 10:30 a.m. till 12 p.m. Following the study, a report will be produced for the consideration of the committee. If the committee agrees, we will quickly discuss drafting instructions with the analysts before we adopt the study budget.

Is it agreed to move in camera to have this discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Fantastic. We will now move in camera. Thank you.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

• (1205) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1235)

[*Public proceedings resume*]

The Chair: I'd like to reconvene our meeting. Good morning to everyone.

Welcome to the study of the impacts of COVID-19 on women. Today we're meeting until 6 p.m. to receive the testimony on this important topic.

We'll begin with opening statements of 10 minutes from the witnesses, followed by the rounds of questions. During the questioning of witnesses, there will be six minutes for the first questioner of each party, as follows: round one, Conservative Party, Liberal Party, Bloc Québécois and New Democratic Party. For the second round, we'll continue to work together on those.

I'll ask the members to raise their hands to ask any questions, if we're not able to get everything circulated appropriately.

We're going to start with our first panel and I am very honoured to welcome Megan Walker, the executive director of the London Abused Women's Centre, as well as Marcie Hawranik, founder and president of Canadian Equality Consulting.

We'll start off with Marcie.

Marcie, you have the floor for 10 minutes.

Ms. Marcie Hawranik (Founder and President, Canadian Equality Consulting): Thank you. I'd like to first thank you for the invitation and the opportunity to testify before you today regarding the impact of COVID-19 on women or, as I like to reframe it, the intersectional gender impact of COVID-19.

To start, I'm sure we all agree that we live in a country that isn't equal and where gender inequality persists. You can see this to be true by looking at the many barriers that women and other marginalized or under-represented populations in the workplace experience, which I see every day in my work. You can also see gender inequality in the lack of women in leadership and in domestic violence rates in this country, by examining the ingrained biases and stereotypes that we all have and that we've all learned, and by looking at gendered sectors and the value or worth that society places on them.

For instance, sectors heavily dominated by men are given greater value than those by women, and sectors dominated by women tend to still have male leadership. Also, there is the persistent gender wage gap. You can pretty much examine any sector in Canada and find evidence of gender inequality, and this was our reality pre-COVID-19.

We were also starting an economic slump pre-COVID-19, especially in Alberta where I'm based. As you typically see in economic downturns, violence against women increases, caregiving responsibilities to women increase, and many of those other gender inequality indicators skyrocket.

Now, once COVID-19 hit, it accelerated and exacerbated all of these inequalities. Then employment dropped related to social distancing measures, creating a large impact on sectors with high female employment shares. The virus itself doesn't discriminate based on gender or sex, but its systems and sectors that we have created and designed are discriminatory. COVID-19 is the flashlight illuminating all of the cracks of inequality in our system.

The workers who are most affected by COVID-19, those who we rely on to keep us safe and informed are, by the very nature of their jobs, at most risk of contracting COVID-19, and they are predominantly women. Our health care sector is dominated by women in Canada. Nurses are 92% women, lab techs are 80% women, respiratory therapists, who are very important during COVID-19, are 75% women, and home care workers and personal support workers are 90% women. These workers at the front line of fighting COVID-19 are all predominantly women, and this extends beyond the health care sector to other jobs on the front line of COVID-19. Our grocery store workers are 84% women, food service industry workers are 72% women, and janitorial staff are 71% women.

When we look at the non-profit sector that includes food banks, shelters, women's shelters, homelessness supports and support for people living with disabilities, that sector is 75% women. That sector alone employs over two million Canadians but also relies heavily on a volunteer workforce of over 13 million people with the majority of those, which is incredibly important, being unpaid labour that helps support our most vulnerable during COVID-19 and, again, they are predominantly women. This sector in particular has also been crippled by a lack of financial relief and by having to delay or cancel fundraising activities.

Then, when we look at the health workers in non-profit sectors that are predominantly women, they also require PPE to do their work and stay safe. We've seen a drastic shortage in PPE that is designed to fit women's bodies. We know that the majority of PPE, even though it is deemed unisex, was designed with only average male bodies in mind, so we are unable to adequately protect these women working on the front line.

The education system is dominated by a female workforce. Teachers are 77% women, and TAs and EAs are 96% women. They have all been drastically affected by COVID-19. When we look at the closing of schools, this results in predominantly women having to home-school their children, having to become their own day cares or care for elderly parents, neighbours or co-workers while meticulously cleaning and sanitizing their homes now in addition to the usual grocery shopping, organizing and laundry, and this is on top of working their usual day job. We know this because 75% of women caregivers in Canada are also employed full-time. We know that women are more likely to work over 20 plus hours a week than men as a caregiver and twice as likely to provide personal care. These stats come pre-COVID-19.

• (1240)

When we apply an intersectional lens, we also learn that racialized women have more caregiving responsibilities than white women. Alternatively, as you know, COVID-19 has also resulted in women having to completely drop out of the workforce due to these heavy caregiving and schooling responsibilities. A study was recently conducted to verify this and found that the majority of women who were seriously considering quitting their jobs during this time due to this caregiving were single mothers, then racialized women, followed by Asian women and then white women.

We also know that in March alone labour data revealed that women accounted for two-thirds of job losses despite making up less than half of the workforce to begin with. Those who didn't lose their jobs lost 50% more work hours than men. Also in March, women between the ages of 25 and 54 years—that core working group—lost more than twice the jobs than men in that same age group. Nearly half of this decrease was among women working in part-time and often low-paying jobs in the service or care industries.

In other cases, it's been reported that women are choosing to exit the workforce. Between February and March, the number of core-age women who were not in the Canadian labour market grew substantially, by over 10%, but this isn't a choice to leave the workforce. It is a need, because, for example, in heterosexual relationships, women are typically paid less than their male partners and are expected to be more responsible for caregiving, and now someone has to do it and look after children and school them, because they're all at home together. The CERB program may help these women in the short term, but this unfortunately will also have longer-term negative effects on their career and future earning power. That needs to be considered.

The pandemic has also resulted in heightened domestic violence. Shelters, support organizations like the YWCA and organizations that provide informal support to survivors, like Sagesse in Calgary, as well as policing agencies, have all reported heightened domestic violence rates. Several of them mentioned that the rates were lower at the beginning of the pandemic due to strict social isolation when women were trapped at home with their abusers, as an example, and then, once restrictions started to loosen, the rates just skyrocketed.

We also know that women are more likely to experience poverty and have lower incomes. Women work two-thirds of minimum-wage jobs, putting them increased risk of unemployment and a greater risk of poverty.

All of these impacts that have been documented thus far contribute to greater gender inequality in Canada. In order to mitigate these disproportionate impacts and to prepare for a second wave of COVID-19, we need to ensure that all of our decisions are made with an intersectional gender lens to ensure we're not repeating these patterns of inequality and discrimination and that we can begin to make incremental and lasting change for the betterment of everyone.

I'm an advocate of gender-based analysis plus, or GBA+, and it's incredibly important to ensure that this lens is being applied to all COVID-19 response, management and prevention decision-making. Now is the time to double down on GBA+. A good GBA+ analysis doesn't examine just sex and gender but also includes race, ethnicity, culture, language, ability, age, sexual orientation and other factors such as geographic location. The government's GBA+ informed program would then be more effective and tailored to specific regions in Canada to remove barriers that specific populations may experience.

The Canadian Human Rights Commission, the G7 Gender Equality Advisory Council and the United Nations, along with a multitude of gender equality stakeholders across Canada and the

world, have been advocating for countries to take a feminist approach to COVID-19. If we don't double down and ensure that an intersectional feminist lens like GBA+ is effectively applied to all of our decisions and interventions, we will fail Canadians, and women will continue to bear the brunt of the pandemic.

• (1245)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Marcie.

Now we're going to move over to Megan Walker, the director at the London Abused Women's Centre.

Megan, you have the floor for 10 minutes.

Ms. Megan Walker (Executive Director, London Abused Women's Centre): Thank you so much, Madam Chair. Good afternoon to you and the members of the committee.

The London Abused Women's Centre is a non-crisis, non-residential feminist agency that provides women and girls over the age of 12 who are victims of male violence with immediate access to long-term, woman-centred, trauma-informed service. This includes women and girls who are abused in their intimate partnerships; are trafficked or sexually exploited into the commercial sex trade, including pornography; are sexually assaulted by strangers or acquaintances or via date; and/or are subjected to sexual harassment and torture.

LAWC also provides support and counselling to family members of women and girls who have been trafficked or sexually exploited, who are missing or who have disappeared. Many parents have travelled from cities across this country to London, Ontario, to meet with us at LAWC to help us find their daughters. Without LAWC's support, more than 200 family members would continue every single day to check online ads to see if their daughters were still being advertised to provide violent sexual services to men. They do this because they need to know whether their daughters are alive or dead. During the 2019-20 fiscal year, LAWC provided service to 8,100 women and girls, a 107% increase over previous years.

COVID has significantly impacted the lives of women, girls and all children. Women have been forced to isolate in their homes with their abusers. Imagine, just for one moment, how your lives would be impacted if you were forced to remain in your home while knowing that you would be repeatedly assaulted, raped, tortured, debased and maybe even killed. Now imagine your young children being forced to witness or be exposed daily to the violence their mother is facing. Some of these children may be harmed as they attempt to help their mothers. Others may be murdered along with their mothers. Older children will sometimes gather the younger siblings and take them to their bedroom, where they will pull dresser drawers or chests in front of their bedroom doors to keep their dad away.

During COVID, many agencies, including LAWC, had to close their physical space and work from home, providing online groups and phone counselling. Women trapped in their homes who needed help couldn't call for phone counselling. They couldn't call for the police. They couldn't run to a friend's home. Leaving their abuser under ideal circumstances is very, very difficult. During COVID, it was almost impossible. If they themselves were able to find a way to leave, they wouldn't do so if it meant leaving their children behind. Most women in these situations live under constant threat of being killed or having their children killed. If the police do arrive, thanks to the wonderful alertness and intervention of a neighbour who decides to take action, where will she take those children? The shelters are full. There is no place for women and children to go.

During COVID, we did connect with the London Police Service because we identified that having no place to go was a huge gap. Police need to have a place where they can take women and children immediately, so the London Abused Women's Centre, in collaboration with the London Police Service, responded by developing a protocol whereby LAWC secured safe hotel rooms so that police could take women and their children immediately to a hotel. LAWC negotiated with the hotel so that police could just drop in there with women day or night, at any time, and LAWC would respond any time by stepping in to provide food cards, clothing, diapers and any other identified needs. We provided counselling and safety planning immediately, and we helped women get to shelters as spaces became open. We helped them find long-term housing.

This was a huge upfront cost to the London Abused Women's Centre, but we were later supported by the United Way and recently by WAGE through the Canadian Women's Foundation to cover those costs. It certainly was not a perfect solution, but it provided hope when sometimes it was hope that was missing.

Aside from the last two weeks of April and the first two weeks of May, following the femicide in Nova Scotia when LAWC service demands increased by almost 50%, our overall service demands during COVID decreased by 18%, as did the London Police Service's. This was all attributed to the nine weeks when we worked from home. Our physical office was closed to walk-in and drop-in clients and we were not able to provide services to women and girls in youth or adult detention services. Phone and Zoom groups were simply not accessible to women at home with their abusers. COVID kept women hostage in their homes with their abusers. How could women possibly reach out for service when they couldn't even go to the bathroom without asking for permission to do so?

However, LAWC's anti-trafficking program saw a 37% increase in service requests during COVID, notwithstanding the federal government's decision to discontinue to fund our trafficking program in the very middle of COVID. The London community sustained us by providing funding to keep our program open until July 31. Had our community not provided funding to sustain that program temporarily, 650 trafficked and sexually exploited women and girls to whom we have provided long-term service would have had no place to go except back to their traffickers, where they may have ended up in the morgue.

That of course does not bode well for a government that prides itself as being feminist. The fact that the Trudeau government

thought it was okay to eliminate funding to all anti-trafficking programs across Canada in the midst of a deadly pandemic is deeply concerning about this government's commitment to women and girls. We find it devastating and appalling.

Trafficking and sexual exploitation did not suddenly disappear or slow down during COVID. It increased. Men who believe they have a right to pay to rape women and girls increased their demand for underage and young women and girls. Sex purchasers fuelled the demand for young girls and women, and it is traffickers who are always at the ready to make sure they have the supply needed to meet this increased demand. COVID was no exception. Traffickers continue to traffic vulnerable young women and underage women from city to city and from hotel to hotel along the 400-series highways.

There is of course no social distancing and no PPE in the sex trade. While those precautions are mandated for health care practitioners exposed to bodily fluids, that would be contrary to the very purpose of the sex industry, which is to allow men unfettered access to rape women and girls.

● (1255)

Men pay more for unprotected sex, and they pay more for the money shot where they can ejaculate on a woman's face. Not only have I not heard any public health official or politician address this, we've heard that too many of them believe that the role of women is to satisfy men, their sexual fetishes and fantasies.

With schools closed, with children at home and parents working from home, we saw an increase in online luring of children. Girls were pressured to strip and masturbate for traffickers. They were young and naive and thought the boy or man online was interested in them. They never expected to be videotaped in various stages of nudity and masturbation.

The videos were uploaded to foreign sites like Pornhub that is operated by MindGeek in Montreal. Horrified and devastated parents called LAWC for help in removing these videos. We have been attempting to do so, working very hard, but the reality is that, once these videos are up, they are easily downloaded and, even when removed from porn sites, they remain forever embedded in somebody's download file.

It's important for you to know that the funding the Trudeau government eliminated for LAWC's anti-trafficking program on behalf.... We served on behalf of the government, and it was eliminated. It cost only \$164,000 per year.

The Chair: We only have a few seconds left, Megan.

Ms. Megan Walker: Okay, thanks.

I just want to say that we are living in extraordinarily difficult times for women and for girls. Governments make a lot of promises to vulnerable and marginalized populations, but their actions move at a snail's pace, if at all.

We're asking that the government take its blinders off and invest in all Canadians, not just those with a voice and the means to make campaign donations.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going to start our round of questions. I'm going to pass the floor over to Raquel.

Raquel, you have six minutes.

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to Ms. Walker and Ms. Hawranik for being here today. I greatly appreciated your testimonies.

I'm a member of Parliament from Manitoba, and we know that the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted women, as you have both outlined, and in Manitoba we're facing a quite dire situation.

Ms. Hawranik, as you mentioned, before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, we were facing some of the highest rates of domestic violence against women in the country. We have over 12,000 children, from my last count, in child and family services, which is the most per capita in the world, and for those reasons and many others, I've been advocating to the wage officials and the minister that we get an office in Manitoba, which we don't currently have, and there have been a number of alarming things that have popped up lately in the media.

We had a report from Shared Health Manitoba that there were over 90 cases reported of sexual assault involving the date-rape drug in 2018, and of course we know that very few sexual assault cases are reported.

This is clearly a rampant issue in Manitoba, and I just want to say that I really appreciate the work you're both doing. We take this very seriously as members of Parliament.

I want to speak to you first, Ms. Hawranik, about the GBA+ work that you do. I want to get your take on some of the programs the government has announced over the last number of months. We know it acted very quickly to bring forward these programs. My concern is that we're not aware of any GBA+ that was put on some of these programs, and I was wondering if you could comment on the CECRA program, the commercial emergency rental assist program for commercial properties. I may have got the acronym wrong there, but it's the program where the government will pay 50%, the

tenant 25%, and then the landlord would take a 25% cut specifically.

We're seeing very little uptake of this program, and anecdotally I'm hearing that women entrepreneurs are having a much more difficult time getting this program. I'm wondering if you've had any experience with that and if you could elaborate on what a GBA+ may have shown on this program, had it been done.

• (1300)

Ms. Marcie Hawranik: Sure.

Thank you for sharing those stats about Manitoba. It's pretty similar out in Alberta as well.

In terms of the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program, I know that and I've been in communication with a lot of different women's support organizations, particularly organizations that work to advance female entrepreneurship in Canada. I've seen and heard very similar things from female entrepreneurs across the country. I've heard from ones in Manitoba and Alberta and even in downtown Toronto.

What we know is that female entrepreneurs experience many unique barriers. One of them is being able to access capital and financing. Women entrepreneurs already face an uphill battle in growing and scaling their businesses and in having the necessary capital and income to ride out pandemics like COVID-19. Added to the situation, what I've heard from female entrepreneurs across the country is that the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program—on which I haven't yet seen quantitative data, and I would encourage the government to share that if they have it—has failed them in a way.

For example, there's an entrepreneur in downtown Toronto named Caleigh. She's an incredible entrepreneur who owns an amazing business that is a large-scale fitness company but that also incorporates a coffee shop and co-working spaces for other female entrepreneurs. She almost had to close her doors for good. The only thing that prevented her from having to shut down for good was that the public health restrictions had started to loosen. She was able to slowly reopen and re-engage, but definitely that program itself didn't help.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Ms. Hawranik.

I'll go to Ms. Walker now.

I have one question regarding some of the funding the government announced, some \$75 million of targeted funding, much of it related to human sex trafficking. I know that, Ms. Walker, your organization, the London Abused Women's Centre, did not receive any of that funding in this round. I do know that PACE in Vancouver, an organization that takes an approach that is different from that of your organization, to, I suppose, legitimize sex work rather than combatting human sex trafficking, which I know is the London Abused Women's Centre's approach....

I just want to get your two cents' worth on how you feel about this government's approach to sex work versus human trafficking and the priorities they are thereby putting forward.

Ms. Megan Walker: We would never call it sex work because we don't believe exploitation of women and girls is actually work. What is really upsetting is that the Government of Canada did not advise any of the organizations that were previously funded through MAPI that they would not be receiving the funding. In fact, it took us calling repeatedly, and it was not until after our funding period ended that we were advised there would be no funding.

The government has now taken an approach in which instead of allocating funding equally across this country as it did at one time, it has issued a targeted proposal call to nine organizations whereby each of them can apply for up to \$750,000 per year for four years. Three of them will be chosen.

When you compare \$750,000 a year for four years for three organizations to \$164,000—the cost of the work the London Abused Women's Centre, an internationally recognized organization, has done nationally—none of this makes sense.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Ms. Walker.

Thank you, Ms. Hawranik, as well. I appreciate the comments from both of you.

• (1305)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Gudie.

Ms. Gudie Hutchings (Long Range Mountains, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Ladies, thank you both for being here today in these unprecedented times. Most importantly, thank you for the work you do helping Canadians, helping women and young girls and everyone. You're doing phenomenal work.

Ms. Walker, I want to give you a shout-out. I believe it was early days in the pandemic that you realized and brought to attention the fact that the human trafficking hotline had ceased to work. Thank you for bringing that to the government's attention. It was interesting that you reached out on one day and the next day, thankfully, the Minister of Public Safety had it up and relaunched. Since the relaunch, it's received more than 340 contacts. So I thank you for that. If it wasn't for that, those ladies and friends would have slipped through the cracks again.

Ms. Hawranik, I really loved what you said, that COVID is the "flashlight". We all know that a lot of these issues have been on the go for so long, and COVID did put the flashlight on them. What are we doing, and what can we do better, to make sure that when the second wave comes, we've addressed it, and that, more importantly, we've made changes for the organizations and these women and children and young boys in the future going forward?

I have just a couple of little points I want to bring up with you. Number one is that with regard to the funding that was announced in 2015, it was known that it was going to expire in 2020. We recognize the importance of human trafficking. That's why the human trafficking strategy will be launching at the end of this month, I believe. That will be great. We know that we're investing \$75 million

across the government, with \$10 million for WAGE; applications from the WAGE funding for that will open shortly.

We know that there's an urgency of action. That's why we're rolling out some things now. We know that we need to address gender-based violence in all its forms. That's why we're supporting the national action plan with more than \$200 million in additional investment. We know that women are at the core of our first-ever national housing strategy. It's our 10-year, \$55-billion plan to give more Canadians a place to call home. Of those investments, 30% has to go to projects that benefit women and girls.

On top of that, we've promised to create at least 7,000 shelter spaces by 2027. We hit that number long before the pandemic of COVID-19 hit. However, since the pandemic began, we've doubled down on funding for vulnerable women and their families. One of our first announcements was \$50 million for this group, including \$30 million for shelters and sexual assault centres; \$10 million for indigenous shelters through Indigenous Services Canada; and a \$10-million contingency fund for groups, like the London Abused Women's Centre, to provide the essential non-shelter services to help so many women.

Through Women's Shelters Canada, we've provided more than \$20 million to more than 420 women's shelters across Canada from coast to coast to coast. Through the Canadian Women's Foundation, we've provided more than \$2 million to more than 90 sexual assault centres. We've worked with the Province of Quebec to deliver funding there as well. We've provided that province with \$6.46 million. According to the most recent report, that has gone to over 120 women's shelters and 50 sexual assault centres in the province of Quebec. As we speak, the contingency fund is flowing out the door via the Canadian Women's Foundation.

We don't know exactly how many organizations have received money from that so far, but we do and can confirm that one of the recipients was yours, Ms. Walker, the London Abused Women's Centre.

To touch on child care for a minute, I just want to make sure... Again, from all the conversations, in terms of our women being ready and able to go back to work, it's the child care component that is so important. We proudly signed the first-ever multilateral agreement with the provinces and territories on early learning and child care, because we understand that investing in our children means investing in our future. We have provided \$7.5 billion, between 2017 and 2028, to give the children the best possible start in life. Since 2017 we've created more than 40,000 child care spots, providing kids who need it the most with quality, affordable and culturally appropriate child care. We have put a lot of money in the pockets of nine out of 10 families with the Canada child benefit. We're currently in the process of renewing each of the bilateral agreements with the provinces and territorial partners. We hope to announce those agreements soon. We all know that child care is basically the responsibility of the province, as many segments are, but we're jumping in to help out there.

We know that there's still quite a lot more to do. It's important to recognize how far we've come, but between 2015 and 2019, our government increased funding to women's and gender equality-seeking organizations from less than \$20 million under the last year, in 2014, of the Harper government, to more than \$65 million a year since then.

• (1310)

This year, through the Department of Women and Gender Equality, WAGE, a department that didn't exist before but was instead a subsection of another department, our government has approved total funding of over \$110 million. That's more than the combined total funding in the last five years of the Conservative government, so it's wonderful that this has come to the forefront. Thanks to our investments, we are providing essential funding to more than 1,200 organizations.

Ms. Hawranik, I'd be curious to hear from you, as we talk about the COVID-19 issue, about your experiences in Alberta when you hit the downturn in the oil and gas industry, which my province is going through now too. What programs did you come up with that really helped? How can we learn from what you did in Alberta and from your experiences there? What can we learn and glean from that to take forward in what we're doing in COVID now and what we have to do coming up in the second wave of COVID?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Sonia Sidhu): I'm sorry. The time is over. You have just 10 seconds. Quickly, please.

Ms. Gudie Hutchings: I thought I had seven minutes. I'm sorry.

Ms. Marcie Hawranik: We're still in the thick of it in Alberta and in the emergency response phase. I think it might be too soon to share anything we did that's really good and that could be replicated across the country, because Albertans are still really suffering, especially the women, but I do have some more general recommendations that I think would be applicable across the country, and that's to ensure that collection of diversity- and gender-disaggregated data in everything.

I've communicated with emergency management agencies across the country. What they've all shared with me is that they are not applying a GBA+ lens and they are not putting this intersectional lens on their work, because they feel that they're in an emergency and it

is the first thing that gets left out, which I think is unacceptable. I'd love for the federal government to take leadership and push or advocate for that, especially since GBA+ should not be slowing down their work or their processes at all. It's been around since 1995. It was reinvigorated—thank you very much—in 2016. Over the last few years, it should already have been seamlessly integrated into the way the government does business.

I commend you for your investments in child care and, as well, I think a really targeted approach to fund emergency, accessible and flexible child care for everyone would be amazing, and also, even establishing permanent top-ups for professionals who work with people with disabilities, the elderly or those experiencing domestic violence and homelessness.

I also think that anything we can do to disrupt and affect the social norms that perpetuate inequality and advance gender equality, which could be some sort of campaign to disrupt these biases and social norms to prevent the—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Sonia Sidhu): Thank you, Ms. Hawranik.

The next speaker will be from the Bloc.

Ms. Megan Walker: Excuse me, Madam Chair. Your former speaker, Ms. Hutchings, mentioned the London Abused Women's Centre twice. I just want to say that this opportunity for us to appear is important so that you can learn what's going on in the community.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Sonia Sidhu): Ms. Walker, you can answer in the next question.

Now the next turn goes to the Bloc.

Go ahead.

Ms. Megan Walker: I'm just concerned about political speeches on the floor when we are here to actually be consulted with.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Sonia Sidhu): Andréanne, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Thank you very much.

The testimony from both of you was very interesting. I hope I have time to speak to both witnesses, Ms. Walker and Ms. Hawranik.

Ms. Hawranik, your group seems very helpful. For example, you provide inclusion and gender lens training.

I will give you some examples of inappropriate measures introduced during the pandemic.

According to a female doctor I spoke to recently who runs a health clinic, many women in her community who work in jobs more often occupied by women, such as hairstyling or personal support in health care facilities, do not yet qualify for the emergency business account measure. These are often small businesses that do not need a business account and use a personal account. They are therefore not eligible for the \$40,000 loan. Earlier, we also talked about the rent payment loan.

These measures may not be tailored to women. What do you think?

Do you have any other quick clear examples of gender mainstreaming in policy measures in these times of crisis?

• (1315)

[*English*]

Ms. Marcie Hawranik: I'll build off it a little bit in terms of the CERB program too. It's partially good because it helps women earn some money while bearing the caregiving load. However, the CERB program isn't advancing or supporting gender equality, which is the goal of GBA+, and it makes it easier for families to burden women and makes it easier for women to exit the workforce. Post COVID-19 it will be really important to pay attention to this and to help women to re-enter the workforce and not face pay barriers or discrimination for taking this time off.

I've also heard things very similar to what you've mentioned about how the CERB is inaccessible to women-owned smaller businesses, as well.

I hope that helps.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: I also believe that education—raising awareness—is the most powerful tool for trying to eliminate major social issues like sexism, racism and all other forms of discrimination. You work on that with your group.

At training sessions or conferences you have organized, which women's public policy stereotype have you found hardest to break?

Is work-family balance still the cornerstone of women's participation in public, political and other spheres?

How can we work on the education issue?

[*English*]

Ms. Marcie Hawranik: Thank you.

I think maybe one of the hardest prejudices to fight in order to advance gender equality and advance women is that of the movement in Canada that believes that this isn't a problem or that gender equality exists or that is misinformed as to what gender equality really means and thinks that it means the same treatment, exactly the same. That's not what the movement is about. I think part of it is to provide that level of awareness and education on what the goal is and how it benefits everyone.

Also there are subtle biases that we all have, which are sometimes referred to as unconscious biases. We're seeing them being raised a lot with the Black Lives Matter movement in terms of racism. The same exist with sexism, and those are often subtle and

harder to detect. We do training that can help you become bias-aware, and there are specific processes similar to a GBA+ process that you can adopt and integrate seamlessly into your daily work in order to disrupt those biases.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: As we know, women also have to deal with a significant mental workload. In addition to the traditional role they have to play, they take on the whole invisible workload, that is, work done voluntarily that is not recognized widely enough. We must not forget all the responsibilities and social commitments at home. When they get involved, women sometimes feel they are neglecting their family. It is hard to change this perception.

How can we facilitate women's participation? What can the government do to help them?

[*English*]

Ms. Marcie Hawranik: Sure.

I think the government can play a role as a catalyst in achieving gender equality. I don't think government is necessarily the best vehicle for doing all of that change. The government has limited scope too.

I think the government can definitely lead by example. I like that there is a dedicated department, WAGE. Ensuring that they're adequately resourced is incredibly important. They're a very small department that's responsible for pushing out GBA+ to the entire federal government. As you can see, GBA+ isn't always being applied. That's a big problem that I think should be addressed too; they need more support and assistance.

Also, we look at regional differences across Canada and the status of women in each different province and territory and try to enact targeted solutions to support women there. One of the examples I mentioned, which I'd recommend, is also trying to disrupt those social norms and anti-equality biases through even public awareness campaigns and public education and by influencing people at a young age in early school curriculum as well.

• (1320)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Sonia Sidhu): Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Great.

Do I have another minute? May I ask one last question?

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Sonia Sidhu): Your time is over.

The next speaker will be Lindsay.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you very much to the witnesses for attending. Your testimony is extremely valuable, so thank you.

I'd like to focus my time on Ms. Walker. You were very passionate and very clear in terms of the impacts on our local community due to COVID and some of the choices that have been made. The level of rhetoric that we heard I would have expected tomorrow, but we heard it today. I'd like to sort through some of that.

Obviously, we know that in London human trafficking is a significant problem. Our proximity to the 401 and that major transportation route is a huge issue. You received funding before for the duration of the MAPI program, and now the gap that you're seeing in between the delivery of new programming through the public safety department is a huge gap.

I understand; I'm so grateful to the London community for coming to our community's aid to help stop this gap. However, could you talk a little bit about whether you are successful in receiving continued funding? I'd like to hear about what problems this will cause in terms of having to stop the funding. You're all right until the end of July, but to restart a program that won't, probably, receive that funding until much later.... What are the costs of restarting that program? What gaps will you see?

In addition to that, could you start to address this? I know there were some considerations that the funding you previously received versus the funding that you could potentially in the future receive, either through Public Safety or through WAGE funding, will be significantly less. What are you looking at in terms of that programming future with those gaps and with those smaller levels of funding in place?

Ms. Megan Walker: I first of all want to say that there are significant gaps. I really have to question the integrity of any government that pulls funding to help trafficked women and girls in the middle of the largest pandemic anybody has ever experienced on this planet at this point.

I want you to know that we are very lucky in London, Ontario. Londoners are appalled by what this government has done. In fact, we routinely and regularly receive phone calls from Londoners who are expressing their support for our program and what it does for our community and this country, and they are willing to donate their dollars to us directly instead of to the coffers of the Trudeau government.

I do want to say that there is another gap I'd like to mention here, which is that the London Abused Women's Centre has advocated strenuously since COVID started that some of the COVID funding announced each and every day go to women who are in prostitution, who are trafficked and exploited. They have no history of a job, so they do not qualify. We've proposed a number of solutions, and yet still this most vulnerable population has received no funding to allow them to exit. Again, I find that devastating.

As far as what we are going to do, the government has clearly turned its back on the women and girls we serve in London. It's betrayed those women and girls. We know London is a sex-trafficking hub because of its access to the 401, but also because of its proximity between Detroit, where prostitution is prohibited, and Toronto.

Our community is going to continue to come forward for us. In fact, we will not allow that program to close. Justin Trudeau may stand as a feminist, but he will not take down feminist organizations with his short-sighted decisions, just like the one he has just made. In the coming days we will be making a large announcement, supported by our community. I can assure every single one of the 650 trafficked women and girls who continue to access our service on a daily basis that they will not be left behind by London.

• (1325)

The Chair: Lindsay, you have about 20 seconds for a question and an answer.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: In terms of both organizations, I suppose, I've been trying to advocate for a return from short-term project funding to core, reliable, long-term sustainable funding. Really quickly, could you talk about the importance of that for both of your organizations?

The Chair: If you could—

Ms. Megan Walker: Yes. One very quick thing is that the government's proposal right now is to fund \$750,000 per year for four years to three organizations across Canada, with the commitment that they sustain that in the future. That is just unrealistic and will not happen.

The Chair: Okay.

Marcie, could you answer in about 10 to 15 seconds?

Ms. Marcie Hawranik: I did see the announcement that there's also \$350 million for the country's charity sector to help them, but again, this isn't for the long term, and what was actually recommended by the YWCA to be effective for that sector is \$8 billion. There's a big discrepancy there.

The Chair: We're finishing up our first round of questions with our first panel today. We've all had the opportunity to go through this.

From the bottom of my heart, I would really like to thank Marcie Hawranik, the founder and president of the Canadian Equality Network, and Megan Walker, executive director of the London Abused Women's Centre.

Thank you for joining us on this extremely important study.

We are going to be suspending for half an hour and then we'll be back. Thank you very much.

• (1325) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1400)

The Chair: I would like to reconvene this afternoon's meeting on our study on the impact of COVID-19 on women.

We're going to start our second panel today. We have three excellent people coming to this one. Ann Decter is the senior director of the Canadian Women's Foundation. Morna Ballantyne is the executive director of Child Care Now. H  l  ne Cornellier is the communications manager of the Association f  minine d'  ducation et d'ac-tion sociale.

You have 10 minutes each. I'm going to pass the floor over to Ann Decter.

You have the floor for 10 minutes.

Ms. Ann Decter (Director, Community Initiatives, Canadian Women's Foundation): Good afternoon. I'm Ann Decter from the Canadian Women's Foundation, Canada's only national public foundation for women and girls and one of the 10 largest foundations in the world. Through three decades, our granting work has focused on moving women out of poverty and violence and into safety and confidence.

Thank you for the invitation to appear today on this urgent question—urgent because women in Canada have been impacted by the pandemic to an extent that threatens to roll back equality gains. Women's safety, livelihoods and well-being have all been put at risk, most severely for women from communities that are marginalized by systemic discrimination. The pandemic has shone a penetrating light on gender-based violence, women's economic security, care work and the central economic role of child care.

Economic losses have fallen heavily on women, and most dramatically on women living on low incomes who experience intersecting inequalities based on race, disability, education, colonization and migration and immigration status. A historic downturn in women's employment, compounded by uncertainty over the capacity of our fragile child care sector to fully reopen, is a potential perfect storm for women's economic security. Women in diverse and marginalized communities can be expected to have the greatest difficulty in emerging from this crisis.

The scale of women's job losses is enormous. At the end of May, 1.5 million women had lost their jobs and another 1.2 million had lost the majority of their work hours, impacting more than one quarter of all women workers. The lowest wage earners have been hit the hardest. Fifty-eight per cent of women earning \$14 per hour or less were laid off or lost most of their work by April. Overall, women earning the lowest 10% of wages experienced job loss at 50 times the rate of the highest wage earners. This is the type of granular data revealed by the intersectional gender-based analysis that is needed to support decisions on next steps.

Mothers are experiencing disproportionate job loss. They account for 57% of parents who had lost their jobs or most of their hours by the end of May and for only 41% of employment gains. More than one quarter of mothers with children under 12 who were working in February were unemployed or working less than half-

time by April's end. Mothers parenting on their own were more likely to lose work than those in two-parent families.

Women are leaving the labour market and increasing their care responsibilities at home. The number of women in core working years outside the labour market increased 34% from February to the end of April. That includes women who stopped looking for work due to soaring unemployment or to take up care responsibilities at home. This leaves women's economic security under threat.

Access to child care underpins mothers' access to the workforce, and without government intervention child care will be scarcer and more expensive. One out of three child care centres have not confirmed that they will reopen. Physical distancing requirements are reducing spaces. Personal protective equipment and sanitization will raise costs, increasing parent fees and putting child care financially out of reach for more families. Parents of all genders need child care to work, but for women, who still shoulder a disproportionate share of family care work, it is essential. Emergency closure of child care centres and schools placed a triple burden on mothers doing full-time jobs from home and managing both children and household tasks.

Care work has been central to pandemic response. Our primary and long-term care systems are staffed largely by women. More than one in three women workers are in high-risk jobs with greater exposure to COVID-19. Women make up more than two thirds of those who clean and disinfect buildings and almost 90% of personal support workers. After two decades of austerity in health care and community services, the most poorly paid workers—a highly racialized, women-majority workforce—form the first line of defence against catastrophic illness and economic depression. Canada's care economy is fractured, and women, largely racialized, black, migrant and undocumented women, are bearing the brunt.

Government withdrawal opened the door to the proliferation of for-profit chains in care work, which reduced quality of care, staff levels, job benefits and protections, with negative consequences for care recipients, the gendered racialized workforce and Canada's pandemic response.

• (1405)

Care work in Canada also has an entrenched reliance on highly skilled but low-paid migrant care workers who now fill positions in private homes and in health care facilities, yet face increasingly restricted chances of securing permanent residency and rights protections. Pandemic impacts on migrant care workers include dismissal by employers now working from home or laid off, 24-7 lockdown in employers' private homes and loss of immigration status due to government processing delays.

Stay-at-home orders increase the risk of domestic violence and decrease women's abilities to leave abusive homes for the safety of shelters—highlighting the importance of the violence prevention sector—while placing additional strain on already taxed anti-violence services. Closure of physical spaces and the shift to remote services created unique access barriers to sexual assault centres.

In the best of times, gender-based violence services are underfunded and oversubscribed. Demand for access to women's shelters consistently exceeds capacity. Significant gaps persist in shelter services for women with disabilities, deaf women, women in rural and remote areas and women in need of culture-specific services. Four out of five women's shelters across the country are accessed by first nation, Métis or Inuit women, yet only one in five can frequently provide culturally appropriate programs, and 70% of Inuit communities do not have access to a shelter.

With the rise of “Me Too”, sexual assault centres experienced significant increases in calls without matching increases in funding. As the pandemic arrived, sexual assault survivors, some at high risk of suicide, were stuck on a waiting list for counselling across Canada. One sexual assault centre executive described transitioning to remote work: “We had to invest in a phone system, as ours was a donation from 1980. We didn't have funds for PPE for staff and volunteers accompanying women to hospitals, police and doctors. ... As much as I'm grateful for the 25k, I must be honest with you: It's not enough. ... We are running out of PPE, volunteers have begun to show signs of burnout, and we are averaging 60 to 80 crisis calls a day.”

As you're likely aware, the women's sector refers to non-profits and charities that provide women-specific services in order to advance women's equality through policy, advocacy and public engagement. That includes shelters for women, sexual assault centres and women's centres that provide a safety net to women and their families. These are essential to a healthy welfare state system and to achieving gender equality.

The pandemic lockdown exposed and exacerbated existing flaws in the women's sector funding model. The sector is funded partially and irregularly through an unpredictable combination of individual donations, corporate gifts and foundation and government grants. This is time-consuming and inefficient, requiring constant renewal and contact. Organizations constantly seek out, apply for and renew funding that is largely project-based and temporary. Reports from the women's sector indicate an impending future crisis.

Like the best of the pandemic emergency response from public health leaders, many of whom are women, recovery planning with women and gender equality in mind requires thorough analysis,

clear evidence-supported outcome targets, methodical approaches to implementation and responsible leadership with vision and heart.

Should broad emergency measures need to be reimposed for another indefinite period, the Canadian Women's Foundation recommends the following actions, with a reminder that an inclusive gender-based analysis with an intersectional lens is essential to the design of all government recovery investments, short or long term: With regard to women's economic security, reinstate the Canada emergency response benefit throughout any economic shutdown; reinstate the Canada emergency wage supplement with a simpler administrative mechanism throughout any economic shutdown; broaden access to employment insurance so all women who pay in can access benefits; work with the provinces and territories to implement 10 paid sick days, as announced; ensure funding is in place to safely reopen the child care sector at pre-pandemic service levels and to continue to expand it until universal access is achieved.

As for women and care work, work with the provinces and territories to ensure—

• (1410)

The Chair: Ann, you're right at 10 minutes now, so we'll give you about 15 more seconds just to wrap it up.

Ms. Ann Decter: —that in long-term-care facilities, staff work in a single facility in full-time jobs at a living wage with access to sick days, refusal of unsafe work and appropriate protective equipment, care and testing; grant all migrant workers currently in Canada permanent residency—

The Chair: Ann, hopefully we'll be able to get through there, but unfortunately we are short of time.

Ms. Ann Decter: No problem.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll now pass it over to Morna Ballantyne with Child Care Now.

Morna, you have the floor.

Ms. Morna Ballantyne (Executive Director, Child Care Now): Thank you very much, Madam Chair and members of the committee, for inviting me to testify this afternoon.

Child Care Now, also known as the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada, was founded in 1982 to act on behalf of organizations and individuals who want high-quality, affordable and inclusive early learning and child care to be available for all families and all children, regardless of where they live and regardless of their circumstances.

We commend the Standing Committee on the Status of Women for undertaking an examination of the impact of COVID-19 on women and for recognizing that such an examination would be incomplete without addressing the impact of COVID-19 on women's access to child care.

I appeared before your committee three years ago, when you were carrying out a study on the economic security of women. I and many other witnesses said then that women in Canada will not and cannot achieve economic security without full access to the paid labour force and properly paid work. This will not and cannot happen without a publicly funded and publicly managed child care system. It's taken a public health crisis to prove our argument yet again. Now, finally, the essential and multiple roles of child care are being recognized, including by our Prime Minister. COVID-19 also exposes the fragility of the provision of child care in Canada. However, what governments will do about it, if anything, remains to be seen.

Statistics Canada's labour force survey confirms the devastating impact of the pandemic on women's employment, and particularly on the employment of mothers with children under the age of 12. While the May jobs report shows some job recovery overall, women accounted for only 29% of that recovery. Getting women back into the paid labour force is critical to women's economic security, but increasing women's labour force participation is also crucial to a sustainable economic recovery for everyone. The construction of an accessible, affordable, quality and inclusive system of child care is essential if Canada is to forge a resilient and just future and also become the best possible place for children.

Child care in Canada was fragile before the pandemic hit, because it's market-based, it's fragmented, and it's seriously underfunded.

Parents in Canada are forced to purchase services from a child care market, some of which is regulated and much not, and some of which is not-for-profit and some a source of profit. It's a market that offers a confusing array of very scarce offerings, too many of which are of poor quality and almost all of which are unaffordable for most families. It contributes to and exacerbates economic and social inequity. Indigenous families, racialized families and low-income households are disproportionately shut out.

The child care market is also particularly bad at meeting the needs of children with disabilities, children whose parents work

non-standard or irregular hours and children who live in rural and remote communities.

This market approach works no better for child care providers. Almost all programs outside of Quebec rely primarily on parent-fee revenue to stay in operation. The predominantly female workforce earns low wages. Any raise in compensation translates into higher parent fees. Inadequate compensation has made the recruitment and retention of qualified early childhood educators a perpetually serious concern.

Leaving the provision of care to the market doesn't work for child care any better than it would work for health care, primary education or secondary education, or countless other areas where governments have intervened for the benefit of all Canadians and because it makes economic sense to do so.

COVID-19 exposed all the problems with market-based child care and the absence of a fully publicly funded and publicly managed child care system. When provinces and territories ordered child care programs to close during the emergency response phase of the pandemic, with limited services for essential workers, the sector was disrupted in a way that it was not disrupted for public education or other parts of the public sector. The level of disruption depended on the approach taken by each province and territorial government.

• (1415)

In places where necessary support was provided, the child care programs are in a much better position to reopen and respond to the needs of children and parents, but a survey of licensed child care centres in Canada carried out in May found that more than one-third of the centres across Canada are uncertain about reopening.

It's now time for major government intervention in early learning and child care. Child Care Now has proposed a federal strategy for doing just that. Of course we recognize that the reconstruction of child care cannot be left to the federal government alone. It's going to require the federal government to work with the provinces, territories and indigenous governments and communities, but the federal government must provide policy leadership, supported by its spending power, to respond to the immediate economic and social fallout of COVID-19 and to set the foundation for longer-term system-building.

Our strategy calls for a two-phased approach. In the first phase, we want the federal government to spend \$2.5 billion to support the safe and full recovery of regulated early learning and child care and to respond to the immediate care needs of school-age children. In the second phase, we propose that the federal government boost its child care spending to \$2 billion in 2021-22 and that this base be increased each year thereafter by \$2 billion.

These federal funds would be used to move Canada towards a fully publicly funded system in partnership with the provinces, territories and indigenous governments. Twenty per cent of this funding should be earmarked to support the indigenous early learning and child care framework. The federal government, under our plan, would require the provinces and territories to use the federal funds to achieve measurable improvement in accessibility, affordability, quality and inclusiveness. Additionally, the federal government would establish and fund a federal early learning and child care secretariat to lead and coordinate the federal government's work. Finally, the government would propose legislation that enshrines Canada's commitment to give all children the right to high-quality early learning and child care.

Let me elaborate very briefly on what we want to see in the first phase, which would start now and continue to the end of the current fiscal year.

The federal government has promised \$14 billion in new federal transfers to the provinces and territories, to be rolled out over the remaining months of 2020. These transfers are to help finance the safe restart of the economy. What we propose is that the federal government allocate \$2.5 billion of these promised transfers for spending on child care. Agreements with each province and territory would ensure that the federal government funds would be used for, one, a safe restart of child care programs; two, the restoration and expansion of the number of licensed child care spaces that existed prior to the pandemic; and three, the establishment and operation of child care programs for school-age children up to age 12 through the summer months and into the fall and winter. Parents need access to quality programs before and after school hours and/or during regular school hours if schooling is not available because of public health concerns.

Additionally, we want the federal funds to be used to improve the wages of those who work in early learning and child care to ensure the return and retention of qualified staff to the sector.

The federal secretariat that has been mandated by the Prime Minister of Canada would be established during this first phase. Its mandate would be to advise on, monitor and evaluate phase 1 implementation and to plan for phase 2, including the development of comprehensive workforce and expansion strategies.

Again, thanks for inviting me today. I invite you to read the full text of our strategy, which is posted on our website at timeforchild-care.ca.

Of course, I am happy to answer any questions you have.

● (1420)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm now going to pass the floor over to H el ene Cornellier, the communications manager for Association f eminine d' ducation et d'action sociale.

You have the floor for 10 minutes. Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mrs. H el ene Cornellier (Coordinator of Action Plan and Communications, Association f eminine d' ducation et d'action sociale): Good afternoon.

Thank you for the invitation to today's hearings.

The question your study seeks to answer is directly tied to one of the fundamental challenges behind achieving equality among Canadians: recognizing and valuing invisible work. The Association f eminine d' ducation et d'action sociale, or AFEAS for short, is approaching today's consultation from that particular perspective.

Already in 1968, during the Bird commission hearings, AFEAS stressed the importance of recognizing unpaid work by women in the family unit and society. It argued that this work, which is seen as women's social role, impoverishes women their entire lives. The situation continues today, as the COVID-19 pandemic has shown.

No one, it seems, anticipated a health crisis of this magnitude. From the outset, it brought out glaring inequalities between women and men, especially for racialized and immigrant women.

At the same time, the pandemic has shone a light on the work of those who remained on the job to keep society's essential services running and care for those who are ill. In the health care sector, 80% of the workforce is female, caregivers are generally women, and the education sector also relies on many female workers.

Since the pandemic hit, women have mostly been the ones on the front lines. However, the key stakeholders, women, are left out of the decision-making bodies, even though decisions made on a day-to-day basis directly concern them. To prepare for a second wave of the pandemic, as well as the recovery or the return to normalcy to be defined, AFEAS is proposing various short- and medium-term measures.

To start with, AFEAS recommends two essential benchmarks to ensure that legislation, policies, programs and measures require that women participate as key stakeholders. It means not only involving women MPs, but also women's and community organizations, as well as researchers who, year after year, work for and with women. The way out of the crisis, which will be social, economic and environmental, must include women.

AFEAS requests that the Government of Canada establish a gender parity requirement for all relevant bodies set up to manage the crisis and its aftermath, and use gender-based analysis, or GBA+, to ensure that women's needs and perspective are heard and taken into account.

To obtain true recognition for their work, and to raise awareness of the contribution made by Canadians who perform invisible work, AFEAS calls on the federal government to declare the first Tuesday in April national invisible workload day and, above all, to assess and integrate the economic value of so-called “invisible” unpaid work into the gross domestic product, or GDP. For your information, in 1992, Statistics Canada estimated that the invisible workload accounted for 34% to 54% of GDP, or \$235 billion to \$374 billion Canadian.

To address some particular challenges women are facing during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, AFEAS suggests implementing certain measures. With regard to women's health and safety, coping with the crisis has brought its share of stress, anxiety and distress for women who manage the daily routine, but also for the people they care for, be they children, the elderly or persons with disabilities. In addition, for many women, losing their jobs, even if that income was temporarily replaced by the CERB, has added further stress. I should also mention the upsurge in domestic and family violence, which more women and children have suffered during the lockdown period.

● (1425)

To remedy this situation, in the event of a return to lockdown, the Government of Canada and the local and provincial authorities concerned must implement services for children and seniors or others in need; ensure regular follow-up with vulnerable people who may be victims of violence, women and children, to bring them out of isolation; and consolidate the network of shelters for those experiencing domestic violence.

In terms of economic impact, the Conseil du statut de la femme estimates that 120,000 women have lost their jobs, as compared with 55,100 men, and that twice as many women work part time, which has consequences for them. The data obviously relate to Quebec.

In Canada, it would cost \$4 billion to \$10 billion to hire 1.2 million full-time professionals to cover the hours worked by family caregivers, 54% of whom are women.

According to the Regroupement des aidants naturels du Québec, only 3.2% of caregivers received a tax credit in 2017, receiving an average amount of \$559. Moreover, because of the restrictive eligibility criteria, many caregivers did not qualify for the tax credit.

Research shows that, in Canada, caregivers spend an average of \$7,600 per year on the person they care for, regardless of their initial income level, and that 20% of caregivers are financially insecure.

To support and value the contribution of parents, caregivers and all those who do invisible work, AFEAS is asking the federal government to convert existing non-refundable tax credits into refundable tax credits for parents and caregivers, and create new income tax measures truly adapted to their needs.

In addition, AFEAS is calling on the government to make changes to employment insurance caregiving benefits: the compassionate care, family caregiver for adults, and family caregiver for children benefits. Specifically, the government should eliminate the

mandatory one-week waiting period, pay all three benefits for 35 weeks, and change the current definition of a critically ill child or adult to provide access to benefits in the event of a chronic medical condition.

More than anything else, AFEAS is calling for the requirement to implement pay equity programs at all levels, both in government institutions and in federally regulated businesses, as well as in companies that receive government contracts, grants or loans.

Women are known to face pressures and social barriers. As the previous witnesses have all mentioned, the coronavirus pandemic has forced the government to place schoolchildren and people age 70 and older in lockdown in their homes, and to close non-essential businesses. Overnight, women had to find different ways to run errands, keep the kids busy, home-school them, and care for family members with diminishing independence or in self-isolation, while continuing to do their paid jobs at home or in the essential service sector—if they had not lost their job as a result of the crisis. Most importantly, they also had to avoid getting infected and infecting others. Quite a heavy added burden that no one was prepared for landed on women's shoulders.

To support women in the coming months, the Government of Canada and its provincial partners must introduce measures to ensure equal sharing of family duties and responsibilities, strengthen family agencies and services, and develop agreements with employers and others to reduce productivity requirements, even for teleworkers, while maintaining full weekly pay.

In closing, AFEAS has something else for the committee's suggestion box. It recommends that the federal government create a public day care system across the country, introduce 10 days' paid vacation, and move quickly to set up affordable housing programs and ensure adequate availability of consistent, comprehensive high-quality home care.

● (1430)

Most of all, AFEAS is asking the federal government to resist introducing austerity measures while the economy recovers, as it would only impoverish those already in need and destroy public services and the social security system. We have been there before.

Finally, AFEAS is requesting that special attention be paid to indigenous communities on and off reserve. How can you self-isolate if you are contagious, when families live in overcrowded conditions because of a lack of adequate housing? How can you follow public health measures—

[English]

The Chair: We need to wrap it up, Hélène. I gave you a few extra seconds. I'll give you 10 more seconds.

[Translation]

Mrs. Hélène Cornellier: I will finish up.

How can you follow public health measures when no water is available? These communities and women dealing with the crisis must make the decisions and define the needs.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

We're going to start our rounds of questioning with Jag Sahota.

Jag, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Thank you, ladies, for your time and your presentations.

I have a few questions for you, Ms. Decter. The earlier panel spoke to the deep need for support for women facing abuse, particularly in the area of human trafficking and exploitation. Recently the funding for the measures to address prostitution initiatives expired, with no interim funding to help organizations continue their programming. We know that violence against women has increased during this pandemic and that trafficked women are now at an even greater risk than normal. In light of this, do you think the government should provide some kind of immediate interim support for these organizations?

Ms. Ann Decter: I'm sorry, but I am not specifically informed on the trafficking program. I don't know exactly the situation there. I'd be happy to check with the women at the foundation who work on anti-trafficking, but in general, we would say yes, all anti-violence work is definitely in need of increased funding.

As I was saying, programs are in over-demand and are underfunded, and it's a patchwork across the country of various provincial funding schemes. I think the pandemic has clearly shown that this needs to be a national system. We need a national action plan on violence against women and girls. We also need the national action plan on violence against indigenous women and girls to go ahead. These things need to come into place, well funded, as quickly as possible.

• (1435)

Ms. Jag Sahota: Okay. Thank you for that.

Ms. Decter, we know that your organization distributed funding to sexual assault centres at the beginning of the pandemic. Can you outline the criteria used to determine which sexual assault centres were provided funding?

Ms. Ann Decter: I didn't work specifically on the criteria, but they were developed in working with the Department of Women and Gender Equality. The sexual assault centres that we forwarded government funding to were all outside of Quebec. We didn't work with any Quebec centres. That funding went straight through the Quebec government.

Also, we were working with WAGE, I guess, again not directly. I did do some phone calls to sexual assault centres and made sure that we had the correct registration information, but I wasn't involved at that level. They also had to be not in receipt of funding that was going to women's shelters, and some organizations had both. The goal there was to make sure that everybody got some money.

That's what I can tell you about the sexual assault centres funding. In that sense, I believe they had to be non-residential programs, because the residential programs were considered to come under the rubric of shelters, but I would have to go back and check that for you, if you like.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Would you be able to provide a copy of the criteria to the committee?

Ms. Ann Decter: I think so. I will try to find it. I haven't seen it myself. I was just given a list to call.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Okay.

I have another question. Were any organizations that are not classified as sexual assault centres, such as the YWCA or other multi-functional facilities, selected for funding?

Ms. Ann Decter: I would have to check. Did multi-service organizations receive that funding...?

Ms. Jag Sahota: Yes, I mean multi-functional facilities like YWCAs.

Ms. Ann Decter: Having worked for the YWCA for decades, I think we called it a multi-service association.

Is it the criteria for sexual assault centre funding and who received sexual assault centre funding specifically what you're asking?

Ms. Jag Sahota: Yes. You had organizations that... If they were not classified as sexual assault centres, did they receive funding?

Ms. Ann Decter: Did they receive sexual assault centre funding?

Ms. Jag Sahota: Yes.

The Chair: Fantastic. Thank you very much.

We're now going to pass it over to Sonia Sidhu.

Sonia, you have six minutes.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thanks to all of you for the work you're doing in your community. It's really appreciated.

My question is for Ms. Ann Decter, and I just want to state that I'm really proud of the work the government has done to support women, including how GBA informs every department. Each department is responsible for doing its own GBA, which is a huge stride. I'm really proud of that.

My question is on the response to COVID-19. The federal government created the Canada emergency response benefit. That has supported over eight million Canadians who lost their jobs during COVID-19. More than 60% of early job losses were women's jobs. In your opinion, how has this program supported women facing many unique challenges during COVID-19? Can you explain that?

• (1440)

Ms. Ann Decter: Well, I don't have data on the uptake of women who lost jobs, on how many of them went onto the CERB, but I did think that the CERB was very effective. I thought it was very smart to bring it up really quickly.

We talk about a recession, but it wasn't so much a recession as an economic shutdown. The underlying factors of the economy didn't cause people to lose jobs. What caused people to lose jobs was a choice we made on how to fight the pandemic. I have no problem with it. It was a smart choice. To continue to have income through that period was very important for those who were pushed out of work.

As we know, the job losses for women, especially in that first month, were about two times the rate for men. We also know that women are working more precariously. They have lower incomes. More of them are in part-time jobs, with little or no benefits such as sick leave and all those kinds of things, so to be able to move onto a benefit that exceeded the minimal amount they'd get paid on EI was probably very helpful.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you.

I had a meeting with some women's organizations and heard that domestic violence is on the rise as a result of COVID-19. Your organization has launched the Signal for Help campaign to support women who are stuck with their abuser during COVID-19 and are finding it difficult to seek help. Could you explain how this campaign is working and how other organizations can make similar steps so they can help other women in the community?

Ms. Ann Decter: Signal for Help was actually brought to us by an advertising firm that wanted to do something to help out. They had an idea that we could create some kind of sign that a woman could use, on a call like this one, that would indicate that she was in distress. They wanted to give an extra tool to a woman who was trapped in a home and didn't have a way to communicate that or to leave. We worked with them to create a hand signal, called Signal for Help, that indicates that the person needs help. We educated them around telling people that calling the police and sending them over to the house was not necessarily the best step. We worked through that process. They created it in English, French and Spanish, and have really pushed it out worldwide. We've seen people posting it from Brazil and different countries around the world.

Obviously, it doesn't work for everyone, but a lot of people are at home and are working on calls like this. If you get the signal that someone is in distress, the Signal for Help poster that's out there says how to contact resources and the steps you can take to help out instead of just calling the police right away in an emergency. It's free for anyone to use and for any agency to adapt and forward as they want.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: The other question I want to ask concerns long-term care homes. They have been hit hard by COVID-19

across Canada. In my region of Peel, there are a lot of cases. Women have been hit hard by COVID-19.

In your opinion, what specific issues do the women who work in and reside in the LTC homes face during COVID-19? How can we protect them? We know that long-term care comes under provincial jurisdiction, the same as child care, but how can the federal government help there? How can the provinces step up and protect them? What needs to be done there?

Ms. Ann Decter: First, I'm not an expert in long-term care by any stretch, but we do see really big differences in how some provinces have approached it and have had success compared with others.

One of the big factors is how much of it is privatized. The privatization shapes the kinds of jobs. Staff working in multiple care homes was really a problem. British Columbia fared the best in Canada in long-term care. They immediately stopped that back in March. They also brought in pay to make sure everyone working the same position in a long-term care home was making the same amount of money. I think those were really strong steps.

I think the federal government can step into a leadership role in the same way that they are working to do in child care and work with all the provinces to bring their standards up. Canada actually has the worst record for long-term care deaths in COVID in the developed world. We really missed the boat there.

• (1445)

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much for that.

Andréanne, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My questions are for Mrs. Cornellier.

First of all, I want to thank you for attending our meeting today. In your presentation, you propose a number of solutions, especially in terms of compensating the invisible work done by women and doing more to recognize it. As we know, it is not adequately recognized. In particular, you suggest increasing Quebec Pension Plan and old age security benefits and support for women with children, giving caregivers refundable tax credits, and establishing family insurance. So we are talking about a number of solutions to ensure that women receive compensation for their invisible work.

I would like to know how this invisible workload can have an impact. Please tell us about women's quality of life in economic terms.

Mrs. Hélène Cornellier: AFEAS is an education and social action group dedicated to promoting equality between women and men in Quebec and Canada. It does not work directly with clientèles such as day care providers and abused women. It is somewhat more generalist in nature. For over 50 years, since it was founded in 1966, its core issue has really been women's unpaid workload. Beginning then, women realized that they and their daughters would remain poor all their lives if that workload was not recognized, offset and, on occasion, paid.

You mentioned the Quebec Pension Plan. I did not bring it up in my presentation because I didn't have enough time. For AFEAS, it's inappropriate that Quebec subtracts the years that women stayed home with the children, unpaid, from the total number of years worked. A percentage of the average Canadian wage should be used to offset those years. I do not have the exact formula. Whether it's mothers with children, family caregivers with seniors, people with disabilities, minors or adults, or people who are sick, with cancer, for example, all the time during which they had to withdraw from the labour market must be offset so their retirement income reflects the work they did in society, not just their work in the labour market, for an employer, in exchange for remuneration.

That's one type of measure. Tax credits are another. When they are non-refundable, who is entitled to them? You have seen the numbers from the Regroupement des aidants naturels du Québec. Some people make very good incomes. Those with low incomes have no chance at it. If a senior has any sort of substantial income, say, around \$20,000 or more, they lose the entire tax credit. It has to be refundable, so that even caregivers or parents without income are entitled to it, just as people are entitled to the GST credit or the Quebec solidarity tax credit.

The same thing goes for caregiver benefits. In the case of the compassionate care benefit, for example, you are entitled to a certain number of weeks—I think it's five or six—if a family member has a high risk of dying within 26 weeks. The first person to receive the benefit is subject to a mandatory one-week waiting period. They can share the benefits with their sister, for example, and the second person will not be subject to the one-week waiting period. So someone always loses at least one week of income, representing 55% of their pay, which is not a lot. You cannot perform miracles with that. However, these individuals devote themselves entirely to the person at the end of their life.

These are necessary and essential measures for women to achieve some equality. Without them, we will never have equality.

If we started talking about pay equity, we could spend hours on the issue.

• (1450)

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: So this legislation is very important for you.

I am going to ask you a number of questions all at the same time, given that the clock is ticking.

You talked about older women. Do you believe that the problem is generational and that their generation is really less financially independent than new generations? You could also tell us how initiatives designed to assist women must be embedded in a coherent system of healthcare and social services.

What more would that do during a crisis like the one we have recently experienced?

To what extent could austerity measures established in the name of an economic principle harm the healthcare system?

Could improving women's access to employment insurance be a positive measure?

Finally, GBA+ is a way of measuring the gender-specific impact in departments and in each aspect of the recovery. In what respect would that all be important for you?

[English]

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

[Translation]

Mrs. Hélène Cornellier: So let me focus on what is most important for us.

GBA+ is essential, such as parity on all the committees that have already been set up and those that will have to be set up for the end of the pandemic, the second wave, and so on. Without it, we will never know the real situation. At the moment, women are victimized because they have more work than men. They have jobs that pay less, if they have not lost them. Those women will not make it if they are taking care of the elderly. We must not forget all the stress that the current situation is generating and that women are experiencing as they take care of the house, the children and those—

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Our time has run out, and we must pass on to Lindsay.

Lindsay, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you.

I think all of you touched on the fact that there is no recovery of Canada's economy without women, and they cannot recover without child care. I know that I hear from so many women in my community in London, or parents in general, who are overwhelmed by the high cost of that child care.

I want to ask the witnesses if they could talk about the importance of that affordability piece and what the difference is between the idea of publicly funded child care and what we currently have in terms of the national child care plan that the government has put forward.

I'm also going to throw in there, in case I run out of time, returning to Ms. Ballantyne's point on the establishment of legislation enshrining the right of high-quality child care, affordable child care into our system, what that would mean overall and link it to something like the Canada Health Act where there's equality and accessibility across Canada.

[Translation]

Mrs. Hélène Cornellier: I will be quick, because that is not one of the areas we specialize in.

For women to be at work—as is the case for men too—it is essential to have quality and educational childcare, rather than services where the children are left to play in a corner. That is what was established in Quebec, in the form of early childhood centres, the CPEs. We ourselves are asking the Government of Quebec for more of them, in order to meet the demand from all women and all families. We wish the same for all Canadian women.

It also means that the government must subsidize those services so that the cost to families is minimal. If it is not, they will not be able to access them. If need be, private daycares can also be subsidized; however, the same criteria as in the public network must apply in terms of education, service quality, and the wages of the educators.

• (1455)

[English]

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you.

Could we hear from the other two, as well?

Ms. Ann Decter: Sure, I'll be quick. We endorse the work that Morna's organization does, and she's really the expert in this field.

I'd just say in response that we do believe that all parents should have access to child care and that it is key to women's economic security, independence and protection against violence. All of these things require access to child care. The rest of the country should have something similar to what Quebec has, which is low-cost, broad-based, affordable child care.

At this point, I'll hand over to Morna on the details, and consider us supportive of everything she says.

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: Thanks. I think you were specifically asking what the difference is between what we have now and publicly funded child care. Essentially what we have now is that we don't have a system. What I tried to explain in my presentation is that essentially governments have handed over responsibility for child care to the markets. The only exception is in the province of Quebec. That would be a long answer just to talk about Quebec, and Hélène spoke a little bit about that.

For most parents, responsibility for getting child care rests with them, not with the government. Providing child care also rests with individuals, so for the most part the child care that exists outside of

Quebec exists because a bunch of people decided to provide it. It could be non-profit organizations or it could be for-profit organizations but it is not really a public system. What we saw through COVID is that when you leave things to the market, something as essential as the safety and provision of care for children ends up collapsing.

A lot of parents, for example, have to turn to unregulated, informal care including relatives. That just fell apart with COVID. I think that's why it took COVID for everybody to understand that we really have a problem here, because there really was nowhere to turn for the care of children. We think this health crisis creates a real opportunity to allow some rethinking to go on, to stop relying on individual solutions for the provision of child care and to look at collective solutions, and that means government solutions. Only government is actually in a place to properly fund the service or organize the service so that we don't end up in a situation where you might have child care that is provided where it's not as needed or in other places where we don't have it at all, what we call child care deserts.

The only way to do that is for governments to step in. Yes, it's under the jurisdiction constitutionally of provinces and territories. However, as we saw through COVID, when the federal government wants to step in and get things done, it can do that. It just needs to do it. The way it does that is by putting money on the table and then saying to the provinces and territories, "Let's sit down. We're willing to help you out with money, but let's also look at what makes sense. Let's draw on the evidence of what makes for a good program and let's stop replicating mistakes and let's start replicating success stories."

That's what we want to see.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank Ann, Morna and Hélène for taking part in today's panel. We're going to suspend to do a sound check for our next panel and reconvene as soon as possible.

• (1500)

(Pause)

• (1510)

The Chair: Welcome back, everybody.

We are now on our third hour of today's study. I would like to welcome Sara Wolfe, director, indigenous innovation initiatives, Grand Challenges Canada; Vicki Saunders, the founder of SheEO; and Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich, communications and development manager, Women's Shelters Canada.

We'll pass the floor over to Sara for 10 minutes.

Ms. Sara Wolfe (Director, Indigenous Innovation Initiatives, Grand Challenges Canada): Thank you.

Aaniin, bonjour and good afternoon, Madam Chair, committee members and everyone.

My name is Sara Wolfe. I am the director of the indigenous innovation initiative at Grand Challenges Canada. Thank you for inviting us to speak today on the gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada. This is my first time addressing the standing committee. I hope to be invited back again one day, perhaps in person.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging the long history and enduring presence of indigenous peoples, including first nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, across Turtle Island.

As an *anishinaabekwe* with strong connections to Brunswick House First Nation in northern Ontario, I would like to acknowledge....

I can hear two soundtracks speaking to me.

The Chair: Okay. I will have them check on that.

Sara, I hate to do this to you, but while they check on that, I will go to the next person. We'll come back to you for your 10 minutes.

I will ask Vicki Saunders, the founder of SheEO, to take the floor for the next 10 minutes.

Ms. Vicki Saunders (Founder, SheEO): Thank you very much.

I'm Vicki Saunders, founder of SheEO. Good afternoon. *Bonjour*.

I started SheEO. I'm just going to give a quick overview of SheEO, how we're dealing with what's happening with COVID and the opportunity going forward afterward.

For those of you who may not be familiar with our organization, we started in Canada five years ago, and we are a complete redo of venture capital. If you were starting all over again and it was designed by women, it would look 100% different from what it looks like currently in the world.

We designed and started this organization to solve the major challenge on the planet that 51% of the population gets 2.2% of the capital out there in the world. It is a global challenge, and it leaves us in a world that's designed mostly by men for men. There are just so many things missing from the existing world that we're living in. Structures and systems are so deeply biased, and that's not a future I want to live in, and so we're tackling this big challenge with SheEO.

We are women who come together in a pretty unique way. We have this model of crowdfunding and crowdsourcing. Hundreds of women in each country come together and each contribute \$1,100 as a gift. That money is pooled together and it's loaned out at 0% interest to women entrepreneurs who are working on the sustainable development goals with their businesses. Every business that we fund is majority woman-owned and woman-led, is working on the SDGs and has export potential in its business and revenue generating.

So far, we are in five countries with this model. We have exported it from Canada to the U.S., New Zealand, Australia and the U.K., and we have 70 countries around the world that have reached

out to replicate this model. We provide 0%-interest loans to women entrepreneurs, who pay it back over five years, and then we loan that money out again. Instead of the economic model that we have in the world right now, under which people invest to get a 10X return, a huge return, and then hold onto that capital and accumulate it so that we have more and more inequality in the world, we have a model whereby women actually gift their capital forward and then they bring all of their other capital—their social capital, their buying power, their networks, their expertise and their influence—to help these businesses grow.

It's a pretty fun model to be part of. If you're an activator in our network, which is what we call you when you contribute capital, you vote for the ventures that you care about, so we have a 100% democratic selection process. We don't have some expert panel with all of the biases that come with it, some investment committee deciding on what's the hottest and latest; we have the intuition of hundreds of women deciding which ventures are creating incredible innovations to solve major challenges we're facing. Then we get behind them with everything we've got to help them grow.

This ecosystem-based approach has created unbelievable resilience in our network during COVID. We have not had a single business go down. We have funded 68 ventures; we have \$5 million loaned out, and we have a 97% payback rate. As soon as COVID hit, one of the first things we did was to gather all of our ventures together globally, to get them all on a call and do a quick triage of red, yellow and green—how they were doing—and we put our resources into the ones that were in the red bucket right away, to help them.

These are things like the venture in Calgary that hires homeless people to do laundry for restaurants all across the city and pays them a living wage, an amazing model called Common Good. With the pandemic, 95% of their revenue was lost in the first day because all of the restaurants closed. She got onto the call—a bucket of tears, I have to say, and it was a really emotional moment—and said, “What am I going to do? I can't actually lay off homeless people during this moment. It's terrible,” and ventures in our network came together and said, “What do you need? How much is your payroll for this month?” and they loaned her money, so that she could get through and figure out how to pivot her business.

We have story after story like that across our network, of women coming together because—we call this whole thing radical generosity—we are here to support each other, and that day it was to figure out how we could make sure no one lost jobs and no businesses went down. It's a community commitment we made to do this, so I'm probably a bit of a good-news story of what's going on here. Part of the challenge, however, is that....

● (1515)

I've been thinking, I did a presentation to the Standing Committee on Finance a few weeks ago. I just found myself trying to find what was the simplest, easiest.... I know you have a million things on your plate. I'm so grateful that you're all in these rooms and not sleeping like the rest of the government officials that I know. I think you've done an unbelievable job during COVID.

If you just look at all the different possible things you can do, I would love to encourage all of you there today to please do whatever you can to solve this child care nightmare that we continue to live with every single year. This is one of the easiest things on the planet to solve. If women and men were at the table when we designed our structures, we would have solved this right up front because it's not a hard thing to solve.

Women who have children and are at home are in a world of pain. Women entrepreneurs are in a world of pain with this. What is happening during COVID is going to adversely affect women in so many different ways because people are having to decide whether they are going to keep their business or take care of their kids.

How do you deal with these issues?

The demand for these services is massive. We've noticed that our ventures are really struggling with this. With the number of relief mechanisms that the government has put forth.... For example, we have an amazing agricultural innovator out on the east coast. She's able to get a wage subsidy to hire somebody or to keep someone on her staff, but what she really needs is to be able to use that money for child care. She's not allowed to do that.

She can hire someone to do the job that she wants to do, but she can't actually hire someone to do child care. There are a lot of these biases built into these relief structures because we don't value unpaid care. We've monetized all of these different elements of our markets. I think this is the one thing that I would love to really focus on.

I also, on a go-forward basis, would love to see more focus, from a government perspective, on innovation being outside the tech space. This process innovation that we've created with SheEO of not just using financial capital to create jobs and economic prosperity, but also actually bringing all the other resources that we have in play—our influences, our networks and our expertise—leads to unbelievable outcomes.

I just want to share something very quickly. In the last year we have received women's entrepreneurship funding from Minister Ng's department to help us get this model scaled. In the last year, we created 276.4 jobs in Canada across our 27 ventures and through SheEO. We got \$750,000 from the federal government.

That is the equivalent of \$2,164 per job that's being created. I'd love to see anyone try to match that in what we're doing.

Women are amazingly capital efficient. It's unbelievable. What we can do with a small amount of money is insane. When you are looking at other models and process innovations as you are out there looking at new economic models, I hope you will pay attention to SheEO going forward.

I have a little deck that I'm going to forward after it's translated into French.

Thank you very much.

● (1520)

The Chair: Excellent.

Thank you very much.

Sara Wolfe, we are going to come back to you. Let's try this again. You have the floor for 10 minutes.

Ms. Sara Wolfe: Thank you. I figured out what the problem was, so we should be good now.

I'm Sara Wolfe and I'm the director of indigenous innovative initiatives at Grand Challenges Canada. I do really want to thank you for inviting us to speak today on the gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada. As I said, this is my first time addressing a standing committee, so I hope to get invited back again one day in person.

I want to acknowledge the long history and enduring presence of indigenous peoples, including first nations, Métis and Inuit peoples across Turtle Island. As an *anishinaabekwe* with strong connections to Brunswick House First Nation in northern Ontario, I also want to acknowledge the territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin people of Shabot Obaadjiwan where I'm currently a visitor. We're experiencing a very warm raspberry moon right now. The raspberry moon in the Anishinabe teaching is the moon when great change begins, so I am particularly looking forward to any questions you might have regarding my statement.

For the last 10 years, Grand Challenges Canada has been dedicated to supporting bold ideas with big impacts. We're funded by the Government of Canada and other partners, and we support innovators who are closest to some of the most pressing challenges in the world. The bold ideas that Grand Challenges Canada invests in integrate science and technology as well as social and business ideas and also, now, indigenous knowledge, to save and improve lives of people in Canada and in low- and middle-income countries.

Our organization has supported over 1,300 innovations in 106 countries and we estimate that these innovations have the potential to save up to 1.8 million lives and improve up to 64 million lives by 2030.

We've been listening to our innovators, our partners and our community members for the past four months to hear how COVID-19 has impacted their lives. Around the world, the pandemic is deepening pre-existing inequalities, particularly for poor and racialized people, and exposing vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems, which are in turn intensifying the impacts of the pandemic with disheartening evidence of even deeper impacts for those at the intersection of multiple vulnerabilities, such as women living in poverty, and this is also emerging.

An intersectional understanding then is what we need if we're to recover from COVID-19 in a good way in Canada and around the world. The United Nations policy brief on April 9 titled, "The Impact of COVID-19 on Women", across every sphere from health to the economy and from security to social protection, noted that the impacts of COVID-19 are worsened for women and girls simply because of their gender. Increases in unpaid work we have already heard about. There has been a reallocation of resources and even blunt attacks on sexual and reproductive health services, and increases in gender-based violence. The poorer you were when you started out, the worse the outcomes have likely been.

At home in Canada we have a tendency to think that things are worse in the outside world, but the situation here for many is not actually much different.

So today, as I appear before the committee to discuss the gendered impacts of the pandemic on indigenous peoples in Canada, I also want to talk about what the indigenous innovation initiative is doing about them and how there's so much more that we could be doing.

My sisters have historically experienced higher burdens of poverty, discrimination, criminalization and violence, and there is a plethora of reports on the gendered impacts of being an indigenous woman, girl or gender-diverse person in Canada, including the pivotal findings from the final report on the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, "Reclaiming Power and Place". The final report confirmed that domestic violence, human trafficking and health-related concerns were already among other significant issues for them, even before COVID-19, and I sincerely hope that everyone on the committee is already very familiar with the report and its corresponding calls for justice.

The indigenous communities are awaiting the government's action plan on that, but there are also new reports that have recently surfaced about the gendered impacts of COVID-19 for indigenous peoples. Last month, the Native Women's Association of Canada published an online survey of 750 indigenous women and gender-diverse people, and they noted a deeply concerning spike in the number of indigenous women facing violence during this time of sheltering in place. Almost one in five have reported a violent incident in the past three months.

• (1525)

In fact, of the indigenous women surveyed, more were concerned about violence than about the virus itself. Another key finding was that the financial impacts of COVID-19 are strongly correlated to violence against indigenous women.

Also, in June, Pam Palmater, the chair in indigenous governance at Ryerson University, wrote an article entitled "Gendered Pandemic Response Needed to Address Specific Needs of Indigenous Women". In it, she wrote:

Canada's failure to use a gender lens on its pandemic measures ignores the many ways in which the covid-19 pandemic is disproportionately impacting women in general.

and

Now consider the dual disadvantage of Indigenous women who are also forced to navigate an "infrastructure of violence"...

The article goes on to give evidence of the several ways in which indigenous women and gender-diverse people have been disproportionately impacted and where there's an urgent need for dedicated pandemic planning for this demographic.

In a previous life, I worked as a midwife with urban indigenous families. That was for about two decades. My friends and former health care colleagues are reporting that at the street level, the impacts of opioid overdoses, untreated sexually transmitted infections, assaults, trafficking, street work, homelessness, mental health issues and unplanned pregnancies are all increasing, particularly for indigenous people.

To maintain the status quo means that the gaps will continue to widen and that indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people will continue to fall deeper, but it doesn't have to be this way. The root causes of the gendered and racialized pandemic inequities that we are seeing are ingrained much deeper than extra masks and hand sanitizer. We need attention to be focused on creating sustainable, long-term solutions. This is an opportunity for Canada to commit to a gendered response, one that includes a specifically tailored approach for indigenous women and gender-diverse people and their needs and which takes into account the context of racialized violence and poverty.

Small and medium-sized enterprises play a key role in the Canadian economy, as well all know. Women—indigenous and non-indigenous—are also the foundation of families and communities. Between 2013 and 2017, small and medium-sized enterprises made up 85% of the net job creation in the private sector, and in 2017, small and medium-sized enterprises employed almost 90% of the private sector workforce in Canada. However, only 1.4% were indigenous-owned, despite indigenous people being 5% of the national population, and of those, only 25% were majority indigenous women-owned. There's a lot of work to do.

For indigenous women and gender-diverse people, economic reconciliation is critical to their emergence. That will require sustainable investments in dedicated economic recovery efforts. Imagine what would happen if, as part of the COVID-19 economic recovery plan, we invested in indigenous women and gender-diverse individuals, so that they could position themselves to thrive when the Canadian and global economies re-emerge.

Seeded with \$10 million in matching funds from the Government of Canada's Department for Women and Gender Equality, we've already started this work at Grand Challenges Canada. We were overwhelmed by the results of our recent call for proposals to accelerate gender equality through indigenous innovation and social entrepreneurship. We've received 238 applications across business, health, social, tech, environmental and cultural innovation. Unfortunately, we will only be able to fund the top 3% in this round, about five to seven projects.

Think about the impact for indigenous women and girls once the best ones are operational. Think about what the potential impact for indigenous women and girls could be if we were able to fund even, say, the top 10%. What if we invested even more in indigenous innovation using a gender lens to give them and the next generation an even better chance to reach their fullest potential? After all, this is helping them to also take care of their families.

- (1530)

What if we started off by offsetting emergency relief funds and longer-term unemployment expenses for indigenous folks who have lost their jobs because of the falling economy? I happen to know a group of indigenous innovators who have some awesome ideas, lots of support from their communities and tons of grit.

It's crucial that any COVID-19 recovery plan, globally and within Canada, places women, girls and gender-diverse individuals, as well as their inclusion, representation, rights, social and economic outcomes, equality and protections, at the centre if it's to have the necessary impact. This recovery plan is also an opportunity to invest in equality from a gender and an anti-oppression lens, so let's give the world more of what Canada and all of us aspire to, where everyone has the opportunity to reach their fullest potential.

Meegwetch.

The Chair: Excellent, and thank you very much, Sara.

We're now going to move over to Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich who is with Women's Shelters Canada.

You have the floor for 10 minutes, Kaitlin.

Ms. Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich (Communications and Development Manager, Women's Shelters Canada): Good afternoon and thank you for this invitation. My name is Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich, and I am the communications and development manager at Women's Shelters Canada, or WSC.

WSC is a national organization representing over 550 shelters and transition houses serving women and children affected by violence against women and intimate partner violence. We were created by the provincial and territorial shelter associations that wanted a voice on the national stage. Today, these 14 associations are our full members and make up our advisory council.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, we held weekly Zoom meetings with our advisory council, both to support them in learning from each other's contexts and to provide us with a sense of what was happening across the country. These remarks are informed by their experiences.

I would like to begin by prefacing that while WSC's overall goal is to see an end to all violence against women, my remarks will focus on domestic violence, which includes family violence and intimate partner violence. I'm sure you will hear from other witnesses who will speak to other effects the COVID-19 pandemic has had on women, such as limits to reproductive choices and freedom, disproportionate job loss, increased child care responsibilities, and police violence against indigenous and racialized people.

Before the COVID pandemic arrived in Canada, things were already bleak for women fleeing violence. In fact, many have called violence against women, or VAW, the pandemic within the pandemic. The stats are indicative: Every six days a woman is killed by her current or former intimate partner. Indigenous women are 2.7 times more likely to be victims of violence than non-indigenous women. However, femicide rates for indigenous women are six times higher than for non-indigenous women. We also know that certain groups, such as women aged 15 to 24, racialized women, women living with disabilities and LGBTQ+ people experience violence at disproportionate rates.

During COVID-19, this violence did not stop. In fact, it increased. Across the country, there have been reports of 20% to 30% increases in rates of domestic violence. Police in some areas have also noted an increase in domestic violence calls. In Ontario, the Assaulted Women's Helpline, a 24-7 crisis counselling service, has seen a total increase of only 5% in the number of calls it received but now has four times as many of those calls relating to women seeking shelter. Several shelters told us that it was not just the number of calls that increased but the severity of the abuse they were seeing.

Women's Shelters Canada's website—sheltersafe.ca—is an online clickable map for women, or friends and family, to find their closest shelter and its 24-7 crisis number. In April 2020, visits to sheltersafe.ca were double what they were in March 2020 and as compared to April 2019. Our May 2020 visits were triple what they were in May 2019. We have also heard from shelters across the country that they are receiving more calls from family and friends trying to help their loved ones.

On the other hand, calls have been greatly reduced in regions such as the Northwest Territories and P.E.I., in indigenous communities in Manitoba, and in other rural and northern areas. We heard from some shelters that their phones were silent, their buildings nearly empty. This was perhaps even more terrifying than an increase in reported domestic violence, because it meant that women, hunkering down at home as was recommended, were potentially trapped with their abusers and unable to call for help.

Anecdotally, we heard from our members that abusers were using the COVID-19 pandemic as another tool in their tool box. Some shelters spoke of women calling them from inside a locked bathroom, saying they only had a few minutes to speak. Others noted that abusers told their partners that they would get COVID if they left the house, or threatened to tell their family and friends that they had COVID.

Various factors associated with COVID-19 likely influenced the heightened rates of violence against women. Various studies have shown that stress, job loss, alcohol intake and mental health issues can all exacerbate violence. However, we want to stress that COVID-19 does not turn people into abusers. While the pandemic can aggravate stress and violence, we cannot blame the violence we've seen during COVID on the pandemic itself.

At times, the measures imposed by different levels of government had unintended consequences. Social isolation is an abuser's dream. Now that this isolation was government-sanctioned, the situation for women living in violence worsened. Border closures also caused problems for some women. We heard of one woman who was fleeing her abuser in Alberta and tried to cross the Alberta-NWT border to stay with her mother in Yellowknife. She was refused entry into the territory and told to "go find a shelter in Alberta".

Too often, domestic violence can lead to domestic homicide, or femicide. In the first month of pandemic-related lockdowns in Canada, at least nine women and girls were killed in suspected domestic homicides. This does not include the Nova Scotia shootings that occurred in mid-April, where nine men and 13 women were killed in a rampage that started with the perpetrator attacking his female partner in a case of domestic violence.

● (1535)

For women's shelters across the country, COVID-19 highlighted something that we at Women's Shelters Canada have been saying for the last few years: that the services a woman can access when she's fleeing violence should not depend on her postal code. During the pandemic, we asked our member shelter associations what was happening in their province and territory in relation to five questions. This was updated at the end of June.

First, are the VAW shelters or transition houses in your province or territory receiving provincial or territorial funds specifically for COVID-19? Seven answered no, two answered yes and three said that it was complicated—for example, some but not all shelters were receiving funds.

Second, is your provincial or territorial government ensuring shelters have PPE and EPA-standard cleaner? Four said no, two said yes and six said it was complicated.

Third, are VAW shelters considered an essential service in your province or territory? Two said no, six said yes and four said it was complicated.

Fourth, in your province or territory, are VAW shelters receiving priority access for COVID testing? Five said no, including P.E.I., which said it wasn't needed. Two said yes and five said it was complicated.

Fifth, has your premier or provincial or territorial government made a public statement about not staying home if home is not safe? Three said no, five said yes and four said it was complicated.

While the federal government normally only funds on-reserve shelters, the rest are funded provincially or territorially. It did allocate \$26 million for VAW shelters and transition houses across the country due to COVID-19. The Department of Women and Gender Equality asked Women's Shelters Canada to distribute \$20.5 million of these funds, which we agreed to do, knowing how important it was for shelters to receive these funds quickly.

COVID-19 emergency funds were distributed to over 400 shelters across the country. However, those in Quebec waited weeks longer, if not months, to receive their funds distributed by their provincial government. We have also heard from several shelters expressing concern over eventual clawbacks from their operational funds from their provincial government because they received these federal emergency COVID funds.

It wasn't all bad, of course. WSC personally saw an uptick in donations from individuals and organizations. We received our largest-ever gift from the Rogers family last month. People were reaching out to us constantly by email and on social media to find out how they could help shelters across the country. We saw an increased number of stories in the press focused on domestic violence in the pandemic, and we were also pleased to see the federal government's commitment to build 10 new shelters on reserve and two in the territories. We have hope that this issue is now firmly on the agenda for both government and individuals across the country.

I'll move on to recommendations for a potential second wave of COVID. We have five.

Number one, shelters need more core funding. Before the pandemic, shelters were already grossly underfunded. Our “More Than A Bed” study, published last year, showed that 56% of shelters indicated that they could not meet their operating expenses without fundraising, while 11% said they could not meet their operational expenses even with fundraising. While the \$26 million given by the federal government was badly needed and gratefully accepted, it is a drop in the bucket. We also echo Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada's call on the federal government to provide \$20 million in its next budget for transitional housing and shelters in Inuit Nunangat and Ottawa for Inuit women and children fleeing violence.

Number two, all levels of government must stress the message to stay home only if home is safe. Our sector worked diligently during the pandemic using social media, traditional advertising and countless media interviews to get the message out there that shelters were open and available and that women did not need to stay home if home was not safe. In a second wave, all levels of government need to relay this message.

Number three, Canada needs to look to promising practices from around the world when it comes to domestic violence and COVID-19. For example, in Tunisia, there's a quarantine centre for women escaping domestic violence. In India, police checked up on women who had previously filed reports of domestic violence before the lockdown. In France, 20,000 hotel rooms were made available for survivors of domestic violence. New Zealand included domestic violence preparations in its lockdown planning from the start.

Number four, the process of designing and implementing a multi-year national action plan on violence against women and gender-based violence must begin. We have been advocating for this for over five years with a coalition of organizations across the country. As you've heard, the situations of women fleeing violence and of VAW shelters across the country during the pandemic differed according to where they were located. We are pleased with the current government's commitment to a national action plan and strongly urge that its development begin without delay. This plan needs to be robust and well resourced.

Number five, we also stand with the national action plan and the recommendations of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and implementing a national action plan in response to that.

• (1540)

Thank you.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you so much, Kaitlin.

We're now going to start our rounds of questioning with six minutes for Nelly Shin.

Nelly, you have the floor.

Ms. Nelly Shin (Port Moody—Coquitlam, CPC): Thank you so much.

I'd like to begin by thanking all of the witnesses today for sharing your hearts and a concern that is actually fundamental to the wellness of our whole nation, because wellness begins at home. Of course, with women being mothers and the nurturers in many cases

and having way more dynamic capacity and potential, I'm very happy to hear all the recommendations and insights you've provided today.

I want to direct my first question to you, Kaitlin, in regard to domestic violence. You said that it's a “pandemic within the pandemic”. I understand that it's something that has always been with us, but because it has come to public attention in a certain way, I think we are in a time now when we can do more with it. I'm happy to hear that there are initiatives the government has been making to start dealing with this.

What do you feel is a core, root problem that every tier of government can address and, since we are at the federal level, what can we do to mitigate some of the core, root issues of why domestic violence happens?

Ms. Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich: That's a very good question.

I think every level of government needs to fund and give core funding to shelters, because there is going to be abuse against women no matter what happens and we need shelters to be able to support those women.

We also need to try to prevent the violence. I think that's where we need more perpetrator programs and we need more education, starting with kids when they're four years old. We also need to hold people accountable when they say things that are victim blaming or that in some ways say that a woman deserves violence and that violence is not as severe as what a woman might say.

Ms. Nelly Shin: Thank you. We could probably expand on all of those things, but I know we're limited for time, so I'll move on to the next question.

We don't know if there's going to be a second wave. It's very possible. I'm very happy to hear the recommendations you made to streamline some of our interventions before that happens, but you were talking about prevention.

How can we prevent in the window that we might possibly have? Hopefully, there won't be a second wave, but in case there is, there are all the complications of social distancing and even the idea of counselling through Zoom or phone calls, which takes away from that human presence that counselling offers when you're one-on-one in a room having that conversation that's part of the healing. How can things be done differently between now and a potential second wave to create a more conducive environment for things to be resolved and dealt with, and to prevent that rise of tension that happens in social isolation in family homes and in exit strategies and police intervention? How can we, as federals, assist with that before the next wave, if it happens?

• (1545)

Ms. Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich: From a shelter perspective, I think it would be very important to have priority COVID-19 testing. Something we saw was that when women were able to make the call to a shelter to leave the violent situation, they had to go into two weeks' isolation within the shelter. That is very hard for a woman who is coming out of a violent situation and has to be put into isolation. If their COVID testing were a priority, they might only have to do that for a few days. That's something we would definitely recommend.

Also, in terms of prevention, for sheltersafe.ca, our website, we did institute an update of it to show email addresses as well as text messaging and web chat services that were available, because sometimes those were more secure ways in which women could reach out to shelters. I think it also has to come down to having a living wage and looking at issues of poverty and racism and all of the things I listed that might exacerbate violence, such as stress, job loss and all of that. If we look at those societal economic issues, that will help with the stress as well.

Ms. Nelly Shin: This question is for Sara regarding first nations indigenous women.

What can we do better in mitigating the cycle of violence, oppression and abuse that women in that community encounter? Similarly—the same question I asked Kaitlin—what is a core root problem that we can start taking care of during COVID and beyond COVID?

Ms. Sara Wolfe: I think it's what Kaitlin said. There are multiple layers, and everything is interconnected. If we can build on women's economic resiliency and give them the tools to be self-sustaining, they will be able to support themselves and their families. It will mitigate the number of people who are just dependent on sheltering in place with their abusers if they have the means to support themselves. Giving them the means and empowering them to build new businesses, build new innovations and work together collaboratively—similarly to the SheEO model—is going to be healing for them as well, and will give them the confidence to move forward.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much, Sara.

We're now going to pass it over to Anju Dhillon.

Anju, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

I'd like to start with Ms. Geiger-Bardswich.

You spoke a little about the money that was given to shelters by our government. We gave \$10 million to indigenous shelters, and \$30 million for shelters and sexual assault centres.

If you have some knowledge, please let us know how this money was helpful during this pandemic. How was it used? How can it promote further help to women in such situations of domestic violence?

Ms. Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich: Sure. Just a clarification, the \$10 million given to indigenous shelters was only given to on-reserve shelters. It did not include urban indigenous shelters or Inu-

it shelters. The other money that we distributed did go to those shelters.

We've heard from different shelters saying that they were able to offer their staff “hero pay”. They were able to hire additional staff or relief staff when their employees had to quarantine for two weeks, either because they got back from a vacation in March, because they were sick themselves or because they had to take care of a relative.

They were able to have hotel rooms and pay for those hotel rooms. Sometimes they were given a reduced rate. Often they were not. They had to buy PPE. They had to buy masks. They sometimes had to change the way their shelter was made up in order to have larger areas where women could go, or cut off certain areas so that there was that level of social distancing. The money has been a huge help, but it doesn't replace core funding.

• (1550)

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Okay.

There's a highly possible chance that there's going to be second outbreak. What do you see as a priority for women shelters? When it comes to intimate partner violence, what are the priorities in that second wave, if there is one?

Ms. Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich: The priorities are around funding and around securing other means of housing women—whether that be hotel rooms, university campuses or anything else—for the increased number of calls that are coming in.

As we've been saying, we also need a national action plan to ensure that things are equitable across the country, so that a woman in P.E.I. can have the same high standard of care that a woman in Alberta can have.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Perfect. Thank you so much.

My next question is for Ms. Saunders.

You explained your business model. I found it very fascinating. You said that no business went down during the COVID peak, whereas in other places some businesses very unfortunately just finished because of COVID.

Can you tell us how you achieved this success? How can this business model be used to help other businesses?

Ms. Vicki Saunders: Yes. The thing that is unique about the approach we're taking is that it's all relationship based. This is part of it. We are living in a world that is so transactional. It's like, “Here's my money, so give me a return for my money”. It's all about accumulating that wealth and holding on to it as if there's not enough for everyone, which we know is crazy, because we're putting \$10 million to \$30 million into assault centres and we were just about to give \$912 million to youth to volunteer. Oh my God, I just don't understand how we decide these things. For me, it is such a no-brainer to get people into a relationship with one another and to share the resources we have to go towards the priorities that we have on this planet.

I personally don't think we need to be investing any money on things that are not on the world's to-do list, which is our short form for the United Nations sustainable development goals, the things that create inclusive societies that take care of one another. We're just very out of balance in the masculine and feminine in the world. When we look at the kinds of businesses that women select, we see that they're selecting businesses that start at the very beginning, where there's no harassment in place, where there's flexible work and where we understand how women come to work and what they need in a different environment.

More models that are starting to design from that perspective will create much more connective tissue in society and much more resilient societies. It's more of the nurturing piece that's part of this, and we've figured out how to scale it, so it's not like it's some loosey-goosey, "oh, you know women", la la la, it doesn't matter... It has deep heft and scale attached to it.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: You also mentioned child care. You said that different women are at the table. Can you tell us specifically what solutions can resolve this issue of child care?

Ms. Vicki Saunders: There will be no recovery unless we figure out child care. We're not going to have an economic recovery. Women will not be able to get back to work. We're going to see a disproportionate impact on women if we don't figure out how to pay for this or solve it. We've seen women being told to keep their kids quiet when they're on a call at home. If you have one-year-olds and four-year-olds running around, what do you mean "keep them quiet"? I'm in a one-room apartment. That's not a thing.

Figuring out how we can actually use some of the relief funds to pay for the child care and have more flexibility around that for a business owner is absolutely critical, and then figuring out how we're going to safely open up our child care centres is obviously massively important in terms of any recovery.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you.

Andréanne, you now have the floor for six minutes.

• (1555)

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you.

Our three participants are absolutely fascinating.

I will start with Ms. Geiger-Bardswich, who represents Women's Shelters Canada.

Of course, we understand the link between the pandemic and the increase in domestic violence. Moreover, isolation is worsening conditions for sex workers and increasing the risks of human trafficking. What is the link between the two?

We must not forget that some workers have not applied for certain programs, such as the CERB, because their incomes are not declared. The measures implemented during the pandemic perhaps did not help sex workers enough. A consequence may be an increased risk of human trafficking.

[English]

Ms. Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich: We don't work specifically on human trafficking. I believe that Amnesty International Canada just

put out a brief about sex workers and not having CERB accessible to them. I would recommend looking at that brief.

I would not be surprised that social isolation has made things easier for women to be trafficked. I know that a previous witness mentioned younger children being at home and being at increased risk of online luring as well, so I'm not surprised that it would have an effect.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: To what extent should organizations like yours be supported by more consistent social policies and health policies?

This also applies to housing. In fact, improving access to affordable community and social housing could have allowed people to get through the crisis more easily and may allow them to get through a second wave more easily.

[English]

Ms. Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich: This would definitely help. One of the things we heard was that women were nervous about moving into shelters, into the communal space of shelters, because of COVID, because of the virus. Shelters that are already set up to be apartment-style units that are self-contained did not see that decrease in women coming to their shelters. They were at full capacity, if not more than their full capacity.

That's something we've been advocating for around the national housing strategy as well. We need safe and affordable housing for women, because if there is not that housing, it creates a bottleneck effect in shelters, where women cannot move out of shelters because there is no housing and more women can't move into shelters. It would be a huge benefit to have safe and affordable housing.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Now I will continue with Ms. Saunders, from SheEO.

We know that it is difficult to promote health when women are not really attracted by politics or when they are hesitant to take higher positions. We talk with a lot of women.

What are the main obstacles?

[English]

Ms. Vicki Saunders: If you mean climbing the ranks within corporate structures, that's not an area I focus on. We're interested in funding women innovators and women entrepreneurs and helping them thrive. The way we do that with SheEO is that we fund them and support them on their own terms instead of trying to "fix" them to fit into the existing systems we have. We are designing and creating new business models and new approaches to doing business that work on women's terms, and when you design from that perspective, you don't have any issues with people climbing. They're completely fine when they create their own rules.

When we get stuck into having to fit into other people's rules, like, for example, when you have to work from nine to five and you have to go pick up your kids at school but you can't do that because the rules inside business are different.... When you change those rules, women are fine. There's no need to fix women to fit into these models. We need to change our systems so that they fit with women.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Speaking of changing the system, we know that, during the pandemic, a number of employers became aware that telework could be a useful option. Telework can also be an option for women entrepreneurs. However, I feel that clear limits would have to be set because women can really be penalized and penalize themselves in the situation.

What has the pandemic taught us about women, telework, and entrepreneurship?

Has it had an impact on the way they perceive their role in the labour market and in the economy as it recovers?

• (1600)

[English]

Ms. Vicki Saunders: Thank you for the question. We have a very interesting mix of young mothers and others on our team. In all of our ventures, we ask these questions all the time. There is no one answer for women. We are so diverse and different in our experiences and what we need.

Again, I think that finding ways.... For those who have support networks and elders to potentially support and take care of their children, it helps, but again, finding some way of supporting and opening up child care so that women who have children can actually get to the work and create boundaries between work and home is going to be absolutely critical. Again, I think that's a very important point for this to work.

The Chair: Andr anne, you have 10 seconds. Honestly, there's probably not enough time for a full question and an answer. Do you have any final comment?

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Yes, I have a quick question for Sara Wolfe, from Grand Challenges Canada.

In indigenous communities, housing is a serious problem. How could the issue of housing in those communities help them after the crisis?

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry. I'm looking at the time frame. Your question was outside of that.

What we can do, Sara, is that perhaps you could give us a very short answer. I'm really trying to keep watching the clock here, so very short, please, Sara, like 10 to 15 seconds, so we can move to Lindsay.

Ms. Sara Wolfe: We need to see the challenge as an opportunity. We have housing problems for indigenous people generally, across urban, rural, remote and isolated first nations communities, but even in Toronto. Housing is a major issue for all indigenous peo-

ples, but in particular for indigenous women and gender-diverse people, so investing in them is great.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you so much. I'm sorry about that. I'm looking at the clock. We have to get everything going forward.

Lindsay, you have the floor now for six more minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I'd like to address my first question to Women's Shelters Canada. It's about Imagine Canada. I'm sure you have heard of their report coming out. They have stated that the central government is "inconsistent in how they administer" grants and contribution funding and that "multi-year funding is" often "not available", while "legitimate financial and administrative costs are excluded and program evaluation is not covered", even though it may be required in an agreement. They state, "The net effect is that charities, nonprofits, and their donors are essentially subsidizing the federal government."

You specifically addressed and I appreciated the continual voicing of the fact that core funding is desperately needed. Can you explain further how in the future that movement away from short-term, project-based funding and into core stable funding is going to help for a second wave or any sort of future crisis that we may encounter?

Ms. Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich: We've seen that, because of COVID-19 and the social distancing requirements, fundraising for shelters has taken a huge hit. As I said in my remarks, the majority of shelters rely on fundraising because the funding they get from the government, usually from provincial and territorial governments, are, yes, project-based. They'll build a house or build new bedrooms, but they won't pay for the staffing of those shelters or for the support and crisis services that are needed. That's where the fundraising has to come in.

We saw in our report last year that the majority of shelters do not have fundraisers on staff, so it means that executive directors are fundraising outside of their desks, while also trying to deal with crisis situations and shovelling snow and everything else that happens and they often have to do. If you didn't have the project-based funding and you had core funding, there would be a lot more time to do the actual work that shelters are supposed to be doing.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Also, then, to build on my Bloc colleague's questions about housing, obviously we New Democrats have been pushing for a national affordable housing strategy for quite some time. The unfortunate downloading onto the provinces and municipalities has created a huge void in terms of what's required across Canada, both in urban centres for women trying to escape violence and certainly for indigenous women and girls.

I'd like to hear from Women's Shelters Canada and Ms. Wolfe about those challenges and the need for that focus in terms of a national housing strategy.

• (1605)

Ms. Sara Wolfe: Absolutely, a national housing strategy is something that I think would be very needed for indigenous people and for indigenous women and gender-diverse people specifically, but there are a lot of opportunities. We could be investing in innovation.

Again, if we're thinking about COVID and COVID recovery, we need to be looking at it from a big-term perspective and not just the immediate crisis of the second wave. We need to be looking at it in terms of how we are recovering from this downstream and starting to set the building stones now, by investing in innovation and long-term solutions and, as Vicki said, by resetting some of the narratives around how we can support and build each other up and how we can build relationships within communities and support each other to thrive in a post-COVID recovery context.

Empowering indigenous women in particular but all women with the tools they need to support themselves and to support each other is going to also help to address some of the challenges around housing, violence, trafficking, poverty and child care. We need women to be empowered to make those decisions for themselves.

Ms. Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich: I would add that it's not just housing for women. It's housing for the shelters themselves. It's the second-stage shelters, which are shelters that women need to go to if they have a high risk of lethality or of post-separation violence. They don't exist in a lot of rural and remote areas because there's no housing for second-stage shelters to purchase in order to exist. That's a huge issue as well.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I would like to move back to child care. It's interesting that I was actually on the finance committee when Ms. Saunders had her discussion about the necessity of child care. I was going to quote you and ask you to expand, so I'm so glad that you are sharing that with us again today.

In the previous discussion, we had heard about the necessity for publicly funded, across-the-board national standardization of child care. I know that we don't have women back in the economy without that child care. Could you continue to expand on the importance of that?

I also heard today on the CBC a quote from a witness who will be coming in shortly. She said that we won't just experience a recession in Canada without that necessary child care in place, but it actually will be a depression because women will not be back in the workforce. Could you expand on that?

Ms. Vicki Saunders: I hope she has some economic data to share. I'm not an economist, so I don't have that.

I think we have such an opportunity with what's happening right now with the pandemic to look at what we value in society, to look at the impact of not valuing certain things and to look at how we have prioritized growth over everything else, instead of taking care of one another.

If you just look at what's happening in homes where elders are being taken care of, or not, we continue to devalue taking care of one another. These are the building blocks of strong, resilient and incredible societies with great connective tissue.

I am so hopeful. We have literally had the curtain pulled back on all of the things that aren't working sitting right in front of us every day and we see the impact of what it does to society. For me, this concept of valuing caring for each other—a caring economy—is going to have a huge impact if we focus on that going forward for Canada's resilience and our economic growth and support of Canadians.

For me, this is just such a no-brainer. On the finance committee, the person who shared it said we've been talking about this since 1980.

The Chair: Wonderful.

We've now ended the panel for today.

Thank you so much, Sara, Vicki and Kaitlin, for bringing us your excellent testimony.

We are going to suspend, go through checks for sound checks and reconvene as soon as possible.

• (1605)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1620)

The Chair: We're going to convene our study once again on the impacts of COVID on women. We are starting our next panel, and I am very honoured to welcome Lorraine Whitman, the president of the Native Women's Association; Jill Earthy, interim chief executive officer of Women's Enterprise Centre; and Linda Gavsie, senior vice-president, Universal Learning Institute.

We're going to start with Lorraine. You will have the floor for 10 minutes. I will be cutting everybody off at 10 minutes. I will be giving you a 15-second warning that I will be slowing it down.

Lorraine, go ahead.

Ms. Lorraine Whitman (President, Native Women's Association of Canada): *Wela'lin.*

Good afternoon. My name is Elder Lorraine Whitman, Grandmother White Sea Turtle, and I would be like to acknowledge the territory of Mi'kma'ki, of the L'nu Mi'kmaq people.

I am also the president of the Native Women's Association of Canada, which means that I represent and defend the rights of first nation, Métis and Inuit women across Canada—

The Chair: Lorraine, could you just speak up a tad?

Ms. Lorraine Whitman: Okay. I will get a little closer to the mike.

You have all asked me here today to talk to you about the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting indigenous women, and I appreciate the opportunity to share some of NWAC's findings and also our concerns.

I am here today to talk about the pandemic, but also to talk about violence, because the two issues are linked.

I don't need to tell you that when COVID-19 hit the shores of the indigenous women, their children were among the most vulnerable populations in Canada. I don't need to tell you that first nations, Métis and Inuit women and girls are murdered or go missing in numbers far greater than their proportion of the population, that the federal government has so far not delivered on its promise to create a national action plan to address the calls to justice of the national inquiry into murdered and missing indigenous women and girls.

The action plan would be a living document that is enhanced over time. It does not have to be perfect when it's first delivered. It just needs to be the start of the end of the violence that the inquiry labelled a genocide. Sadly, COVID-19 increased the danger level for indigenous women. The government has used the pandemic as an excuse for not releasing a plan. We are urging the members of this committee to pressure the government to listen to us and to keep its commitment, but let's look at the impacts of the pandemic.

As the pandemic threat grew, NWAC conducted a needs assessment with its provincial and territorial member associates. All but two responded, and the results painted a frightening picture. Our affiliate, the Nunavut Inuit Women's Association, for instance, said it was extremely concerned that levels of violence were on the rise as a result of the pandemic. Elsewhere in Canada, there were no medical resources on some first nations to test people who appeared symptomatic. Support services, such as community counselling and other programs, were withdrawn, and the mechanisms established to help our people cope with their special needs disappeared.

Between May 1 and May 29, we conducted a survey of 750 indigenous women and gender-diverse people, a poll that was verified by Nanos Research. Their responses suggest that indigenous women are far more worried about domestic violence than they are about the COVID pandemic crisis itself, that they are experiencing more violence since the pandemic began, that the most vulnerable are under the age of 35 or living in the north, that romantic partners are seen as the most common source of the violence and that the financial impacts of the disease have increased the dangers.

Yes, COVID is of significant concern to NWAC and the indigenous women of Canada. Among the recommendations we made when submitting our advice to the government about the creation of a national action plan was a request for the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations to host a virtual international best practice summit to discuss the impacts of COVID on indigenous people in Canada and other countries and to offer practical solutions. We have yet to hear back and are continuing to follow through with the Crown on these negotiations and talks.

We note that in the document "The Impact of COVID-19 on Women", the United Nations says member nations should ensure women's equal representation in all COVID-19 response planning and decision-making, and in its document "The Impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous Peoples", the UN says, among other things, that member nations should provide support to indigenous communities that have imposed lockdowns or restrictions to prevent the spread of the disease.

We too are asking for those supports. We are asking that government reach out to indigenous women who are under greater threats because of COVID and because of the financial hardships that have come with them.

• (1625)

We are asking this committee to pressure the government to take seriously its commitments to end the violence that is taking so many of our women before their time, violence that has become an even greater issue during the pandemic.

Wela'lin. Merci beaucoup. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going to turn it over to Jill Earchy, from the Women's Enterprise Centre.

You have the floor.

Ms. Jill Earchy (Interim Chief Executive Officer, Women's Enterprise Centre): Thank you very much. Good afternoon. It's wonderful to be here.

I'm here as the interim CEO of the Women's Enterprise Centre in B.C., representing the interests of women entrepreneurs who play a critical role in the economic recovery of Canada. Before we discuss how women entrepreneurs have been impacted by COVID-19, it's important to understand the progress we've made to date.

Women entrepreneurs account for 28% of all entrepreneurs in Canada, according to a 2019 BDC study. Prior to COVID-19, it was projected that advancing women's economic empowerment in Canada could add \$150 billion in incremental GDP by 2026, with women's participation in entrepreneurship identified, of course, as a key strategy to achieve this.

Entrepreneurship also provides pathways for addressing inequalities and labour force participation for immigrant women, indigenous women, women in rural and remote communities, and women who require greater flexibility in their working structures, yet as an under-represented group, Canadian women entrepreneurs must overcome several financial, systemic and personal challenges. They earn on average 58% less than male entrepreneurs, access less than 3% of venture capital, receive 14% of loans and own just 48¢ in equity for every dollar male founders own.

There are many reasons for these gaps, many of which you would be familiar with, but they're primarily because the systems that have been created are not designed to be inclusive for all and do not address the different needs of women entrepreneurs.

Some 25 years ago, Western Economic Diversification founded the women's enterprise initiative in each of the four western provinces to address these gaps. These organizations focus on four key areas, including offering loans up to \$150,000, advisory services, skills development and mentoring. Women entrepreneurs assisted by the women's enterprise initiative have demonstrated more growth than unassisted firms in terms of employment and sales, and they stay in business longer and their labour productivity is higher. We know this holistic plan works and the impact is significant.

Since 1995, the Women's Enterprise Centre in B.C. has provided over \$72.8 million in direct and leveraged financing and created over \$2.18 billion in economic activity just in British Columbia, which has helped to create or maintain over 3,000 jobs. We can't lose this momentum.

Of course, a key component of this success is collaboration. In 2010, the Women's Enterprise Organizations of Canada, WEOC, was initiated to bring together organizations from across Canada that support women entrepreneurs to share best practices and to advocate through a collective voice for women business owners, and, as many of you know, in 2018 the Government of Canada launched the women entrepreneurship strategy, with the goal of doubling the number of women-owned businesses by 2025 in Canada. Both the Women's Enterprise Centre and WEOC were recipients of this funding.

We're seeing through this coordinated effort many encouraging shifts. For example, women are improving their financial literacy and access to capital. Between 2007 and 2017, we saw this increase by 20%. More women are exporting. We've seen the share of women entrepreneurs exporting nearly double, from 5.9% to 11.2%. Nearly 40% of women business owners are engaging in at least one type of innovation, and we're seeing shifts in overall growth performance. Again, these results are due to increased awareness, consistent support, improved resources and enhanced collaboration among organizations from coast to coast.

Now we are hit with a new challenge in COVID-19. I stepped into this role at the end of March—interesting timing—just as the impact of this pandemic was truly being realized. I have been familiar with the ecosystem. I served on the board of the Women's Enterprise Centre for eight years and I've been active in the Canadian ecosystem for 20 years in various leadership roles, so I have seen a lot of different things. I'm also the co-founder and co-chair of We For She, an annual conference bringing together business leaders of all genders, along with the next generation of young women in grades 10 to 12, with a focus on the economic advancement of women. I also currently serve on the boards of Sustainable Development Technology Canada, the Forum for Women Entrepreneurs and the Women's Enterprise Organizations of Canada. I just share this to demonstrate this ongoing commitment to advancing gender equity, but of course with a specific focus on women entrepreneurs and creating new models. It's an absolute honour to serve in my current role at this critical time.

- (1630)

With the onset of the pandemic, many entrepreneurs had to close their businesses as a result of health regulations or a lack of customers. Women entrepreneurs were especially hard hit, as they tend

to be in service-related businesses, such as those in retail, accommodation, tourism and food services. Some were able to rapidly adapt to the changing environment, and many, of course, have shifted to working from home. In Canada, 24% of female small business owners have children under the age of 18, so of course the concern is that women are taking on additional household duties, including child care and elder care, and that the gaps outlined earlier in my remarks may widen.

Over the past three months, the Women's Enterprise Centre has risen to the challenge—or should I say opportunity—to provide enhanced support to women entrepreneurs throughout the province of B.C., using our proven model. We've offered increased webinars and business advisory services, and we've seen a 39% increase in the number of one-to-one business advisory appointments and a 202% increase in training participants.

As a development lender, we're able to offer deferred loan payments and interest forgiveness, which 90% of our loan clients accepted. We proactively work with our loan clients based on their specific circumstances, and as a result, our repayment rate over the years has been 94%. This is a model that works for women entrepreneurs, and it will be even more critical as we move forward.

We help entrepreneurs understand their options, create a solid plan for recovery and, currently, navigate the many government programs, including the Canada emergency business account loans of \$40,000, for which only 50% of our loan clients qualify. This is because of three main factors.

First is business structure. We know that women entrepreneurs are more likely to be first-time business owners, operating as solo entrepreneurs or self-employed without employees.

Second is loans. Many of these government relief programs are being offered as loans, which is challenging, given the business structure I just described. They are typically characterized by a weaker balance sheet and are often unable to support additional debt.

Third is risk. Women entrepreneurs are risk-astute, not risk-averse. They prefer different forms of support and advice. Because there is an inherent lack of role models, they benefit from holistic one-on-one supports when accessing funding, as women entrepreneurs want to understand and consider all impacts.

This is why programs offered by the women's enterprise initiative are so essential. This is a time of change and reimagination in creating systems and models that are more inclusive and holistic. As we recognize the longevity of this current period of staged recovery, we're continuing to be proactive by offering interest-only payments for the next six months to provide a much-needed cash runway, to relieve financial stress and to enable business owners time to adapt, plan and be more proactive instead of reactive.

Another example of a new model is a partnership launched last month between the Women's Enterprise Centre and Vancity, one of Canada's largest credit unions, which is based in British Columbia. In consultation with the Women's Enterprise Centre, Vancity launched a new loan product specifically designed for women entrepreneurs, keeping in mind their unique needs. The program combines Vancity's loan with the Women's Enterprise Centre's services as wraparound support.

We launched this at the end of June, and there has been a surge of applications, indicating that there are still gaps that exist. This is also significant, as fewer than 30% of women business owners surveyed last year felt that banks, credit unions and government-funded lenders recognize and respond to their unique goals, wants and needs. We want to change this, one credit union and one financial institution at a time.

Helping entrepreneurs navigate all these programs and resources, adapt business models and manage cash flow while maintaining a positive mindset and juggling increased household duties has been the focus of our dedicated team, and we're seeing this with our colleagues across the country. With that, we'd like to suggest the following recommendations for consideration.

The first is about data collection. We know the importance of this. We'd like to request that financial institutions and investors build diversity and inclusion metrics into the key performance reporting metrics for all divisions and sections of their companies that work with and for women entrepreneurs. We want government to apply a gender and diversity lens across economic development, research and innovation, and support for small businesses, including in the COVID-19 recovery programs. For example, tracking the percentage of women entrepreneurs accessing the Canada emergency business account loans would provide valuable insight and identify key gaps.

A second recommendation, which I know this committee has heard several times, is to create a national child care policy. This would enable women to have personal space to focus on business growth during their child-bearing years.

• (1635)

A short-term solution to consider is even a caregiver grant: offering a grant to women entrepreneurs who have taken on additional caregiving responsibilities, which has resulted in decreased productivity—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Jill. I know you have—

Ms. Jill Earthy: I'm just wrapping up.

The Chair: Great. We just have a few seconds. Thanks.

Ms. Jill Earthy: Okay.

Also, we recommend considering a matching grant or micro-grant initiative, unlocking new capital by offering tax incentives for private investors to invest with a gender and sustainability lens, and of course continuing to deepen support for training and support across the country.

As we rise out of this global crisis, women entrepreneurs represent a critical part of economic recovery, so let's ensure that women entrepreneurs are poised to thrive.

Thank you.

The Chair: Excellent. Great job, especially in your first three months. I hope they're helping you out with those 90 days. If not, we'll write you a letter saying, "She's awesome."

Ms. Jill Earthy: It has not been boring. Thank you very much.

The Chair: What a 90 days.

We're now going to move on to Linda Gavsie, who is with the Universal Learning Institute.

Linda, you have the floor for 10 minutes.

Ms. Linda Gavsie (Senior Vice President, Universal Learning Institute): Thank you. I'm honoured to be a witness for this committee.

I've been with the Universal Learning Institute for 25 years in a variety of roles. For me as a woman, a senior citizen, a full-time employee in the private post-secondary education field and as someone who is severely hearing-impaired, COVID-19 has had a significant impact on my sense of security and well-being and has had the same impact school-wide.

The women at ULI are local and international students, administrative staff and team members, and teachers. The senior team at ULI is female. As senior vice-president and as someone who has owned my own school in the past, I understand the entrepreneurial needs of the workplace. Today I will focus on the experience of our female constituency.

With COVID-19, many women were losing their part-time jobs or having hours cut, thus losing social connections and not always able to meet the technological requirements for studying or working from home. This has led to an assortment of issues for the businesses and for the individuals. The business of ULI lost expected revenue, and the students and staff were challenged to be resilient with all the changes and concerns coming at them at once. What follows are some of the insights from your guidelines.

I'm in the unique position of having designed, managed and experienced the difficult transition from face-to-face learning to online learning. I moved the entire school to work from home, 100%, as the school was required to shelter at home while we navigated this pandemic together. The greatest obstacles for students and staff were technology skills, the availability of appropriate equipment and child care responsibilities. It was a steep learning curve for employees, as they were not hired to teach or work online, and also for students, who did not sign up for online courses.

Classes and streaming were happening for students with and without the appropriate bandwidth, equipment or resources. This proved to be a great emotional stressor for both students and teachers, who struggled with technology and the use of new platforms, as well as the sudden loss of social interaction.

For many women, working and studying from home created conflict and tension. For example, classroom requirements were complicated by children at home needing a home computer for their own schooling, thus competing with the working mom and caregiver for limited computer resources, all at the same time.

Some places are crowded, with housemates requesting use of space or equipment in an interruptive manner. Balancing both home dynamics and the work and school requirements, plus the increase in domestic unpaid work, led to additional obstacles to completion of programs. Unpaid care work has increased with children out of school and with the heightened care needs of older persons, as well as domestic responsibilities. Those living with seniors were worried about spreading COVID-19 to their healthy loved ones. Those with children were worried about their cognitive and personal development if the children did not have the stimulation they needed. Add the loss of social interaction, and the formula for continued resilience is lessened and the potential for frustration is heightened.

The female international students seemed to carry a significant level of burden as their world of connections in Canada is small and their families are separated. Many of our domestic and international stakeholders are single parents, have satellite partners, live in crowded housing, live alone or, in the case of international students improving themselves, have children and family in their home country with less success in containment of COVID-19 than Canada has.

Luckily, in B.C. and Canada, we have many resources. We were able to post and advertise to give the mental health information readily to all and to create internal social and academic circles on Zoom and social media sites that seemed to assist in reducing some pressures and, most of all, in connecting students and staff to each other and creating new communities.

We had to address the needs of women whose power at home, or lack thereof, exacerbated the challenge of studying with a teacher who is driven by curriculum requirements, attendance feeds to regulators and a push to progress.

● (1640)

Many students fell behind due to the distractions at home. This was a hard cost to schools, as extra tutorials and classes were needed to ensure success, an additional expense during a time of declining revenue. This was based on very little new enrolment or withdrawals of expected enrolments—not a great formula for a strong bottom line.

We are grateful that some of the Canadian federal government programs such as CERB and CESB, rental assistance, wage subsidies and other programs have been and are very effective for the life of the business as well as the lives of our female students who lost jobs, financial stability, social security and support systems.

An important additional support was the federal government IR-CC adjustment to allow us to teach international students with student visas online, which allowed the female students the freedom to continue in their path towards a credential, albeit it with a quickly changed methodology. It is hoped that this adjustment will be extended as needed to service local and overseas students as the pandemic cycle continues.

The value added to this policy is the opportunity to maintain revenue in an industry that, in education and at ULI, is a substantially female population in health care and in management. For wave two, the technology part could be easier with assistance for the cost and process of having the right number of computers per family or living situation, and in the school, as well as the right type of Internet bandwidth for classroom streaming, and computers, cameras and microphones.

The Canadian government has been most generous in helping Canadian students this summer. I anticipate it will ease the burden of managing the household as well as redirecting resources to equipment for family needs. Additional individual and business support for technology would be most helpful in the reduction of stress and anxiety with the second wave.

Currently, with the opening of the economy, many students are returning to their part-time jobs. We now know that the burden of financial pressures and social isolation can be handled and will be less frightening should there be a shutdown again. We all recognize the temporary nature a second time around.

The challenge of working or studying from home for a woman is daunting. When the second wave arrives, although parts of the transition will be easier, in some ways it will be a bigger challenge as people suffer from pandemic fatigue.

I see the government offering some credit relief programs such as tax breaks for equipment, as well as pandemic education to maintain the energy to stay safe at home, as well as reinforced education about social distancing, wearing a mask and appropriate pandemic behaviour, including balancing staying on track with every aspect of the lives of women.

A more level playing field between private and public post-secondary institutions is a policy aspect of the experience that could help our students stay on track, such as allowing the many students who qualify to come to Canada if they choose the path of a vocational school. This will include a look at the postgraduate work permit and spousal and family visas to help encourage students who have study visas to complete their studies if their families have an opportunity to come to Canada as well.

We just graduated a class of eight caregivers and 35 postgraduate nurses, all of whom had a variety of the personal challenges listed above. Most of the postgraduate nurses are currently still working, either in their co-op position or as sponsored employees across Canada in the health care field. Their personal journeys and stories are yet to be told as they watch their home countries being ravaged by COVID-19.

● (1645)

The Chair: Ms. Gavsie, if you could just wrap it up, we have to get on to questions.

Ms. Linda Gavsie: I'm sorry. I didn't hear you.

The Chair: We need to get to questions, so if you just want to make a final comment, we will get to questions.

Ms. Linda Gavsie: Okay, I will go down.

The reduction in the workforce is staggering, and we need to find a way to support our students who are in co-ops that need to be delayed and who need to earn a living to pay their rent. I thank the federal government for giving us the support that they have so far, but we need more and our students need more.

I very much appreciate the time for this. I will take questions.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you so much.

What we're going to do now is reduce the questions to five minutes. We will go around five, five, five and five before going on to our next panel. Marc, sorry about that. You are going to have to revise that.

I'm going to start off with Jag Sahota for five minutes.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Thank you, ladies, for your time and presentations, and for the work you are doing with women during these difficult times. I'm going to go to Ms. Whitman.

In your opening comments, you touched on the government announcement in May that they would not meet their June target for the release of an action plan based on the final word from the national inquiry. What was your reaction to that? Governments need to be able to lead and take action during a crisis, especially if the crisis remains ongoing. You need to be able to handle it when you are in government. I am curious to hear your thoughts on that.

● (1650)

Ms. Lorraine Whitman: Thank you very much for the question.

First of all, I would like to mention that I was very disappointed. It was very hurtful for the family members who had opened their hearts and their wounds with the national action plan when they told their stories of their loved ones. That's where the hurt came, because the families who were there thought there was a hope that the government would be able to help them. They had seen the light at the end of the rainbow, but when there was no action plan, they were disappointed. They lost faith in the government because it didn't follow through with an action plan when it said it would have one about a year later. In saying that, we're still working with the families as best we can to uplift them and let them know that we're still working with our minister, the Honourable Carolyn Bennett, so that we can work through it. So, that was difficult.

As well, with the violence that is occurring, I'm not saying that it's going to end today if we had an action plan, because it certainly isn't. There is a lot of history that goes back into it. We had given the Crown some recommendations from a round table that we had with all of the PTMAs across Canada and the territories. If we had just one piece of paper, the government would be able to use that, just as a beginning, a baseline, so that we would be able to start the work in progress.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Thank you.

I will move on to Ms. Earthy.

We know that many women-led businesses such as catering companies, hair and nail salons, and also tutoring services and home health care services have been massively impacted by COVID-19. Many of these businesses use personal chequing accounts and are ineligible for the Canada emergency business account. Should the government allow certain businesses that dedicate personal chequing accounts for their businesses to apply for the CEBA?

Ms. Jill Earthy: Thank you for the question.

Now, I should mention to you, of course, that there is the regional relief and recovery fund loan as well, and some of that has now been extended to sole proprietors. That absolutely has helped, and stage three of the CEBA loan has helped with that. I think it is a consideration. It is certainly a reality for women entrepreneurs that they don't all incorporate and shouldn't necessarily need to.

A big role of the Women's Enterprise Centre and the women's enterprise initiative is to provide that education and support and to ask those questions of the entrepreneurs, to understand their goals, so we can guide them towards the right resources. But I do agree that using personal chequing accounts is a reality and should be considered.

Ms. Jag Sahota: The next question is similar to what I just asked. Many small businesses are unable to access the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program as well, because their landlord refuses to apply for it. Does this challenge have a disproportionate impact on women with small businesses?

Ms. Jill Earthy: We don't have data to confirm this, but I can share an example of one of our loan clients just from today. We were having a conversation. She has an indoor gym for children. She has two locations. One of her landlords at one location is working closely with her and helping her and they are accessing this program, which is wonderful. The other one is not. Her monthly rent is very high, and of course she has no revenue to offset that.

There are still some gaps there. We would love to see a little more encouragement for landlords to access this program. We would like to see more landlords use that program to better support entrepreneurs, and we are certainly seeing many of our women entrepreneurs being challenged by that.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to move over to Marc Serré. You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My thanks to the witnesses for giving us their ideas today. This subject is very important in the context of the economic recovery from the current pandemic.

My first question goes to Jill Earthy.

[*English*]

Jill, you talked about women entrepreneurs. I just want to share this with the committee. With Covergalls Workwear, Alicia Woods from Sudbury, northern Ontario, has done a lot of work adapting clothing for women in the mining industry, to start off. Now she's trying to get more in the oil sands. She has adapted a lot of the PPE for women. I encourage you to look up Covergalls Workwear and all the work she's doing all across the country.

You mentioned financing. It's really important. You mentioned the RDAs, Western Diversification and the 2018 program that put dollars for developing women entrepreneurship. I don't know your opinion of BDC, but from what I see here, it has been, I would say, neglectful of rural, of women, of resource-based companies. It hasn't really supported them, so I want to get your sense of that.

During this pandemic, should the federal government expand the women entrepreneurship that was set up in 2018? Would that be appropriate? We're looking at recommendations here for the fall.

Also, you mentioned the fact that many of the businesses that are women-led cannot access current programs. The RDAs' relief fund

was put in place just a few weeks ago to address this. Do you think we should be expanding that in the fall?

Ms. Jill Earthy: Thank you. I think I heard three questions there.

First of all, to answer your question around BDC, that is a complex question. I will speak of my experience with the Women's Enterprise Centre of B.C. We do partner with BDC. For example, our loan program is up to \$150,000, and we partner with BDC to add an additional \$100,000. Are there gaps? Yes. Can there be improvements? Always. That's a different conversation.

With regard to the additional support in programs, under the women entrepreneurship strategy and the ecosystem funding, there is absolutely an opportunity to enhance support there, to offer the additional training and support, financial literacy and guidance that's so important, along with the funding. I think that is really the key piece. It's not just the funding; it's the wraparound support that's so important. Now, we are optimistic that there will be additional funding coming soon.

The other key piece I should mention is that the organizations that are supporting women entrepreneurs right across the country are collaborating. We're connecting. We're looking at ways to leverage this funding and resources, to share best practices. The impact that any additional funding would have would be very significant.

Mr. Marc Serré: Good.

You also mentioned data collection. Would you be able to provide the committee with some more detailed reporting of specific items that you feel would be beneficial for Statistics Canada or other federal government departments to collect data on?

Ms. Jill Earthy: Yes, again I can share an example. The recent partnership with Vancity came out of a conversation that we were having internally. We were curious to know what percentage of women entrepreneurs were accessing the CEBA funding; that's the \$40,000 loan fund. We had our intuition around that, and some of that has been addressed in this conversation. We approached a couple of financial institutions, and they are not tracking that. Certainly, gender is one of these, as well as phase of business, type of business, etc. Some of those things are being tracked, but we really need to dive deeper into the demographics.

Certainly, you indicated, too, the need to ensure support for rural entrepreneurs and rural communities. That's another critical piece.

I do have a list I'd be happy to share as a follow-on. We will be submitting a brief, which will include the recommendations and more specifics.

Mr. Marc Serré: I have 30 seconds before the chair mentions anything, so thank you, Chair, for allowing me to continue.

Ms. Earthy, can you just expand on the caregiver credit you talked about? It's really important for caregivers.

Ms. Jill Earthy: As I indicated, a caregiver is with children or elder family members. I indicated the percentage: 24% of women entrepreneurs in Canada have children at home under the age of 18. That's a lot of additional juggling that has to occur. We're seeing a number of women entrepreneurs having to choose family over building their business and continuing to have that business grow and thrive.

The caregiver grant would provide much-needed support, either for child care support or elder care support, or to hire assistance for the business. Ultimately, it would be flexible, to offer some different options to increase productivity.

• (1700)

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much.

We're now going to Andréanne, for five minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you.

My questions first go to Ms. Whitman.

June 3 marked the first anniversary of the release of the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. You expressed your disappointment, which we can well understand.

Could you tell us of any specific ideas that, in your opinion, could have been implemented in the last year to respond to the report and provide assistance to indigenous women and girls. I would also add the potential for a second wave of the pandemic, that we have to take into account.

[English]

Ms. Lorraine Whitman: First of all, if we did have the national action plan, which was supposed to happen... For nine months, the government could have reached out to our national organization. We submitted some suggestions and comments about how to work together and what's happening with the violence that's occurring with our women, as well as about some of the 231 calls for justice.

Another area we mentioned, under call for justice 7.1, was health and wellness. We are soon going to be opening a resiliency centre. This centre is a lodge that will be implemented by our elders [Technical difficulty—Editor] to help our women who have had violence in the past or who are still living with violence. It will help them with their work and their capacity.

We should support resiliency centres. We would like them to be in each of the provinces and territories. Dollars should be made available so that we can put this in motion. We have one that will

soon be opening in Quebec. We have another one in New Brunswick that we have been funded for. We have another one in Nova Scotia, which is being worked on, and another one in Saskatchewan. If we could have the government's support and dollars to continue, this would certainly be a good step [Technical difficulty—Editor] women.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: You also brought up the issue of violence. Attention has been paid to the help for women who are victims of violence, but there has perhaps been less mention of indigenous women during this pandemic. This brings up the whole issue of available resources.

How can we encourage or help women to find resources that will provide them with assistance during the pandemic? Because of the lockdown, a lot of resources designed to help them have been cut off.

How can we improve the access to resources in preparation for second wave?

[English]

Ms. Lorraine Whitman: First of all, with this resiliency lodge, four elders answer a 1-800 number that people are able to phone in to, just to know there's someone else on the other end. As the information comes in, we have a navigator who is able to, in turn, take the information from the elders to give more support to the women, girls and gender-diverse people who call so that they would be able to meet the resources in their area to help them. If there's a shelter they can go to, we can book [Technical difficulty—Editor]. It's just a voice at the other end of the line, as opposed to an answering machine. It gives the heart and opens up that [Technical difficulty—Editor] of the cultural component that we miss because of COVID and the isolation.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: My next question is for you, Ms. Earthy.

As you mentioned, programs really must be tailored to women entrepreneurs. Basically, to provide them with more help, we need tax incentives tailored to their situation. You talked about credit. Perhaps it should be more focused on part-time work. There is also the whole matter of networking and better financial guidance. In short, that is really how we can create a genuine program of female entrepreneurship.

• (1705)

[English]

Ms. Jill Earthy: I would also add that it's the networking, it's the access to capital and it's absolutely the education and training and ongoing support. We see the success that we have through the holistic model of the women's enterprise initiative, because we offer one-on-one business advisory support, peer support and access to additional education and training, as needed. It's multi-faceted, and it is all of those pieces that help women entrepreneurs the most.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much.

We'll now move to Lindsay for five minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you.

Ms. Whitman, I too was incredibly disappointed in the delayed response to the MMIWG report. I think action now on the 231 calls for justice is really key. Recently, the Native Women's Association published a report card on the government's follow-up to the final report. In that report card, you gave a failing grade to the government's response, including delivering on the right to culture, right to health, right to security and right to justice. Could you please elaborate for this committee on the specifics of that report card?

Ms. Lorraine Whitman: First of all, there is the cultural component as we defend and represent our first nation, Métis and Inuit women, making sure the cultural component is there so that they're in a comfort zone where they're able to get the help. That's with the shelters as well. There are only a few indigenous shelters across Canada. Many of our women will not go to a non-indigenous shelter. The people there don't know their culture or their history, so they would not attempt to go there. The shelters are certainly well endowed to be able to help the women, but there's no cultural component for the indigenous.

With the health component, we're noticing more of the violence. We're noticing more with the mental health. With COVID we've noticed more of an increase because of the violence. People are isolated. They're in the same home as the perpetrator, the abuser. They're also unable to get the help they need because the offices are closed down, or they may be from outside the community. There are a lot of gaps. Even though there have been dollars for off reserve, some of those dollars haven't gone to the indigenous women and their children.

With regard to security, we just noticed, a day after the national inquiry, Chantel Moore in New Brunswick being shot by a police officer five times. When it comes to security, I think there could have been a better way. We can always say "if this" or "if that", but I do know that if they'd had the means to track or have a record of elders in the community, of different knowledge-keepers, they could have called upon them to help the indigenous lady. They may have been able to de-escalate some of the events. So if we are able to have that in the line of security....

With regard to justice, we're seeing more of our women, our marginalized group of men and women, who are in prisons and shouldn't be there. With COVID, in order for them to be able to be protected, they were going into a cell that was for those who'd done something bad, but they hadn't done anything bad. It was for their protection, when in fact it wasn't. Again, it demoralized women because of the situation they were in. We were supposed to be there to protect the women, but we were putting them in isolation cells. Those are the parts with regard to justice.

So no, we haven't seen many improvements. We're working on them. I'm hoping that with partnerships continuing we will be able to meet the needs of vulnerable women, girls and our gender-diverse communities, which again helps our communities as a whole.

Wela'lin for the question. Thank you.

• (1710)

The Chair: You have 45 more seconds, Lindsay.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Okay.

I think we're seeing a movement into a lot of the black lives matter and against anti-black racism and anti-indigenous racism and violence. We're seeing a movement toward more of the mental health focus, housing supports, and that sort of thing. I'm wondering if you could talk briefly about that movement away from a focus on hard-core policing, or recognizing that there is systemic racism within our police forces, and how that impacts the indigenous community and women as well.

The Chair: Ms. Whitman, before you get started—

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Super fast.

The Chair: You need to be super fast. We have about 20 seconds, because that was a 45-second question.

Ms. Lorraine Whitman: Do you still want me to answer that? Okay.

Yes, [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] racism and discrimination, we're noticing that. I have spoken to Commissioner Lucki. We are working together and hoping that there will be some changes. We have given her recommendations.

We also gave it to the media, and that is to be able to have a camera on the police officers so that in an investigation that occurs we then know from the footage that there are no gaps or guessing at pieces of the puzzle.

Again, there's the cultural component, which is that we would have an elder who would be available or a database that they would be able to use in the area of the situation with people with mental health...as well as stop to kill, you know, shoot to kill, so we are working—

The Chair: Thank you so much. I know that was such an important answer.

On behalf of the committee, I would really like to thank Lorraine, Jill and Linda for coming today, providing us their briefings and answering our questions.

We are going to suspend for a couple of minutes to let the next panel turn over, and we'll reconvene very shortly.

• (1710)

(Pause)

• (1720)

The Chair: We're going to reconvene. This is our final hour of witnesses we're going to hear from today.

Today on this study we have Anita Khanna, who is the national director of public policy and government relations for the United Way; Rhonda Barnett, president and COO of Avit Manufacturing and chair of the advanced manufacturing economic strategy table; and Armine Yalnizyan, economist and Atkinson fellow on the future of workers.

I welcome all of you.

We're going to turn it over to Anita for 10 minutes.

Ms. Anita Khanna (National Director, Public Policy and Government Relations, United Way Centraide Canada): Wonderful. Thank you.

I'd like to acknowledge that I'm speaking from the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe Nation and to thank the committee for the important opportunity to contribute to the study.

I'm Anita Khanna. I'm the national director of public policy and government relations at United Way Centraide Canada.

On behalf of the United Way Centraide network, I'd like to thank the federal government, MPs and civil servants for their critical and important work to support Canadians through this pandemic. I'd also like to recognize the service of essential workers on the front lines of this pandemic: cleaners, child care workers, migrant workers, grocery store staff, nurses, PSWs, doctors and staff in domestic violence and homelessness shelters.

The United Way Centraide network is second only to government in funding for vital community services focused on eliminating poverty and removing barriers to social inclusion for vulnerable people. Serving all regions of Canada, United Way Centraide supports over 3,400 community organizations and 5,600 programs, including direct funding of over \$11 million for sexual and domestic violence services that reach 122,000 people annually.

United Way Centraide Canada and our network have been on the front lines since this pandemic broke in Canada, and our work has been multi-faceted. We are leading and supporting community action tables and making direct investments to support basic needs and life essentials, access to food and delivery for isolated families and seniors, support for homeless people and support to sustain essential front-line community services. We've also been active in providing advice to governments about the needs of community members and of the charitable sector, which so many are relying on now and will rely on in the future. We've also been brokering new partnerships and coordinating sector-wide responses, like bulk purchasing and coordination of PPE and food.

Collectively to date, our network has raised over \$30 million to invest in local emergency community supports across the country. We are also very honoured to be serving as a delivery partner for critical federal investments to address urgent needs arising from COVID. We are ensuring that funding from the new horizons for seniors program and a portion of the emergency community support fund are being deployed to community agencies serving people in extremely vulnerable circumstances.

Our on-the-ground experience affirms that the pandemic has impacted women, children, seniors, black and indigenous people, people of colour, precarious workers and people with disabilities,

among others who are marginalized the hardest. Women with intersecting identities—racialized, gender-diverse, disabled—and those who are mothers are more likely to be precariously employed, to earn less in the labour market or to work in risky conditions. As PSWs and grocery store workers, they are at greater risk of infection due to the lack of PPE and their travel to and from work on public transit. They also face potential exposure at work and on their way to work and the risk of bringing the infection home.

Whether a woman is managing her household, laid off or performing essential duties, she is much more likely to be working around the clock, caregiving for elders and children, and this has only been amplified with day cares and schools closed. Women's heavy labour burden also involves going into stores to purchase food, home-schooling supplies, medication and other essentials for their families, again placing them at risk of infection.

Social distancing and isolation have worsened gender-based violence. Women who are in abusive relationships are more at risk, while close living conditions, economic hardship, family stress and other pressures make women even more vulnerable in situations that could become abusive. Many women feel they have no choice but to stay in these abusive households because of the risk of staying in shelters with close quarters and exposure to infection. This has contributed to an increase in invisible homelessness in our country.

With these concerning trends, we need to ensure that COVID-19 does not move women's economic and social gains backwards. The threats to advancing gender equality, expanding workforce participation and building Canada's economy are just too great.

Our deployment of community funding across the country has highlighted that many social issues and inequalities have deepened and have become even more complex due to the pandemic. We've seen the additional vulnerability of low-income families, a high demand for food and mental health support, and consistently an increase in violence against women.

United Way Centraide has deployed funding to serve women. Through the new horizons for seniors program funding, over 930 programs received support, and 60% of those targeted women seniors.

- (1725)

Through the emergency community support fund, United Way Centraide has so far supported 116 programs that serve women and girls as a primary population, and another 280 that serve women and girls as secondary populations. Over \$3 million has been granted to support programming targeting women and girls so far, and funding processes are still very much under way.

The federal government has implemented critical policies and programs to help Canadians keep safe. These include the CERB, funding for sexual assault and domestic violence programs, increasing funding for Reaching Home, and much more. This is work that should be commended.

We can also improve upon the programs and implement crucial additional ones that will further support women. Key elements of preparing for the potential second wave, achieving the she-covery that Armine Yalnizyan has written about, and building Canada back better demand action on a national child care program, prioritization of access to affordable housing and reduced risk of homelessness, improving access to good jobs and building more income security, as well as a stronger charitable sector that is there to serve women and provide them with good, stable jobs.

The pandemic has made it clear that our economy cannot function without child care. It is time to act on a national child care strategy that ensures affordable access to high-quality spaces. Women and their families cannot recover without investment in a reliable system of child care that compensates its majority-women workforce like the essential economic engine they truly are.

COVID-19 has also shown us that action to end homelessness and enable access to safe, affordable housing needs to be further prioritized. With high numbers of women in poverty who have mental health challenges or who are in abusive situations struggling to find and maintain housing, systemic barriers are clearly at play. We urge the federal government to take accelerated action on ending homelessness, to bolster supports for homeless women and gender-diverse people, and to appoint a federal housing advocate and council in accordance with federal right to housing legislation.

The job losses due to COVID-19 have been significantly higher for women, as the service, hospitality and retail sectors have been hardest hit and heavily challenged to recover. This will in turn hurt our economy, as women spend much of their earnings in local community. A program of good, stable jobs paying livable wages needs to be prioritized, and women need to have access to PPE in these settings as well. And of course, child care will be essential to their returning to work and bolstering our economy. This is also the case when it comes to income benefit programs that boost household incomes to ensure that no one is left behind, whether they are working or not.

It's also essential for Canada to continue its work collectively on anti-racism and building relationships with organizations of people of colour. It's a key community solution to get us through the pandemic and meet the needs of those who are most vulnerable. It's something that everyone should be doing at this time, and it is more important than ever. We have to continue the work of truth and reconciliation and confronting anti-black racism and sexism, or risk moving backwards on those fronts as well.

Finally, I'll speak about not-for-profit and charitable sector stabilization. Action here is critical, given how many women are served by and serve in our sector. They make up 75% to 80% of our workforce. As a funder of the community sector, United Way Centraide Canada knows that organizations working with women and children are under significant strain, while working to ensure they continue to offer vital services.

The pandemic has created additional cost to organizations, which have to rapidly alter their models to meet public health requirements on their own reduced capacity, especially at shelters. There is a huge concern out there around the financial viability of these organizations, given the loss of key spring and summer fundraising events like golf tournaments, galas and events that have had to be cancelled. In the context of already limited core funding for women's organizations, COVID-19 is a threat to the existence of organizations that are focused on gender equity.

There is an urgent need to ensure that the charitable and not-for-profit sector and its workforce are stabilized. Without this, the sector cannot support community members during a second wave or beyond. Stabilizing this sector and building it back better would help promote gender equality. We have a highly feminized workforce, and we need to ensure that they can stay in the workforce, especially with variations in school and child care programs across this country.

- (1730)

We know that many staff across organizations are stressed. They have to deliver more services in different and more costly ways to people in more need than ever before. This leads to big concerns about the mental health of their staff and teams, who are suffering vicarious trauma and exhaustion as they address the hunger, the violence and the mental health needs within their communities. Many staff are concerned about the financial viability of their organizations and how to continue their agency operations, even as they make tough choices and have layoffs.

Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to speak on this important topic. As leaders in evidence-based investments for lasting social impact, our members are deeply committed to building strong, resilient communities in collaboration with local community members, all levels of government, business and labour partners, and our individual donors through COVID-19 and beyond.

• (1735)

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much, Anita.

We're now going to move over to Rhonda Barnet.

You have the floor for 10 minutes.

Ms. Rhonda Barnet (President and Chief Operating Officer, Avit Manufacturing): Thank you. I have been on this computer on Zoom and Teams all day with the government. Again, I'm Rhonda Barnet, president and COO of Avit Manufacturing in Peterborough.

I was the first female chair in Canada's history of Canada's largest trade association, Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, from 2016 through to 2018. With the full support of the sector and the national board, I started women in manufacturing, which is what I want to talk to you about today.

I've been selected to be one of the nine Canadians working with Monique Leroux on the industry strategy council to help government. It's an industry-led strategy to advise government on nine critical sectors to grow the economy. I've been on that meeting all day today with three ministers, constantly carrying the torch of gender equality and building a gender-balanced economy and recovery as we go into the next phase.

I want to talk to you a little bit about the background of what brought women in manufacturing forward, what the federal government has done, the difference we made, and then the problems that COVID has caused, the recovery and how we build out that gender-balanced recovery. Manufacturing is a sector where the wage gap between men and women is very negligible, especially in entry-level jobs, and we're working very hard to shift to that. There's a real opportunity to engage more women in this sector and elevate them in the economy.

I would like to give you a bit of background. Manufacturing is one of the three engines of the Canadian economy: manufacturing, mining and agriculture. We need to make things, grow things and develop things, and add value to them to make money. We build a service economy on that. It's a very important sector in the Canadian economy. We represent 10% of employment, which is about 1.8 million jobs, as well as 10% of GDP, which is \$620 billion in Canada. For every direct job in manufacturing, up to three other jobs are created in the economy.

We have a great opportunity as we recover to build out this sector, engage more women and have a more gender-balanced economy. Manufacturing is vitally important to the economy. Women are vitally important to the success of the sector.

Historically, employment numbers in manufacturing for women were grossly under-represented. The last 30 years the dial hasn't changed. Of the gross number of jobs, out of the 1.8 million jobs, we are looking at about 460,000 jobs that women held in the sector.

When I came on in 2016, we wanted to make a difference.

We worked together with Minister Monsef and Women and Gender Equality to set up a program and move the dial. We needed the talent to grow our sector. Women were grossly under-represented. We put in a bunch of programs. You can look at our website, womeninmanufacturing.ca. It's world class. I travel the world talking

about what we're doing in Canada. A lot of countries are starting to learn from us.

We set these programs together. We received a grant of almost half a million dollars over three years to put the program in place. We have things like free diversity tool kits that apply to male-dominated industries. There are some great tools there; please go and see those. There are tons of tools and programming.

A year and a half through the program, we were really making a difference. We call this program "We can do it"; it's a modern-day Rosie the Riveter. Our goal was to add 100,000 net new jobs for women in our sector over five years. In one and a half years, we added almost 55,000 net new jobs for women in the sector, as of February from Statistics Canada. We didn't even get a chance to celebrate that. We passed our halfway mark in just a year and half. The share of jobs held by women increased from 28% to 29.6% of the total jobs in manufacturing. It was a huge win for the sector, for women and for Canada. Then March happened and COVID happened.

I want to talk to you about that. I want to talk to you about the she-session. I was urged today on the council to give some strong data points. Today I am here to give you the data, to let you know just how bad it is and how much work we need to do to double down. We have the tools. We have the government, policies and people to engage women in the economy. We have to double down and do more of that because of what happened.

• (1740)

In April, manufacturing lost just over 300,000 jobs compared with February. Women were 29% of the labour force, but they lost 38% of the jobs, whereas men, who had held 70% of the jobs, lost 62% of the jobs. Job losses for women were negatively disproportionate to their share of jobs in the sector. Even more concerning than that, the sector is rallying, which is good. There's recovery. There's rehiring going on. In May the sector recovered 79,100 jobs. The June data will be released, I think, this Friday. Both men and women saw some partial rebounding, obviously, through these numbers, but men were called back in much greater numbers.

I had our statistician do a deep dive on this because I wanted to share some of this with you. Women earned only 15% of the recovered jobs in the sector. We lost more jobs and we're recovering less. The gap is widening. It's a serious problem. Men recovered 85% of the jobs. When we looked at it—I'm going to break it down for you—it was men who had children who were over the age of 18. It was even men outside of the sector who got brought back in. Your points around child care are well taken, and I have some other thoughts on that.

My hypothesis to this problem that I want to share with you today is that women have seen greater job losses and fewer recovered jobs, possibly on a voluntary basis. In our sector, women might have put their hands up because they had to out of a direct need to care for children and aging parents. I'm sure that's something you've been talking about all day.

To verify this, I looked at the multi-use microdata files, PUMF, and across tabulated age of youngest child in the home and the sex of the worker—so looking at the gender of the worker and the youngest kid in the homes—just to see what impact child care did have. As expected, women in households whose youngest child was less than six years old or between six and 12 years old, which were the categories, suffered the biggest job losses, 33,000 job losses. Men in households with the youngest child less than six also saw significant job losses, 18,000 job losses. In fact, both men and women with young school-age or preschool children have suffered a lot of layoffs in our sector.

What we've heard is that many parents, especially women, were hanging on by a thread to maintain employment and care for their children. It's been a very serious issue. We're predominantly production workers. We do have other avenues where people can work from home or work part shifts, etc., but there's a very serious issue here.

Again, the interesting statistic is that men in households whose youngest child was between 18 and 24 years old have seen their employment rise over the pandemic by 13%. That category actually had increases, not decreases, in job levels in our sector. That means that, when the sector went back to the labour market to add capacity in May, net new jobs were awarded to men, basically, with adult children, which is not a surprise. We needed labour. Those are the people who could be recalled, maybe, from disrupted sectors.

The data does suggest that caring for children is a serious factor to consider as we look at plans to rebuild the economy through growth in jobs, especially. I'm talking specifically in my own sector, in manufacturing.

What are the next steps and recommendations from my seat? Manufacturing is absolutely a growth opportunity for the economy. We were already set in a plan to double the output of manufacturing, and we were desperate to find workers. We're going to get back there, and we want to double down and work with the CME women in manufacturing programs. They were working. We had moved the dial. It was so exciting. We gained 55,000 jobs, but we lost 100,000 jobs overnight, so we're way behind.

Now we have to double down and really re-engage women back into the economy. We need to ensure that we engage women in all

sectors and in our sector to prepandemic levels. That's a very serious issue.

● (1745)

The Chair: Rhonda, we're just coming to the end of your remarks. Please take about 10 seconds to give us your final comment, so that we can move to our next witness. Thank you.

Ms. Rhonda Barnett: Sure.

One of my suggestions would be to leverage.... Child care's a big problem. What about programs like work sharing or expanded CEWS? We need to give women tools to be engaged partially in the economy and maintain adherence to an employer, so that we can get them through this part, where child care and the access to education is so uncertain.

I'm thinking, in light of not having the time to deal with child care just yet, we need other levers to get women partially back to work.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you so much, Rhonda.

We're going to move on to our final witness of the day. Armine is an economist and the Atkinson fellow on the future of workers.

You have the floor for 10 minutes, Armine.

Ms. Armine Yalnizyan (Economist and Atkinson Fellow on the Future of Workers, As an Individual): Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you to everybody who has been spending all day listening to witnesses.

I know it's hot and I know it's the middle of the summer, and I know that we're all really struggling. I thank you very much for your time and the invitation to bear witness to this august committee. I hope you can change the world because we need you to do that.

A month ago, the Bank of Canada told us that the worst could soon be over for the economy—great news. Of course, the pace of rebound and getting back to so-called normal is far from certain. For Canadian workers, recovery just can't come soon enough, as both Anita and Rhonda have said.

In April's labour force survey, StatsCan said that more than a third—36.7%—of the potential labour force did not work or worked less than half of their usual hours. May, a month ago, showed that we had more of a “he-covery” than a “she-covery”, that is, more men returning to work than women. On Friday, when the next labour force stats come out, let us hope that the stories we are all hearing don't translate to more women simply giving up and dropping out of the labour force because they just can't juggle everything and do child care and home-schooling too.

The trends are deeply problematic for households and for the potential of the economy. This isn't a feminist issue. This is a macro-economic issue. That's because household spending accounted for over 56% of GDP before the pandemic struck. It's been a growing driver of GDP for some time because we've been exporting less and businesses have been investing less, which leaves only the household sector and government actions to continue to help GDP grow.

Household purchasing power propels the Canadian economy, and women's incomes are critical to maintaining household purchasing power. Women have been asked to pull more weight over the last few decades. By around a decade ago, we made up half the employed workforce. Women's incomes are really critical to maintaining household purchasing power, but we have a lot of women who were deemed non-essential during the shutdown, the majority of whom were women who are going to find their way back to being rehired blocked because the limiting factor for women's return to work is child care. Mathematically speaking, it is simply impossible for us to get to recovery, to regain GDP or the number of jobs, without women coming back fully able to return to work.

Simply put—sing it with me now, because this is the smash summer hit of 2020—there will be no recovery without a she-covery and no she-covery without child care. Let me be really clear. If we don't do this, we are actually voting to move towards economic depression—and not a recession but a prolonged contraction of GDP—by policy design. You can't turn around to your colleagues in any of your parties and say that you didn't know, because I've just told you, and there is no way, mathematically, that it can happen differently.

On the acceleration of shovel-ready infrastructure, sure, that will help speed recovery. That's fantastic, but mathematically you cannot get growth in primarily male-dominated jobs to offset the number of jobs lost by women. Furthermore, you can repair all the critical physical infrastructure you want, but if you're just standing by and doing nothing about the loss of critical social infrastructure, you are not doing your job, and that is exactly what we are poised to do.

User fees for child care represent the second-biggest cost for young families, second only to housing expenditures. Many families who lost their incomes forfeited their spots in child care facilities because of the high cost for simply holding onto something that they weren't using. Child care costs will undoubtedly also rise because of the new requirements for physical distancing, dramatically increasing staff-to-child ratios and adding new fixed costs for space, PPE and cleaning.

We don't know what share of our ecosystem of child care, which in Canada is operated through the public system and through the

private not-for-profit and private for-profit providers, is going to shutter in the wake of the pandemic, because we don't measure it. In the United States, they've estimated that half of their ecosystem of child care is at risk. In other words, four and a half million spaces out of nine million spaces are about to shutter. It would cost \$9.6 billion every month just to hang on to the capacity they have. Also, of course, the fewer the spaces, the less the ability for women to return to work even when they have a job.

• (1750)

The irony, my friends, is that subsidized child care literally pays for itself. A study by noted Quebec economist Pierre Fortin showed, in 2008, that for each \$100 of day care subsidy paid out by the Quebec government, the Quebec government generated a return of \$104 for itself and a windfall of \$43 for the federal government, which didn't put in one thin dime. It literally paid for itself.

Child care can indeed play a threefold role in recovery. Beyond simply facilitating women's return to work and indeed being a source of employment, the decision to ensure that child care is affordable and that high-quality early learning is accessible to all families is going to maximize the future of the next generation of Canadian children, who in turn will be asked to lift up people too old, too young and too sick to work. That would lower public spending and increase revenues for governments and society. It pays for itself in the short term and in the long term.

We may choose not to act, as the federal government—or not—but we will reap what we sow. The U.S. data provocatively shows the return on investment on spending on child care. Subsidized, high-quality early learning education for kids who are at risk returns between four dollars and \$8.75 on each dollar invested in that type of child care. It's not a warehouse to make sure mommy can go to work, but a system that is targeted to neighbourhoods where kids are more at risk of entering school not learning ready and of not being supported when they are in school to continue to learn.

The impact also doesn't end with preschoolers. Canadian data, our own evaluation, shows that spending on pathways to education, which has been supported by both Liberal and Conservative governments but never made the norm, has resulted in a net benefit of over \$2,000 for governments over and above what they spent per student in the program, and almost \$5,500 for individual students. It's a winner.

Why aren't we doing this? What is the resistance to this? We are literally leaving money on the table by not using the opportunity that we have right now to improve our social infrastructure. By rolling out accelerated initiatives in our biggest cities first, which have the biggest concentrations of children and the highest concentrations of poverty, we could maximize our collective potential and our individual potential.

Across society and per person, we could improve our future by investing in child care. Getting everyone learning ready and learning supported as they age has to be a 21st-century requirement because the population is aging. As a shrinking working-age cohort is asked to do more for growing numbers of people who are too old, too young and too sick to work, we can't afford to discount the skills development of anybody. This means the supply of high-quality early learning child care should not be left to market forces to decide what is our choice, but rather integrated with the public education system because it is a public good that is undersupplied by markets chronically.

I believe that, given the circumstances, this requires a national approach and a federal role—and I get that it's controversial. Why would you put the feds in charge of child care or having any role in child care when it falls, constitutionally, into the provincial jurisdiction?

I have an answer for you. It's because child care is more costly to operate safely in the post-pandemic world, because provinces and cities are cash-strapped, because the federal government provides funding also for health care and post-secondary education and runs EI, and because even if we don't raise taxes to pay for it immediately due to the post-pandemic fiscal pressures, debt by the federal government is the least risky and the lowest cost of any debt held by any economic agent in society: households, businesses, municipalities and provincial governments. We would be crazy not to do this, even if it required borrowing to do it.

I would be remiss not to mention the number of recent immigrants and migrant workers who have been made sicker and even died because of the pandemic and inadequate provisions for safe reopening. We need—

• (1755)

The Chair: Armine, we have only about 20 seconds left for your comments.

Ms. Armine Yalnizyan: Okay. Thank you.

I will say, in closing, the pandemic has revealed that the caring economy—health care, elder care, child care—is a vital underpinning to the essential economy. You need a plan. If you had 25% or half of your roads and bridges at risk of collapse, this government would have a plan to fix that. What's the plan for child care? We know that this is as critical for infrastructure as it is for anything else, and it is an economic imperative, not a feminist imperative.

Thank you very much for your time and your consideration. I look forward to our conversation.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you so much.

We're going to start off our rounds of questioning with five minutes each. We're going to start off with Raquel.

Raquel, you have the floor for five.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Chair. I just want to say thank you for doing such an amazing job today. It was a long haul for everyone.

I have a few questions for Anita from United Way, specifically in the Manitoba context.

Anita, I'm a member of Parliament from Manitoba. I believe the United Way serves over 5,000 communities, with 88 offices. How many employees in total do you have? How many in Manitoba, specifically?

Ms. Anita Khanna: Thank you for the question.

We serve over 5,000 communities. We fund over 3,400 community organizations and 5,600 vital community programs. We have 79 members, just to be clear on that as well, not 88.

In terms of the specifics around the number of employees, I'm sorry. I don't have that figure in front of me. I'm happy to follow up with you.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: That would be great. I would really appreciate that. I've been to the Winnipeg office. It's a lovely office. The people there are just phenomenal.

In a former life I got to take a tour. I greatly appreciate the work that your organization does in Manitoba.

I want to ask you about the government's Canada emergency community support fund, the \$350 million in total given to several different large-scale charitable organizations in Canada. How much funding in total did United Way Canada receive from this fund?

Ms. Anita Khanna: Thank you for that question as well. I'll say that it's one that I anticipated.

Given that we're holding a contribution agreement with the federal government, it is actually theirs to disclose in terms of the figure of distribution. I'm not able to disclose that figure.

• (1800)

Ms. Raquel Dancho: That's no problem. I hope they are forthcoming, then, with that.

The reason I asked is that, as far as I'm aware, Manitoba has only received \$2.6 million from this fund, which went to United Way Winnipeg. I think it was distributed through The Winnipeg Foundation. My concern is that Manitoba represents 3.5% of Canada's population, but this portion of funding from the Canada emergency community support fund is less than 1%.

I'm just wondering, with all the funding that you may have had for your national organization, if you would consider perhaps moving the proportional amount of funding to Manitoba, so we get proportionally what we need. Could you look into that and maybe commit to considering it?

Ms. Anita Khanna: I can answer that question more directly.

The portion of funding that we received from the emergency community support fund has been distributed provincially, based on population, actually. The proportional amount United Way received in Manitoba would follow that same logic. It's the same across the country.

You mentioned both of the community foundations, I believe, as well as United Way. We have two separate pockets of money, just to be clear on that.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Okay.

How much in total has Manitoba received?

Ms. Anita Khanna: I don't know the answer to that question, unfortunately, given that I don't know what the allocations were to the other intermediaries. I know that our distribution through United Way was based on two factors: One was the population; the second was the consideration of need. If they were a highly rural community where it's more difficult to meet needs, we would have topped up, in a sense, funding allocations so that the money could make more of a difference.

We're fortunate in Manitoba that we have United Way Winnipeg and other United Ways that are able to serve beyond their traditional catchment areas in order to get into some of the more vulnerable communities, and more rural communities as well. I'll say there was a high demand for funding from the Winnipeg office, as you might have heard.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Absolutely.

Particularly with our senior population, I know the United Way received the \$9 million from the federal government to support vulnerable seniors.

Do you know how much of that specifically came to Manitoba?

Ms. Anita Khanna: Again, it would have been proportional to population. I should follow up with you. I can give you the exact figures on that. That would be no problem.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Yes, perhaps you could. An email would be great, just encompassing what Manitoba got. We often have to punch above our weight to get noticed on the federal stage. I'm just doing my due diligence on that.

I have one more question. United Way has a vast network in Canada with thousands of employees and a great reputation as a leader in the charitable sector.

I'm just curious. Did the federal government approach United Way about administering the Canada student service grant? Were you considered at all for that?

Ms. Anita Khanna: I'm not aware of anything related to that.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Okay. I'm just surprised, given that you have such a great reputation and given the capacity in your national network. Now that the WE Charity has pulled out, maybe they'll approach you.

That's all the time I have, I think. Thank you very much, Anita.

Thanks, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll now move over to Salma.

Salma, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair, for an amazing job today.

Thank you to all the witnesses for their important input as we try to navigate through this pandemic.

My first question is for Ms. Khanna. Thank you for all that you are doing at United Way. I represent the riding of Scarborough Centre, which is home to many immigrant women. I know the challenges they face every day, and now with this pandemic those have escalated for many of them. Have you worked to ensure that the unique challenges faced by immigrant women and women of colour are recognized and addressed by the projects that your organization has funded?

If you can, provide some details about what those challenges are and what you have done through United Way to make sure those challenges are addressed.

Ms. Anita Khanna: Certainly. Thank you for the question.

We're very happy to report that allocations in the greater Toronto area have been made through the emergency community support fund. There has been a really strong emphasis in the greater Toronto area, as well as across the country, on implementing decisions based on considerations of equity, to ensure that diverse women, racialized communities and other very vulnerable groups are receiving this money.

We've worked really hard to go beyond our regular funding relationships to reach the most vulnerable. So far, in our distribution of funding through our network, we've seen that 50% of programs or agencies receiving money are not currently funded by the United Way networks. We've really branched out in order to ensure that no one is left behind.

In the Toronto area—maybe not in your riding particularly—there has certainly been support through the new horizons for seniors program, for example, to the Afghan Women's Organization. There has also been support for the Massey Centre for young women, which also serves a lot of racialized and newcomer women, providing emergency mental health support for adolescent mothers, and children as well, who are impacted by the pandemic and facing some of the issues that I mentioned earlier related to violence within the home, homelessness issues and certainly cultural barriers to postpartum and other supports as well.

Certainly, we've been on the ground in communities, making decisions at community tables that have been informed by the experience of diverse women as well as other equity-seeking groups.

● (1805)

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you.

My next question is for Ms. Barnet. For many of your employees, working from home isn't an option. Are there any measures you are taking, as an employer, to address the child care issue your employees are facing? Have you thought of assisting businesses to have their own day care centres on site in your sector?

Ms. Rhonda Barnet: Thank you for the question.

My specific facility is a smaller facility. With that, I provide a lot of flexibility. I actually have two new dads in my organization. Their families had babies in February, so I immediately put them on work from home so they could support the added stress in the home. Smaller facilities can provide a lot of flexibility.

A lot of large manufacturers are already involved in these programs. I know Toyota Canada and many other big manufacturers look at sponsored day care, day cares right at the facility, but it's a really challenging issue for small and medium-sized enterprises to provide that. The best we can do is provide flexibility, look at investing in digital tools, etc., to make jobs a little more flexible.

I have some people who come in a day or two a week, and they can do the bulk of what they need to do, maybe even off hours at home, to accommodate children who are in the home right now. It's often a problem in our sector with both young men and women. Young families today really do struggle with child care.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Has there—

The Chair: I'm sorry that I'm cutting you off, Salma.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: It's no problem.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're now going to Andréanne, for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you.

We have really benefitted from a day in the presence of quality witnesses who have given us much food for thought.

The next question goes to Ms. Khanna.

The federal government has mandated the United Way to manage a number of the programs it has established. We are very familiar with your organization; it has a very good network and is fully qualified to fulfil that mandate. There is no question about that. However, by leaving the work in the hands of community organizations rather than adequately funding the healthcare and social services systems, and by transferring money to the provinces, including Quebec, is the federal government not in danger of becoming disengaged?

We can see the fatigue in the community. A lot of women are employed by community organizations. Their mental burden has become heavier during the pandemic.

Given all the fatigue, the exhaustion, do you believe that the community world that you have helped is ready for a second wave? Is the exhaustion too much?

[*English*]

Ms. Anita Khanna: Thank you for your concern about the health and well-being of our non-profit sector and the workers.

There are two pieces I would pull apart there. The first is the necessity to support the workers we've talked about and the flexibility to respond to a second wave and beyond. The second is to understand that, collectively in our sector, we work creatively across different networks, as you mentioned, and sectors. We work with the private sector, municipal governments and provincial governments, in addition to the federal government and other actors, to bolster and support communities.

That is why it has been so essential that we have been working at community tables to make allocations. It's so that if one community or one organization is stretched or cannot continue its services due to the lack of personal protective equipment, for example, or another challenge, another one can step up to ensure that the populations they intend to serve do not suffer because they have difficulty accessing PPE and maintaining service.

In our activities, our focus has been on service continuity and safety for the community, and we will continue to focus on that. We have seen real success in working across sectors and tables, as I mentioned, to get funding to where it's needed and where it can be used best to support the community.

I'll give an example from the Montreal area. It was quite astounding that our Centraide du Grand Montreal was approached by local government, I believe, to help with the procurement of PPE early in this crisis, given its strong connections to the private sector and the producers of PPE, to ensure that there could be equipment necessary to continue service, whether within food banks or in public health operations. Our sector, like many parents, mothers and others, feels the stretch, but it also steps up and steps into creative ways to get the job done.

• (1810)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you.

My next question goes to Ms. Yalnizyan.

In its response to the pandemic, the federal government implemented a number of financial measures to help families, such as the Canada Child Benefit, for example. Other measures have been considered inadequate in terms of guaranteeing equal opportunities for women. You have talked a lot about the importance of the childcare system. We have a great one in Quebec. I hope it will be looked at when the time comes to discuss a national policy.

In your opinion, which additional measures can be implemented to make the economic recovery into a feminist recovery and to help women succeed?

[*English*]

Ms. Armine Yalnizyan: That's an excellent question.

Almost everything else pales in comparison to making child care an accessible, affordable, high-quality reality for every family across Canada. It's true that Quebec leads the country in its expansion of access to affordable child care, but even Quebec, as I think you will acknowledge, has some room to improve its early learning education.

I think that what the system did was help parents get back to work without necessarily investing in children in a way that could maximize their potential. To do this requires a very strong commitment to a national vision of extending early learning as part of the public education system and making it accessible to people across the country just like we make school-age learning accessible. We should also make before- and after-school classes available.

I'm sorry, but am I being cut off?

The Chair: Yes, but it's all good. You have great testimony.

We're just going to move over to our last five minutes with Lindsay.

Lindsay, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you.

Ms. Yalnizyan, how important is it to establish legislation to enshrine the right of high-quality child care by the federal government?

Ms. Armine Yalnizyan: I don't know the answer to that. In some provinces we have the right to education enshrined. In Ontario it is a human right for a child to be educated.

I think we need a national strategy to safely reopen the schools and child care centres. We need to be really vigilant so that, in an era when it is possible that we will lose capacity, as they are warning in the United States, the capacity we are left with is not, primarily, for-profits that have deeper pockets. We saw it. The omen was there with the long-term care facilities.

The legislative approach is an interesting one, but it doesn't change anything if you don't have any funding, and there are no principles or norms with which you wish to make this a reality for people.

You know, maybe we do need a Canada child care act like we have a Canada health care act. Perhaps those principles should be enshrined. I hadn't thought about it. It's an excellent question.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you.

I'm just going to shift a little bit. I'd like for you to just talk briefly. Canada hasn't ratified the ILO's Domestic Workers Convention, No. 189, which looks at unpaid work and the realities, the fact that women do the vast majority of that unpaid work. Would that be a key leadership role? What are other specific things that the Canadian government could do to recognize that work and start to pay for it?

• (1815)

Ms. Armine Yalnizyan: What a great question. We've been wrestling with this. You know, in December we're going to have the 50th anniversary of the status of women commission's report.

We've been talking about this issue for 50 years, along with child care.

I don't have a quick answer for you. I think it's really problematic to pay people for what was unpaid work. We already have tax credits for caregivers. I'm very nervous that women will settle for, essentially, a very small stipend to do unpaid work and set back women's equality by decades. That's my personal fear, but I also recognize that maybe I'm fetishizing paid work. I don't know. You're raising one of these unbelievably difficult needles to thread, so kudos to you.

Is there something else that the federal government can do? You bet. One thing the federal government can do is to walk what it's talking on 10 paid sick days. It's telling the provinces to do 10 paid sick days, but it itself, in its own jurisdiction, does not lead by example. It could be doing that in its own jurisdiction, which is about 7% of the labour market. It would make a big difference to some people.

We need to regulate the gig economy more because we know it is going to bust open. In the wake of COVID, we're going to have much more on-demand work, and it's an essentially unregulated sector of the labour market. We need 21st-century regulations to govern this work, which is not as gendered as you'd think. Sometimes, when people think about the gig economy, they think about Uber drivers. Women are going to stay at home and do TaskRabbit and Mechanical Turk and stuff like that if they don't get child care. More women are going to do this kind of work. It is unregulated. People earn less than the minimum wage.

I'm sorry; I've taken too much time.

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Ms. Barnet, you mentioned that a lot of the workers are, you said, hanging on by a thread. In terms of what you've seen—and again we go back to unpaid work, we go back to the stresses on parents, but women in particular, such as child care, elder care. What are the long-term impacts on those workers that you have seen because of COVID recently?

Ms. Rhonda Barnet: I've listened to a lot of CEOs around the country trying to support young women with young families, and the young men, too. It's been a family problem.

I think it will be very discouraging for these people on a go-forward basis. They've been stretched so far that they give up on that dream of a two-income home, or whatever it was for them, or being elevated in the economy. We need to fix this so that we don't stress people so far on what should be realistic that it feels like it's a dream they can't fulfill.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you so much, Rhonda.

On behalf of the committee I would really like to thank Anita, Rhonda and Armine for coming today. You have brought excellent testimony once again, so thank you very much. On behalf of the committee and as chair, I am so grateful that everybody is here today. We have had excellent panels.

Thank you to all of the staff who have been here to support us. You've done an excellent job. I am looking at Scott over there. Thank you so much.

Of course, to both our clerk and to our analysts, thank you so much. To all of the interpreters, I know we've been here for a long time.

I'm looking at everybody. Thank you so much for being part of today.

Voices: Hear, hear!

The Chair: It's time to wipe our brows and get to work. We will be back tomorrow. We'll be commencing at 10:30, when we'll have both Minister Qualtrough and Minister Monsef. I'll see everybody at 10:30 tomorrow to reconvene.

Today's committee meeting is adjourned. Thank you.

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