

CITIZENS FOR
PUBLIC JUSTICE



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Consolidating Commitments, Honouring Rights

Submission to Pre-Budget Consultations
October 2022

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Divert subsidies from the fossil fuel sector towards the development of renewable and efficient energy sources, while supporting those most impacted by this transition.

Recommendation #2: Invest in dismantling the barriers faced by many Canadian residents and their families based on immigration status.

Recommendation #3: Work with the provinces and territories to increase the adequacy and accessibility of income supports, ensuring all people living in Canada are brought up to a minimum income floor consistent with the right to an adequate standard of living.

Recommendation #4: Address the current affordable housing crisis and the financialization of the housing market by increasing the share of publicly-owned, non-profit housing and ending preferential tax policies for Real Estate Investment Trusts.

Recommendation #5: Work with the provinces and territories to close inequitable gaps in health and socio-economic outcomes by ensuring all people living in Canada can access the health and social services, medications, and related supplies needed to support their physical and mental health and meaningful participation in society.

Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ) is a faith-based public policy organization that believes federal policy can and must serve the public good. Our research, policy analysis, education, and advocacy work are grounded in an understanding of the sacredness of creation and the dignity of all people. From this perspective, the central role of government is to promote the well-being of its residents, and the flourishing of the Earth. We pursue our policy analysis and advocacy through an [Equity and Anti-Oppression](#) framework, and walk in solidarity with those that are most severely impacted in our issue areas.

Consolidating commitments

CPJ has continually argued for federal budgets that take a holistic, all-of-government approach to addressing the crises we face. We acknowledge that recent Federal Budgets have explicitly recognized the need for climate justice, Indigenous Reconciliation, poverty eradication, and refugee and migrant rights.

While important progress has been made, it is time to prioritize investments commensurate with the urgency of these interconnected issues, and reject incrementalistic approaches that fall short of addressing root causes. Our main request in this budgetary cycle is for a bold federal budget that consolidates critical commitments and that implements effective, equitable policies to close the gaps between the Government's human rights obligations and people's lived experiences.

Human rights as minimum standards

As a signatory of multiple international and domestic human rights charters and conventions, Canada has a legal (as well as moral) responsibility to create the conditions in which these rights are upheld. The federal budget should reflect the use of all available levers to effect change. This includes prioritizing spending towards those whose human rights are not being upheld, as well as generating revenue in a way that ensures governments, industries, and individuals all do their fair share, and that contributes to a more equal distribution of wealth and wellbeing. People in poverty cannot afford another budget that prioritizes the middle class.

While CPJ acknowledges significant progress in the federal government's commitments and investments in areas such as housing, income supports, and childcare, for example, current efforts still do not adequately address persistent trends in who is most likely to experience poverty, food insecurity, or housing insecurity - all violations of our inherent human rights.

Previous budgets have successfully shown, however, that the government has the tools and resources to make a real difference in people's lives: we know that income transfers; publicly funded, universally accessible programs; and progressive tax policies work together to lift people out of poverty. What remains is to ensure all people living in Canada can equitably benefit from these policies by increasing their adequacy and expanding eligibility criteria.

The success of this federal budget must be measured against our human rights obligations, and the degree to which we are closing the gaps in health and socio-economic outcomes experienced by people living in Canada who are Indigenous, Black, People of Colour, disabled, 2SLGBTQIA+, women or gender nonconforming, and those with low-incomes and/or precarious immigration status.

In the following five recommendations, we present key policies and spending priorities that would contribute to a Federal Budget that upholds the principles of equity, sustainability, and justice.

Policy Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Divert subsidies from the fossil fuel sector towards the development of renewable and efficient energy sources, while supporting those most impacted by this transition.

All fossil fuel subsidies should be ended, as has been promised will happen by 2023. The savings (at least \$6.5 billion over three years) from ending these subsidies should then be invested towards **renewable and efficient energy, skills development and training** for those leaving fossil fuel-intensive industries, and **income supports for people most impacted** by the transition to renewable energy. This includes those with low incomes, migrants, and residents of remote rural and Northern communities who disproportionately bear the impacts of climate change and increases to the cost of living.

Recommendation #2: Invest in dismantling the barriers faced by many Canadian residents based on immigration status.

We recommend that the government invest in dismantling the barriers faced by many Canadian residents and their families based on immigration status. These efforts should include **increased staff capacity to reduce backlogs and processing wait times**. Currently there are approximately 1.3 million applications in the backlog, including 336,200 permanent residency applications and 829,000 temporary residency applications.

Efforts to address barriers should also include the funding necessary for **broad regularization programs** that create more pathways to permanent residency for all migrants, including those who are undocumented and those working in low-wage jobs. Additionally, the government should **ensure that programs and services are available to all Canadian residents**, regardless of immigration status. Pursuing these recommendations will lead to more equitable access to employment, housing, healthcare, and other important provisions **such as the Canada Child Benefit**.

While an investment in dismantling these barriers may come at an initial increase in budget costs, we urge the federal government to honour its commitment to the principles of human rights and equality. As a nation that strives to champion values of human rights, equal access must be granted to all people who are contributing to Canada through many forms including social networks and the economy. Moreover, through taxes and economic activity, migrants help fund the very services and programs that often exclude them. The budget should reflect a recognition of the basic human rights all people are entitled to without any barriers due to immigration status.

Recommendation #3: Work with the provinces and territories to increase the adequacy and accessibility of income supports, ensuring all people living in Canada are brought up to a minimum income floor consistent with the right to an adequate standard of living.

Budget 2023 should **increase federal income benefits** to reflect the real cost of living and inflation, including Employment Insurance, the Canada Worker's Benefit, Guaranteed Income Supplement, Canada Housing Benefit, and the Canada Child Benefit, as well as fast-tracking the creation of the Canada Disability Benefit and the interim Canada Dental Benefit. **Eligibility must be expanded** to ensure all people living in Canada can access these benefits regardless of immigration status. For the Canada Child Benefit specifically, expand the circle of people able to attest to residency and ensure that kinship, customary care, and families caring for children outside a formal care arrangement have access to the CCB.

The federal government must also **ensure that when federal supports are made available, provincial and territorial supports are not clawed back**. Efforts must be harmonized to bring people up to a minimum income threshold. CPJ recommends the CFLIM-60 (i.e., 60% of the median income of tax filers, adjusted for household size) as a minimum threshold.

In particular, immediate **CERB repayment amnesty** should be granted to all people with low-incomes who received the CERB, used it for its intended purpose, and were then

ordered to repay the amount. Income supports that were lost because of the temporary increase in income from the CERB must be immediately reinstated and paid retroactively for people with low income, similar to what was done for seniors receiving the Guaranteed Income Supplement.

Recognizing the many gaps and inadequacies of our current patchwork of income supports and eligibility criteria, CPJ further supports the development of a **federal basic income guarantee**.

Recommendation #4: Address the current affordable housing crisis and the financialization of the housing market by increasing the share of publicly-owned, non-profit housing and ending preferential tax policies for Real Estate Investment Trusts.

Budget 2023 must build on the current commitments of the National Housing Strategy by investing in the creation of new **deeply affordable and accessible social housing** supply, and the repair, renewal, and retrofit of existing social housing stock. Canada's **goal should be eliminating core housing need**, particularly among those disproportionately impacted, including people who are Indigenous, Black, People of Colour, disabled, 2SLGBTQIA+, women or gender nonconforming, and those with low income and/or precarious immigration status.

CPJ supports the recommendations outlined in the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' [Alternative Federal Budget](#), along with partners at the National Right to Housing Network and many others committed to effective and equitable policies grounded in the right to housing. For Budget 2023, we call on the federal government to:

- commit to building 1 million non-market and co-op housing units within a decade;
- ensure supportive housing supply is allocated for people with mental, physical, developmental, and addictions health needs;
- ensure a minimum of 33% of all housing investments reach households led by diverse women and gender diverse people as per GBA+ commitments under the National Housing Strategy;
- implement and adequately fund the recommendations for an Urban, Rural, and Northern Indigenous Housing Strategy as envisioned by the CHRA Indigenous Caucus' 2018 *For Indigenous, By Indigenous* report;
- end preferential tax policies for Real Estate Investment Trusts; and
- end first time home buyer tax incentives, which do not benefit those in core housing need.

Recommendation #5: Work with the provinces and territories to close inequitable gaps in health and socio-economic outcomes by ensuring all people living in Canada can access the health and social services, medications, and related supplies needed to support their physical and mental health and meaningful participation in society.

A key priority for Budget 2023 should be to **pay full compensation as ordered by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal** to the First Nations children, parents, and grandparents who were harmed by discriminatory funding for child welfare services on reserve and lack of adherence to Jordan's Principle. This is a critical and clear step in adhering to our country's human rights obligations and the government's stated commitment to reconciliation.

Similarly, CPJ feels the government of Canada has the information and tools required to move forward on implementing a **national, single-payer pharmacare program** as outlined in the 2019 Final Report of the Advisory Council on the Implementation of National Pharmacare, A Prescription for Canada: Achieving Pharmacare for All, and the creation of the interim Canada Dental Benefit. The proposed mental health transfer and Canada Disability Benefit should also be moved forward with input from those disproportionately impacted.

While the goal of offering \$10/day childcare services is a major improvement over current fees, this rate is still unaffordable for many parents and caregivers. In Budget 2023, we call for targeted investments to implement **operational funding of childcare programs** based on set (daily) fees on a sliding ability-to-pay scale, from \$0 to a maximum of \$10, replacing full user fees and individual parent fee subsidies. Operational funding of childcare services must also factor in **decent, fair compensation for staff**.

CPJ further recommends that **conditions be tied to the Canada Social Transfer** to ensure funds are spent on intended social services and infrastructure (e.g., housing, income supports, childcare) that **demonstrably reduce inequities in health and socio-economic outcomes**.

CPJ welcomes the opportunity to discuss our recommendations in greater detail.

Sincerely,

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