

2020

# A Municipal Gendered Recovery Plan for All

Making the City of Ottawa Work for Everyone





# About City for All Women Initiative

Founded in 2004, CAWI is a unique collaboration of a diversity of women-identifying people from academia, civil society, and the grassroots working with municipalities to advance gender equity and create more inclusive cities. We address systemic inequities across the spectrum of oppression (racial, gender, gender identity, ability, age, income, etc.) which perpetuate poverty and discrimination in Ottawa. CAWI promotes and creates systemic change for gender equity and inclusion for all people by starting with substantial changes in our lives and in our city. To do so, we draw upon the strengths, cultural expression, values and knowledge that women across diversity have to offer. We envision an Ottawa in which the knowledge and leadership of women and gender-diverse people are valued fully and where our diverse experiences, cultures and perspectives are honoured and viewed as an asset in building an inclusive, caring and just community.

CAWI works to ensure that the issues that impact women, girls and gender-diverse people from diverse backgrounds are systematically considered in city decision-making. It does this by training people in civic engagement and community facilitation and working with the City and community organizations to apply equity and inclusion to all aspects of their work. Our work is city-wide and focused on communities facing socio-economic marginalization with a specific focus on women and gender diverse people.

## Acknowledgements

The Gendered Recovery Plan would not be possible without valuable contributions and support from our research participants and community partners. CAWI would like to express profound appreciation to all those who contributed to the compilation and completion of this report. Special gratitude to the women of CAWI who participated in our survey and weekly check-ins, around 150 women across Ottawa. Your contagious energy and commitment to a better Ottawa for all motivated us to develop this project.

A special thank you to the Community Development Framework (CDF) with whom we collaborate to host our weekly check-ins for women across the city. We also acknowledge the support of Ottawa Community Housing (OCH) in offering technical support for our weekly check-ins.

Katherine Occhiuto, a Ph.D. candidate at Carleton University, continues to share monthly data from her research with lone mothers and their experiences accessing community resources during COVID-19, which has been instrumental in formulating our gendered recovery plan. Contributions from the City of Ottawa's Women and Gender Equity Strategy (WGES) working group were also critical in shaping the context and content of this report. We are thankful to members who provided their input.

Funding for this project has come from the Ottawa Community Foundation, the Department of Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE), and the Canadian Red Cross



Women and Gender  
Equality Canada

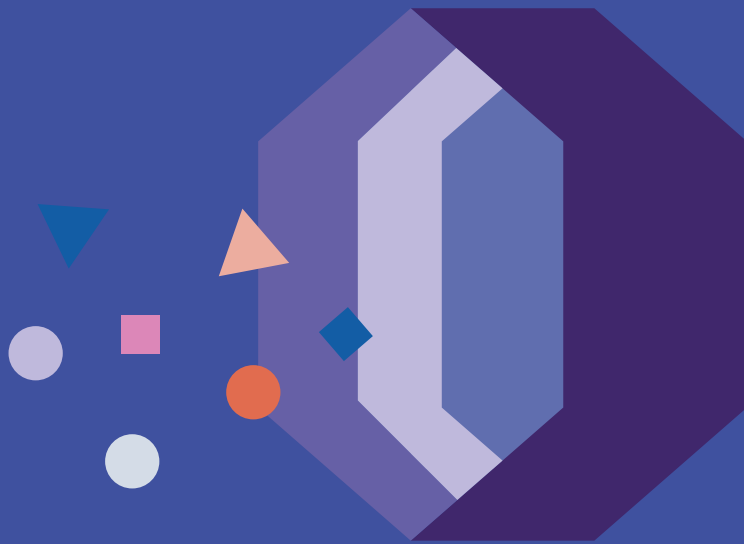
Femmes et Égalité  
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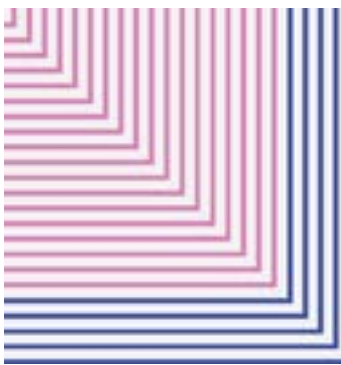


“Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.”

**Arundhati Roy**

[The Pandemic is a Portal](#)

# Why Ottawa Needs a Gendered Response to COVID-19



Women continue to shoulder a disproportionate amount of unpaid care work

The COVID-19 pandemic and the conditions it has created have exposed and exacerbated the deep disparities that exist across gender, race, ability and class lines within our city and country. Through drawing national and international attention to anti-black racism, the Black Lives Matter movement has also highlighted the deep racial and social inequalities in our society and demonstrated the need for a collective reimagining of physical spaces and social dynamics and public institutions. Cities represent microcosms of these complex and interconnected inequalities and that, because of that, cities can be at the heart of broader change.

The disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women – particularly women, girls and gender-diverse people experiencing socio-economic marginalization – is well documented in research from [Canada](#) and [worldwide](#). While the reasons behind this fact are various, there is also a simple truth that is common among them: because there are higher rates of poverty among women of colour, women living with disabilities, trans women, gender-diverse people and women in lone parent households, women are more likely to be vulnerable to the pandemic’s social and economic impacts.

Since April 2020, the City for All Women Initiative (CAWI) has asked its members,

community leaders, researchers and organizational partners in Ottawa how these unprecedented circumstances have impacted women’s lives. They reported the following:

**Increased double burden of care, including an increased burden of health care (both paid and unpaid).**

- Women continue to shoulder a disproportionate amount of unpaid care work in the home (childcare, eldercare, grocery shopping, meal planning and prep, cleaning, laundry, grand parenting, etc.) while also doing paid work. The double-burden of care is aggravated by school closures and online learning, absence of childcare and eldercare services and decreased access to community services.

**Greater exposure to infection and stress.**

- Women are over-represented in paid health care work (i.e. PSWs, nurses, frontline staff in hospitals and home care as well as in long-term care homes, retirement homes, and group homes etc.), other paid care work (i.e. shelters, child care, teaching, therapy, etc.) and in paid work that has become essential during the pandemic (i.e. cashiers, cleaners, grocery stores, pharmacies, etc.)



**Higher risk of violence against women and gender-based violence,**

**Higher surveillance and overpolicing/ by-law enforcement of racialized and low-income communities.**

**Increased risk of food insecurity and loss of income for women and women-led households.**

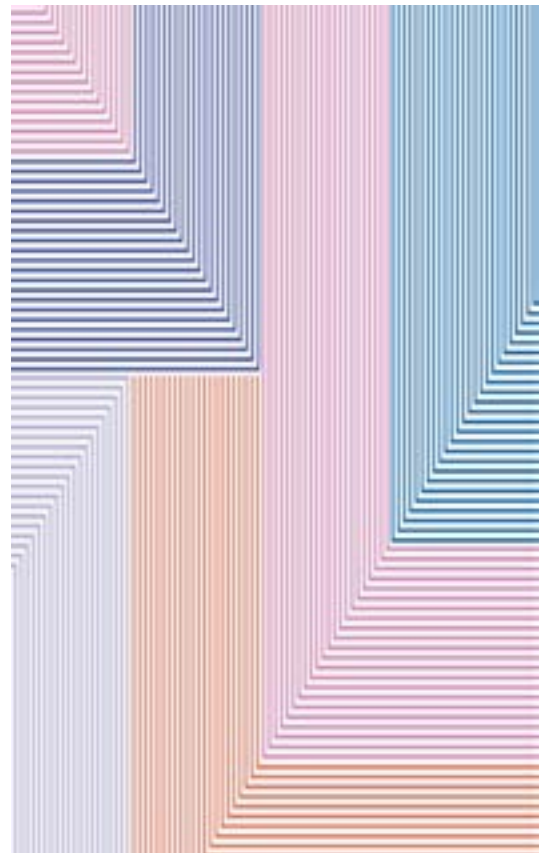
- The historic pay inequality puts women in situations where either paid work or unpaid caregiving has to be compromised to prioritize the other.

We have seen some great leadership on gender equality from the City, particularly through [An Equity and Inclusion Lens for COVID-19 Recovery](#) - but more needs to be done. The City of Ottawa's response to the COVID-19 crisis pivots around the key pillars of a resilient, equitable, and inclusive city. However, women, girls and gender-diverse people have experienced consequences resulting from the lack of a robust Equity and Inclusion Lens in the City of Ottawa's pandemic response.

The Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition is undertaking their own COVID-19 research and these findings will reflect the issues of 15,000 of the 40,000 Indigenous community members in Ottawa which will be presented at a later date. It is important to note that this current report does not reflect an Indigenous culturally-relevant gender-based analysis. Our findings should not be considered as representative of Indigenous peoples.

The goal of this Gendered Recovery Plan is to support the City of Ottawa in applying a more robust intersectional gender Equity and Inclusion Lens in municipal response and recovery planning. This will ensure that any emergency response considers the full diversity of women, men, and gender-diverse people.

**Cities are  
microcosms  
of complex and  
interconnected  
inequalities.**



# The 5-Point Plan: A Guide for the City of Ottawa's Feminist Approach to COVID-19



As we plan for recovery, we believe that going back to the pre-pandemic “normal” would result in a return to conditions that were already inequitable and untenable for many of our neighbours, friends, colleagues and family members. Instead, we need to re-imagine city services, public infrastructure and public space creatively to ensure that everyone’s needs are met. **CAWI offers a five-point recovery plan for the City of Ottawa using an intersectional gendered lens.**

Harm can be avoided by following [OCAP principles](#) and allowing communities to lead, and be compensated for, this research. Research efforts can be designed to support equity and inclusion by identifying:

- Inequities in City planning practices and outcomes, groups facing systemic barriers or discrimination, or underserved areas and communities.

We urge the City of Ottawa to work with other levels of government to ensure a basic standard of living for all.

We call on the City of Ottawa to place gender and racial equity at the core of all recovery planning. We urge the City of Ottawa to work with other levels of government to ensure a basic standard of living for all. We need to work together to ensure that these measures are not just applied during crises but that our long-depleted social infrastructure gets much-needed investment so that future pandemics and other crises do not have such a substantial impact on our society. We call on municipalities to re-imagine and re-create cities as communities that work toward keeping everyone safe, housed, fed, included and healthy.

Data does not always mean numbers. Quantitative data can be complemented by qualitative data to capture the lived experiences of different communities. For example, planners have long focused on redesigning the physical environment to improve women’s safety and perceptions of safety in public spaces. But for Black, Indigenous, other racialized communities, older adults, people living with disabilities and/or the 2SLGTBQ+ community, the question of safety is more complex and related to the policing of public space, exclusionary social norms, systemic anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism and other forms of discrimination.

## GENDER DISAGGREGATED DATA: THE FOUNDATION OF THE 5-POINT PLAN.

As the City of Ottawa designs a recovery plan for COVID-19, it is integral to base planning, policies, and processes on disaggregated data regarding gender, race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, geographic location, age and ability. Data collection, analysis, and sharing must not cause harm to these communities.

Cities can also institutionalize equity checks by embedding equity-oriented indexes and indicators into planning policies and practices. For example, the City of Winnipeg Pedestrian and Cycling Strategies applies an equity index and indicators (e.g. poverty rate) to bicycle coverage levels to identify service and investment gaps (Linovski & Galati, 2019).



### HOUSING FOR ALL

In January 2020, the City of Ottawa declared a housing crisis and homelessness emergency. The pandemic has exacerbated Ottawa's housing crisis and disproportionately impacted women. A gendered approach to housing works to ensure everyone has access to housing that is connected, deeply affordable, accessible, and supported in culturally appropriate ways.

### FOOD SECURITY FOR ALL

Pandemic-related job insecurity and financial difficulties mean that people, especially single mothers, older women who live alone, and those living on social assistance, are forced to make difficult decisions between paying rent, buying food and other essential costs. Moreover, the pandemic has disrupted supply chains and food pricing. Those who access food banks and other food delivery services - many of whom are women on social assistance, women with disabilities and older women - have found hours of operations and volunteers reduced while demand for these services increased. Online grocery ordering was not available for those without access to credit cards or the appropriate technology. Food security for all requires investing in robust and sustainable local food infrastructure to be affordable, accessible and appropriate.

### INCOME SECURITY FOR ALL

Calls for a universal basic income have increased during the pandemic. While this legislation is under federal jurisdiction, by applying a gendered lens to income security, the City of Ottawa can set its own basic income standards. This could include raising minimum wage requirements for all City services and City-funded services; advocating for liveable rates of social assistance such as Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) to match CERB; supporting small businesses - many of which are owned by women - and retaining women in the workforce, as women disproportionately hold part-time, temporary positions and are more likely to be laid off or given shorter hours, or live on a low income.

### SOCIAL INCLUSION FOR ALL

Municipal services that create a sense of belonging and inclusion, such as public and accessible transportation, parks and recreation, community centres, libraries, public health, emergency services, and social services, play an integral role in supporting a resilient city now and into the future. Our social infrastructure - mental health services, childcare, eldercare, family and cultural programming and addictions services - has been defunded consistently since the 1980s, leaving our social safety seriously undermined when we need it most. Prioritizing ethics of care in the City's response to COVID-19 will mean significantly reinvesting in municipal services and social infrastructure so that the most marginalized among us are supported and included in all aspects of life in Ottawa.

### SAFETY FOR ALL

COVID-19 has resulted in greater insecurity for many people: increased domestic violence and elder abuse, violence against trans-women and women who are homeless, an increasing possibility of online sexual and financial exploitation, and heightened surveillance of low-income and racialized communities by By-Law Enforcement, the Ottawa Police Service, and the public. Safety for all includes supporting services for survivors of sexual violence, creating safe public spaces, particularly for women and racialized and low-income communities, and incorporating an intersectional gendered lens into all aspects of city planning.

Prioritizing an ethics of care in the City's response to COVID-19 will mean significantly re-investing in social infrastructure



# Recommendations



“Impossible to self-isolate or physical distance at the shelter, and we have nowhere else to go. Where do you go if shelters are not safe?”

CAWI WEEKLY  
CHECK-IN  
PARTICIPANT

## HOUSING FOR ALL

Social isolation measures illuminate that having a home is a public health issue. An analysis of infection rates shows that people living in low-income communities are the most affected by COVID-19 (Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2020). They are largely from racialized, newcomer, and other marginalized communities. Individuals experiencing homelessness and relying on emergency housing are also at higher risks of contracting the virus due to overcrowding. Low-income communities need more diverse and affordable mixed-income housing options; this includes building more affordable housing that emphasizes accessible units and family units. New affordable housing is being built further away from rapid transit and access to basic support, whether that is food, childcare, services, health care, or workplaces. This increases the time spent on public transit to access basic needs and increases private transportation costs, such as purchasing vehicles (Bliss, 2018; Burgen, 2019).

**Work with the Federal Government to advance the right to housing at the municipal Level.** Municipalities play a critical role in housing decision-making. Like other cities across Canada, Ottawa has jurisdiction over an array of housing responsibilities and is positioned well to integrate a rights-based framework into housing. Additionally, the City must adopt a right to housing lens to guide all housing and homelessness decision-making. This would mean that all housing policies in Ottawa uphold values of anti-discrimination, inclusion, participation and accountability (HomeComing Community Choice Coalition, 2018).

**Make affordable housing a key priority in all municipal budgets.** Municipal budgets are important tools that can ensure that long-term housing plans and targets are supported through substantial funding. To achieve a just recovery for all, Ottawa’s city budget needs to commit progressive funding to affordable housing stock that is above and beyond investments from federal and provincial grants. The City must commit \$30 million in its first year, increase investments in the following years, building and acquiring affordable housing, mixed-income housing and supportive housing units in Ottawa.

This commitment should match the [National Housing Strategy](#)’s commitment to allocate 25% of funding to women and gender-diverse people by designating 25% of all new builds and acquisitions for women’s housing needs. In addition, we urge the City to respond to calls from local Indigenous organizations and allocate 30% of all new builds to Indigenous-led housing initiatives.

The commitment to capital expenditure in housing must include funding streams that prioritize retrofitting existing high-rise towers (Udoh-Orok, 2018) and emphasize access to shared common space that encourages social interaction as well as safe, walkable and connected 15-minute neighbourhoods. It is also critical that allocated funding incentivizes spending on accessible units and larger family units (2-3 bedroom units).





**Commit to a gendered lens on housing in the City's Official Plan.** [The City's Official Plan](#) is a key document that can lead to transformative policies focused on addressing Ottawa's Housing and Homelessness Emergency. Including directions for strong inclusionary zoning by-laws, transit-oriented development, and the missing middle of housing are all critical policies that can provide much-needed solutions to Ottawa's housing crisis. The Official Plan should focus on creating not only "complete streets" but "complete neighbourhoods" in the form of 15-minute neighbourhoods that support care work and consider equity and gender issues.

**Work with other levels of Government to create a rent bank,** and increase housing subsidies, thus avoiding mass evictions. This will help develop a targeted program for households who need rent relief. Commit \$20 million for rental assistance to support households affected by COVID-19 and the 1400 renter households, which were already housing insecure before COVID (Pomeroy, 2020).

**Work with other levels of Government to create a land bank,** and increase access to, and amount of, municipal land that is earmarked for affordable housing developments.

"These days I just want to say screw it and give up my home, and live in our van until a shelter spot opens up. Drowning in debt and fear is just so much. After all of our attempts to stand up get squashed, we stop feeling the need to bother standing up."

LONE MOTHERS RESEARCH PROJECT PARTICIPANT



## FOOD SECURITY FOR ALL

The number of hungry families has exponentially increased with the pandemic. Food banks are often unable to meet the demand through the minimal funding and donations they receive and reduced volunteer capacity to deliver these services – with the rising costs of food, housing and transportation, demand is increasing. According to Ottawa Public Health (2019), it costs a minimum of \$901 to feed a family of four every month. Donations to food banks often lack healthy and culturally appropriate foods, leaving some communities to develop their own food preparation and delivery programs for isolated older women and immigrant and newcomer families, for example. Online ordering is not available for those without access to credit cards or the technology. We need sustainable and community-led efforts that address food security. There is an urgent need to develop a coordinated food access system, as community food support is exhausted.

and infrastructure through systems-level analysis of what is needed. Create a more sustainable farming infrastructure to ensure steady livelihoods for farmers and strengthen workers’ rights and increase their wages (Canadian Commission for UNESCO and UNESCO Chair on Food Biodiversity and Sustainability Studies, 2020). By applying ALUS Canada’s agricultural stewardship offset model (Mackenzie, 2008), we can reduce the ecological footprint of local farmers, which in turn boosts their financial income. This will allow them to offer their products at more affordable prices and still cover their costs.

“I am losing my house; I am on maternity leave; I have two special needs kids and am a single parent of 4 girls. I do not qualify for CERB. There is no food; I go hungry so my kids can eat.”

CAWI SURVEY PARTICIPANT

**Create a more dignified food infrastructure model that offers more choice, respect and freedom.** Support food banks and meal and grocery delivery services to ensure that groceries and prepared meals are healthy and culturally appropriate. This can be done by creating partnerships between food banks, ethnic community grocers, local farmers, and community gardens. Expand the services of community organizations such as Good Food Box, Market Mobile, Hidden Harvest Ottawa and Parkdale Food Centre to provide locally grown food for free or at affordable prices to low-income neighbourhoods and to allow food bank patrons to pick out their own groceries.

### **Integrate the two core sets of comprehensive food resilience strategy principles as defined by [Good Food for All](#).**

Good food is affordable, accessible, culturally relevant, local and as minimally processed as possible. Prioritize a Neighbourhood Food Approach, featuring multi-sector, multi-agency collaboration for community development based food-sharing at a neighbourhood level: shared meals, education and skills building, emergency food, support for food production and processing, edible landscapes, shared kitchen space and food storage, and affordable food for purchasing.

“Food is still too costly, and there is a lack of culturally appropriate and healthy food choices with prepared meal services and food banks. As a newcomer, I am unfamiliar with pasta.”

CAWI SURVEY PARTICIPANT

### **Design a comprehensive food strategy.**

Develop a systems-level approach to food security to ensure that families are supported in the short term and not reliant on emergency food services on a long-term basis. The City can provide more backbone support to food systems

**Increase funding for Indigenous-led food initiatives,** such as year-round funding for accessing and growing traditional food through community gardens, greenhouses, rooftop gardening and other innovative gardening initiatives across the city. Good food means addressing colonialism, racism and poverty as clear barriers to both accessing and growing traditional food.



“Unable to reach my caseworker for \$50.00 COVID-19 Benefit. Had to call food security more than once because money just doesn't go far enough on social assistance after all bills are paid.”

CAWI WEEKLY  
CHECK-IN  
PARTICIPANT

## INCOME SECURITY FOR ALL

Women and gender diverse people are more likely to be underemployed, in precarious jobs, underpaid, working as front-line workers, or to leave the labour market to provide child and eldercare. They also have more difficulty in accessing financing or funding. The pandemic has brought to light that women make up just under half (47%) of all workers, but account for two thirds (63%) of all job losses. Among workers in the core demographic aged 25 to 54 years, women represent 70% of all job losses (Scott, 2020). These challenges are more compounded for equity-seeking groups - especially youth, older workers, women, migrants, persons with disabilities and members of 2SLGBTQ+ communities (Al-Refaei, 2020). According to Statistics Canada, 39.5% of gender-diverse people have reported that COVID-19 has impacted their ability to meet their financial obligations and essential needs (Moysler, 2020). Statistics Canada reports that women, with an overrepresentation of Black and Filipino women (Turcotte & Savage, 2020), are in the majority of roles such as nurse aides, orderlies and patient services associates. Just in the first two months of the pandemic, 1.5 million Canadian women lost their jobs as they tended to work in the industries that were the hardest hit from closures and layoffs (Desjardins et al., 2020). This is the lowest the women's labour force has been in 30 years. Mothers and single mothers are among the most disadvantaged by these layoffs. RBC Economics revealed in their analysis that employment in single mothers declined by 12% compared to a 7% decline among single fathers (Desjardins et al., 2020).

**Increase financial education and support small businesses owned by women and gender-diverse people.** Incorporate an intersectional gendered lens into the Business Recovery Tool Kit (2020), along with tools and resources necessary for businesses to pivot their revenues streams. Collaborate with BIAs, the Ottawa Board of Trade and the Centre for Social Enterprise

Development (CSED) to create a workshop series specifically for the small business community, to help pivot their business, adapt to the new digital economy and build capacity. Create buy-local campaigns and develop procurement policies for City operations which prioritize buying local and supporting the local economy.

**Advocate provincially and federally for social assistance rates to permanently match CERB.** People living on Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) can barely make ends meet. The CERB allowance at \$2000/month was deemed the “liveable” income by the Federal Government. Yet, OW and ODSP recipients have been receiving, and continue to only receive, a maximum of \$1169/month – far below a liveable income.

**Ensure adequate financial resources and equitable policies for youth employment.** Young people have the least amount of financial independence, causing them to take on potentially dangerous or exploitative work to make ends meet and support themselves. The majority of their work is in service industries where they earn low wages and are expected to deliver frontline customer service under public health restrictions, resulting in greater exposure to COVID-19 and unsafe working conditions.

**Implement a universal child care plan.** Economist Armine Yalnizyan has extensively researched and advocated for better child-care systems in order to sustain the economy, noting that there is “no recovery without a she-covcovery, no she-covcovery without child care” (Yalnizyan, 2020). The City should undertake race-based data collection to address racial justice in childcare. To meet COVID-19 needs, we urge the City to invest in new municipally-run childcare centres, to create a capital fund for the expansion of community-based, non-profit childcare programs and to become a licence holder for home-based childcare so that we can raise the bar in employment standards and early learning.



More childcare is needed during after-hours for parents on shift-work and single-parent households. Provide free drop-in childcare at essential public and city-owned buildings. Work with other levels of government to implement a universal child care plan. Flexible working arrangements and equitable child-care sharing among women and men will make room for more capacity and create a balanced work-family life (Desjardins et al., 2020).

**Ensure access to financial literacy education and services, including tax filing and budget counselling.** For many low-income women, access to tax benefits, refunds, credits, deductions, grants, and rebates requires annual tax filing to start or continue receiving payment. For example, tax benefits can represent up to 40% of the income of a family

on social assistance with children. In contrast, low-income seniors can receive up to \$917 additional income per month through the Guaranteed Income Supplement. Yet, tax filing is lowest among newcomers, single households, and individuals on social assistance (Bajwa, 2015).

“I’m a single mom, trying to support learning at home with kids, worried about losing my job. Finding it hard to focus and accomplish anything work-wise while at home.”

CAWI SURVEY PARTICIPANT PARTICIPANTPARTICIPANT



## SOCIAL INCLUSION FOR ALL

The pandemic has exacerbated community members, community-led support systems, and organizational resources. Concerns around mental health and lack of mental health support have been a significant theme in CAWI's conversations with women and gender-diverse people, prominently among seniors, people living with disabilities, new immigrants, and lone parents. Stress and mental health concerns have arisen due to social isolation, overexertion, uncertainty about the virus itself and anxiety about rapidly changing circumstances.

Lack of connectivity and access to connectivity have heightened feelings of isolation for rural residents. The conversation around mental health and well-being has also been heightened by the Black Lives Matter movement, which shines a light on how policing and mental health services have meshed over time with fatal results for Black and Indigenous communities. Gender-diverse folks have expressed poorer mental health outcomes than both male and female participants, especially those younger (Moyser, 2020). Having access to affordable, culturally appropriate, and community-led mental health supports, which take form as family programming, diverse educational options, and recreational activities are vital to the overall well-being of every resident. Community care and support are integral to holding vulnerable populations up during the pandemic and beyond.

With schools, seniors centres and child care centres operating at limited capacity, families and lone parents, especially those

that are essential workers, are finding it extremely difficult to work while also finding safe and affordable childcare and eldercare support.

**Ensure equitable access to public washrooms and showers.** Since the start of the pandemic, the lack of public washrooms – especially downtown – has been highlighted by residents and frontline workers. Yet, there are still not enough porta-potties and shower facilities set up and maintained by the City. Public toilets should be considered essential public health infrastructure and set up in areas with high housing insecurity. Responsibility for the maintenance and security of public toilets and showers should not be downloaded onto already stretched community organizations. Showers, laundry services, and harm reduction services should be made readily accessible to sex trade workers, people who use drugs and those sleeping rough, in encampments, in shelters or couchsurfing, as part of strong public health prevention measures during COVID and beyond.

**Increase funding for free and accessible social services.** Already overstretched, community and family services need a consistent injection of extra resources to catch up to funding in other areas and to respond adequately to pandemic-related concerns and pre-existing issues. Having access to affordable, culturally appropriate, and community-led supports such as family programming, counselling, diverse educational options, and mental health services are vital to the overall well-being of every resident. Funding is needed, so all of these sectors can transition to online programming and ensure adequate public health measures for in-person programming.

“We are really missing the community activities where we talk, or kids plays together. It is the togetherness that my son and I are missing, but it is getting better.”

LONE MOTHERS RESEARCH PROJECT PARTICIPANT





“I no longer have childcare. I had been managing a pre-existing anxiety disorder, but with having to care for my baby at home while expected to conduct my job duties by telework, I ended up having anxiety attacks daily. I had to request a sick leave.”

CAWI SURVEY PARTICIPANT

**Increase funding for community-led organizations providing virtual and in-person social, recreational, educational, and cultural programming.** Cultural programs have been among the hardest hit in the city as they tend to be community-run and underresourced. Provide these organizations with the volunteers, spaces and tools necessary to run their programming safely. Building in robust Equity and Inclusion Lens measurements for the City’s granting programs would support more equitable service delivery outcomes, allowing community cultural programming to serve our diverse community. Increase access to public spaces in city-owned buildings for social, cultural and recreational programming for grassroots, volunteer-led organizations.

**Ensure that access to public outdoor spaces and recreational activities are financially and physically accessible.** The City should close streets, widen sidewalks and prioritize active transportation lanes to create more outdoor space for residents – this should be an ongoing practice during all seasons. Prioritize programs that allow underserved communities access to public outdoor spaces (Al-Refaei, 2020). This could be in the form of free programming: activities, summer camps, recreation programs and family tours with free transportation, prioritizing low-income communities and communities with less outdoor public spaces. For the winter months, offering safe, outdoor winter activities will be essential in keeping communities active and connected.

The City could undertake a **gender analysis of snow removal** to prioritize caregivers’ movements and to encourage safe and active winter movements for all ages. Access to outdoor spaces and recreation programs is crucial for the healthy development of children and youth, as well as social inclusion and physical health of older adults, particularly during the pandemic. Furthermore, ensure that all programming has alternative participation methods for those using mobility aids, as they are often isolated and neglected from community programming (Greenlee & Reid, 2020).

“People with disabilities are being forgotten in these strategies and services.”

CAWI WEEKLY CHECK-IN PARTICIPANT

**Invest in digital connectivity infrastructure across the city, especially in rural communities.**

Lack of connectivity has increased feelings of isolation across all demographics, especially for newcomers and those living in rural areas. With limited or unstable internet connectivity, they cannot access community resources and mutual support or connect to their community, therefore losing a sense of belonging.

Develop and expand free hotspots around the city, prioritizing underserved areas. For example, the City of Toronto launched a Free Wi-Fi Pilot Program at 25 different locations for the next year to allow low-income households access to connectivity (City of Toronto, 2020). Advocate at provincial and national levels for better connectivity in rural areas. Work with OPL to loan out technology tools and Wi-Fi for low-income individuals, families and seniors who are unable to afford these increasingly essential tools.

**Offer free family counselling and parent counselling sessions with culturally appropriate professionals using modern and culturally specific methods of therapy.** Services like CounsellingConnect should be extended due to high demand.

**Support the social service sector to recruit and retain volunteers.** Older adults, with a majority of older women, volunteer more hours than any other age group. During the pandemic, many were released due to the higher risk of exposure leaving many organizations scrambling to recruit and train new volunteers. As organizations move to online and virtual programming, the ability to support volunteers’ access to these lower-risk volunteer opportunities is a significant challenge.



“There needs to be an understanding there is no time limit or session count on dealing with trauma and especially when struggling as a single parent.”

LONE MOTHERS  
RESEARCH PROJECT  
PARTICIPANT

## SAFETY FOR ALL

Reports from other countries show that incidences of domestic violence have tripled during the pandemic (Allen-Ebrahimian, 2020). CAWI’s research anecdotally supports this data, demonstrating an increase in domestic violence during isolation measures. Physical distancing and self-isolating put vulnerable people and children further at risk, not just in partner violence situations but also sexual violence more broadly. In Canada, Indigenous women report experiencing sexual assault at a rate triple that of non-Indigenous women (Department of Justice, 2017). Transgender people also experience higher rates of violence, including sexual assault (Jaffray, 2020). In addition, 2SLGBTQ+ youth living with homophobic parents face increased stress and anxiety under isolation measures with very few resources or supports geared explicitly towards this population.

Ottawa’s overflow hotels, used when there is no room at shelters, present several problems for survivors. These include isolation and little connectivity to supports such as grocery services, childcare and health care, a lack of programming and recreation space for children, no kitchens, and a general lack of safety. While data is not readily available, it is likely that online sexual exploitation and sex trafficking are also increasing during the pandemic.

Additionally, enforcement of physical distancing guidelines disproportionately impacts racialized communities. Desmond Cole and Robyn Maynard demonstrate how law enforcement disproportionately targets Black people, Indigenous people, and people of colour. Erin Dej reminds us of the over-policing of people living in poverty contributing to a cycle of incarceration and homelessness. Fear and stress caused by the pandemic are compounded for communities already

experiencing police violence. For example, during our weekly check-ins, Indigenous residents, who rely on access to land for their spiritual well-being, expressed concerns about being policed while practising prayers and ceremony. Resident leaders and service providers consistently highlight that public health distancing measures disproportionately impact those who live in small spaces, overcrowded housing, or neighbourhoods that tend to be low-income, less white, and heavily policed. Moreover, distancing guidelines are not clearly communicated to non-English and non-French speakers, putting immigrants, refugees and Indigenous language speakers at an increased risk of being ticketed.

### Create an action plan to protect women and gender-diverse people at increased risk of violence and sexual assault.

Coordinate a multi-stakeholder response across departments and organizations to identify core needs, including the core needs of sex trade workers. This would include adequate housing for women, trans and gender-diverse people, youth and children fleeing violence. Create better-integrated case management between the Violence Against Women (VAW) sector and the City.

**Provide ongoing, sustained funding for innovative practices** such as Unsafe at Home Ottawa that will extend beyond the pandemic. Create a Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) working group at the City. Develop a civilian gender-based violence intervention team, focused on survivor support and connection to services, which will replace police intervention in sexual assault and intimate partner violence. Generously support organizations providing services to 2SLGBTQ+ youth, including counselling, shelter and health services.





“I ended up in an emergency women’s shelter with my mother and children, due to domestic violence. We are now fighting to get back into our house as the COVID risk within a communal setting for my mother is more of a burden than she might physically be able to handle.”

CAWI WEEKLY CHECK-IN PARTICIPANT

“I need long term financial security. Quality liveable housing with clear and enforceable standards for maintenance. And communication regarding services for low income families.”

LONE MOTHERS RESEARCH PROJECT PARTICIPANT

**Meet the needs of survivors** through increased supportive housing, access to counselling and free legal advice, including housing, employment, childcare, and immigration and cultural responses such as restorative justice or community-based intervention methods that focus on survivor-centric and survivor-led processes.

**Support organizations working on sexual violence and exploitation**, including sex trafficking and online harassment and exploitation such as the SASC text line.

**Implement safe, culturally appropriate and supportive care initiatives through existing community-led organizations**, which will divert crisis intervention away from the police and into better-funded community organizations and services. This will especially help those that do not trust police services, social workers, and therapists. Have community-led and cultural-specific programs such as Peer-to-Peer support, community conversations, community support groups and restorative justice circles.

**Focus on public health education as opposed to enforcement.** The City, laudably, set up a Park Ambassadors program – similar to the OC Transpo Red Vests – to prioritize education over enforcement. A Gender Equity and Inclusion Lens could take this program further by hiring residents from the neighbourhoods where the program is running so that information can be shared by peers and in the language and/or culture of the residents. This would also avoid the criminalization of residents. Instead of ticketing, the City and Ottawa Public Health could engage in a comprehensive, multilingual education campaign about physical distancing through print, radio, TV, and social

media. Community organizations, local businesses, and cultural groups could help spread the word. Instead of policing their neighbours, people can offer support, mutual aid and assistance. Librarians could walk through parks on awareness campaigns.

**Integrate a Gender Equity and Inclusion Lens into all aspects of city planning.**

The built environment impacts our social experience of the city. While spatial planning often does not adequately incorporate social considerations into decision-making, this separation makes little sense to residents negotiating their everyday lives in city parks, transit systems or neighbourhoods. For those seeking affordable housing or daycare close to work or near public transit, or for the diversity of residents seeking safe access to public space, the social and spatial dimensions of municipal policies are inseparable. Planning can reinforce existing social and spatial inequities, or it can work to counter them as part of working towards a more just and caring city. These are political choices influenced by municipal plans, the content of policies, the allocation of resources, power dynamics and the nature of decision-making processes. Planning for a more equitable and inclusive city necessarily involves integrating the lived experiences of equity-seeking groups into actual planning policies and practices, backed by resources, policy and programming changes and other forms of support from the city.

# Conclusion

The City for All Women Initiative's work has always been informed by the lived experiences of the women in Ottawa. Approximately 150 women across Ottawa have brought this document to life. We are women who are anglophone, francophone, Indigenous, immigrant, newcomer, living on a low income, living with disabilities, university educated, non-educated, women of colour, religious, 2SLGBTQ+, older women, professionals, caregivers, mothers, students, academics, advocates. We are all this and more.

This report is living and breathing for us. We do not turn it off when the last word is read. We continue to live these experiences – to struggle, to overcome, to achieve, to confront, to advocate, to win. Our research is more than words – we are community members in the city of Ottawa.

Since April 2020, CAWI and the Community Development Framework (CDF) have held weekly community check-ins as a way to maintain social and mental support with women across diverse experiences and the partner organizations that support them. Approximately 50 CAWI and CDF members and frontline workers shared stories of how issues such as tenant rights, social assistance, CERB and other relief benefits, masks and childcare have impacted them.

CAWI also conducted a COVID-19 impact survey of the pandemic on women and gender-diverse people in Ottawa. Ninety-eight women responded with significant representation from seniors, women of colour, women living on low-income, women accessing income supports, women living with disabilities, women in single-parent households and individuals identifying as 2SLGBTQ+.

We heard from women across the city of how they were struggling to choose between paying rent, buying healthy groceries, their medication and diapers for their children. They shared overwhelming anecdotes of the most critical challenge impacting women across demographic groups – the double burden of unpaid care work and paid economic responsibilities.

Women continue to take on the bulk of unpaid care work. The double burden is aggravated by the closing of schools, absence of childcare and decreased access to community services. Many women turn to other family members, including older grandparents, and friends to support each other.

Women in lone parent households have found themselves physically and emotionally exhausted as a result of attending to their children's physical and emotional needs, as well as the demands of at-home school work. The lack of childcare, education, and eldercare support during COVID has led to job insecurity and difficult choices for women.

We heard from front-line workers working with women who are homeless or precariously housed whose basic housing rights were not being met pre-pandemic and whose physical and mental needs are even more in jeopardy with COVID.

Women, particularly racialized and immigrant women, are disproportionately represented in frontline care work, in hospitals, long-term care homes, pharmacies, assisted living facilities, childcare and teaching centres, shelters, and as social workers, cleaners, cashiers. The chronically underfunded care jobs and higher exposure rates to COVID-19 have taken a toll on our women.

Older women report a loss of independence, as they reduce or stop services to lessen their exposure risk and to comply with public health guidelines. In a recent survey by the Council on Aging of Ottawa with over 2,221 older residents, the majority of which were women, 40% reported feeling more isolated and lonely, and 50% reported feeling more anxious than before the pandemic (Adele Furrie Consulting, 2020).

**We have hope that decision-makers will take action and implement a gendered municipal response so that all of its residents can benefit from the riches of our city.**

# Appendices

## Appendix 1

### CAWI Online Survey: Impact of COVID-19 on Women, Girls and Gender-Diverse People Engaging Lived Experiences

1. If you identify as a woman, please describe how circumstances under COVID-19 have impacted you.
2. If you identify as a gender-diverse person/2SLGBTQ+, how have the circumstances due to COVID - 19 impacted you?
3. Voluntary identification – Collecting demographic identifiers helps us map how diverse populations are impacted by the pandemic.

## Appendix 2

### Bi-Weekly Online Survey for Lone Mothers Accessing Community Resources Research by Katherine Occhiuto, Ph.D. Candidate at Carleton University

1. How has COVID-19 (the Corona virus) impacted your ability to access the community services you and your family regularly depend on to meet your needs? Please elaborate.
2. What are the strengths in the community's response to meet your needs?
3. What are the areas that need improvement in the community's response to meet your needs?
4. Are any of your needs going unmet? If so, please elaborate.
5. In your ideal, what would supporting you look like during this time? (be it from the community, government, anything really).
6. Have any changes taken place since you last filled this out? (example: you qualified for financial supports, a service you relied on closed, a family member became ill, etc.)
7. How has physical distancing (previously referred to as social distancing) changed the way you engage with your community?
8. How are you coping through this all?

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