

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE BC GENDER EQUALITY REPORT CARD for 2019/2020 assesses the provincial government's recent progress in six issue areas impacting the human rights of women and people who face gender discrimination: access to justice; economic security; freedom from gender-based violence; health care; justice for people who are criminalized; and the rights of parents, children, and youth. In order to hold the BC government accountable to international human rights standards, the Report Card highlights principles from international law. It also integrates insights from community dialogues held in partnership with PACE Society, Urban Native Youth Association (UNYA), and the Coalition Against Trans Antagonism (CATA).

While recognizing that BC has taken some steps in the right direction between December 2018 and early April 2020, the Report Card also finds that many of these steps have left marginalized communities behind. Some government services remain difficult or impossible to access for those who need them most. And some measures have been introduced without full consideration of the needs and priorities of those most impacted. The Report Card calls for action to correct these gaps and exclusions — many of which are strongly gendered — and to ensure that everyone in BC has their rights respected and their basic needs met.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE



A modest increase in funding for BC's legal aid system has allowed for a handful of new community legal clinics to offer

sorely needed services across BC. However, enormous gaps in access to legal help remain, disproportionately leaving marginalized people without a way to enforce their rights. The inability to obtain legal assistance can be life-threatening — for example, in the case of people fleeing intimate partner violence who are deprived of legal aid for family law matters. Moreover, BC must actively work to ensure that its new legislation implementing UNDRIP and its recognition of transgender and non-binary identities are more than just symbolic.

ECONOMIC SECURITY



When it comes to economic security, BC took several steps in the right direction in 2019 and early 2020. Workers gained improved access to dispute resolution,

and people who need income assistance now face fewer arbitrary barriers to accessing it. However, rates for income assistance and disability benefits remain woefully low. More modular homes and shelters are good news, but a reduction in the number of affordable homes that BC plans to build is a worrying setback. And the province can take longer strides towards alleviating poverty for all if it puts an intersectional lens into action. More targeted housing, social supports, and employment programs are needed for marginalized people to attain economic security in the context of systemic sexism, transphobia, racism, ableism, and other inequalities.

FREEDOM FROM GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE



BC's temporary funding top-up for services for survivors of violence falls short of the need for sustainable, comprehensive, community-based, wrap-around supports. It is disappointing that BC did not budget dedicated funds for acting on the Calls for Justice of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, nor for adopting the rights-based framework for responding to sexual assault that community groups have been calling for. Furthermore, BC has taken only very limited steps to address violence against gender minority communities.

HEALTH CARE



BC took important steps to make health care more affordable and comprehensive in 2019: for example, it eliminated MSP premiums (finally catching up with the rest of the country in this regard), and it made gender-affirming lower surgery accessible under MSP. However, further action is needed to ensure universal access to gender-specific and sex-specific health care, as well as contraception, dental care, and other health services. BC needs to be proactive in tackling the stigma and discrimination that create barriers to health care for marginalized communities. It also needs to commit to continue providing life-saving access to a safe drug supply after the COVID-19 pandemic has passed.

JUSTICE FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE CRIMINALIZED



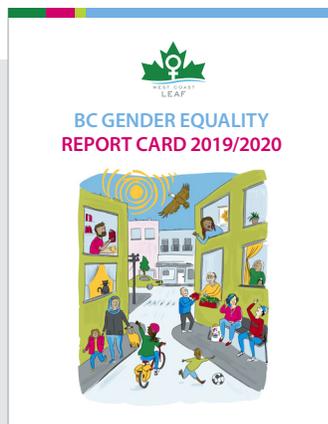
The BC government has still not adequately addressed major human rights concerns surrounding criminalization. Indigenous people continue to be incarcerated at appallingly disproportionate rates, and transgender people in prisons continue to face dangerous conditions. While BC's plan to reform solitary confinement practices is encouraging and long overdue, and it remains to be seen how far the changes will go towards fully respecting human rights. And, troublingly, BC recently passed two pieces of legislation, that *Community Safety Amendment Act* and the *Civil Forfeiture Amendment Act*, that are likely to exacerbate the criminalization of marginalized groups.

RIGHTS OF PARENTS, CHILDREN, AND YOUTH



BC continues on the path towards universal child care — a welcome policy direction. However, inaction in other areas continues to undermine the well-being of families in BC. The child welfare system is riddled with systemic problems that disproportionately harm Indigenous families. While BC's move to end birth alerts is a positive and hard-won change, questions remain about what will happen to children previously apprehended as a result of birth alerts, and what new supports (if any) the government will provide so that infants and new parents can thrive together. What's more, BC's family law system presents significant barriers and risks for parents and children who are survivors of gender-based violence.

Download the full report card at
westcoastleaf.org/our-publications/report-card-2019-2020/



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