



*Manitoba's Femme Fiscale grades the Golden Boy on his commitment to women's equality.*

Manitoba  
**Equality**  
Report Card  
2010

# **Manitoba Equality Report Card 2010**

## **Cumulative Grade: C+**

### **Introduction**

Forty years ago, Manitoba women joined women from across Canada to voice their concerns about equality through the Royal Commission on the Status of Women. We have come a long way since this historic event, however, in many ways we still have a long way to go. At the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, governments from around the world pledged to work towards implementing the Convention on All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW requires Canada to modify existing laws and implement new ones without delay to promote women's equality and to refrain from engaging in any practice of discrimination against women. The federal government set out Canada's commitment in 1995 in its Federal Plan for Gender Equality. The Government of Manitoba was also represented at the Beijing meetings and pledged to work towards women's equality in all areas. While Manitoba has taken some important steps, more needs to be done. As part of ongoing efforts to help our governments maintain their focus on women's equality, several organizations across the country have issued report cards for their provinces (last year BC earned a D and PEI earned a C). UNPAC offers this report card as a baseline which can help our government ensure that it is on track to meet its equality commitments to the women of Manitoba.

This survey is not a comprehensive study. Rather it is an overview of the situation now, highlighting particular issues of concern to women within each theme. Generally, the ideals of CEDAW were used as a benchmark. Grades were assigned according to the following criteria:

- A** = Fulfillment of women's equality
- B** = Considerable action towards creating equality for women
- C** = Some action taken; needs continued improvement
- D** = Very limited action; needs significant improvement
- F** = Total inaction or detrimental action

In Canada, all provincial policy-making takes place within a federal context, a context that is currently extremely inhospitable to women's equality. Although we recognize that the province is constrained by lack of federal commitment to these issues, we believe that more work can be done in Manitoba and we urge our government to commit to immediate action to address these inequalities.

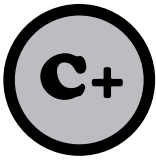


## Economic Security

No province in Canada should be proud of its economic record when, as a nation, we face ever increasing gaps between our richest and poorest citizens, and Manitoba is no exception. Because women are overrepresented among the poorest citizens, this also implies a low grade on equality. Manitoba women earn an average of \$25, 627 compared with Manitoba men's average earnings of \$37, 317, meaning women earn 69 cents for every dollar men earn. Immigrant women and women with disabilities earn less and Aboriginal women's earnings are so low that they amount to a mere 50% of the average earnings of men. Social assistance rates have not increased significantly since 1992, in constant dollars, and minimum wage also lags significantly relative to inflation despite recent increases. In both cases, women and their families dependent on assistance or minimum wage work live below the poverty line. Thirty five percent of women earned income under \$40,000, whereas only 18% of men did. By contrast 41% of men earned incomes over \$80,000 but only 20% of women did. Studies show that at least some of the difference between women and men's economic well-being stems from women carrying the responsibility of care for children and other dependent individuals.

What this means is that government policies that favour tax cuts and the consequent social program spending cuts will, on average, disadvantage women and favour men. By contrast, policies that maintain government revenue and support social programs will assist women. Manitoba has recently introduced an anti-poverty plan called *All Aboard* which, while it does not specifically target women, will benefit women. Furthermore, the recently introduced Primary Caregiver Tax Credit of \$1,020 does benefit women who provide the bulk of care for dependent individuals in the province. The Manitoba Child Benefit also assists women and their children in low-income families. Finally, the decision to reject the Harmonized Sales Tax is good for Manitoba women since sales taxes take a much larger proportion of the income of poorer individuals than they do of richer ones. Other policy developments are not as positive for women. Removal of the Corporation Capital Tax and the small business income tax on the other hand will ultimately be harmful to women as that source of revenue disappears. Tax credits for adult physical activity will benefit higher income individuals (lower income people cannot afford the fees for participation in discretionary programs) and men (women have less leisure time than men).

CEDAW requires Canada to ensure that women have equal access to employment opportunities and pay and to adequate social security. Necessary supporting social services to enable parents to combine family obligations with paid work and participation in public life are also required. Our province's performance would ordinarily merit a grade of C, but the continued willingness of both the former and the current Finance Ministers to work with UNPAC and other experts to develop gender-based analysis of tax laws and other fiscal policy warrants an upgrade to a C+. We look forward to continued progress in the near future.



## **Domestic Violence and Violence Against Women**

Historically, Manitoba has been a leader in Canada regarding its initiatives on Domestic Violence (D.V.) and violence against women. The Manitoba Department of Justice was the first in Canada to introduce specialized criminal court processes to respond to family violence. In 1999, Manitoba introduced the most comprehensive Domestic Violence and Stalking Act in Canada which was further improved with amendments in 2005 and finally the Victim's Bill of Rights introduced in 2001 which promised services for victims, as well as consequences for offenders. In the social service field Manitoba has led the country in its combined housing and social services response to the needs of victims for shelters and second stage housing, providing facilities, per diems and program costs to ensure stable funding for essential shelter services throughout the province. Manitoba was also a leader in the country for its service and funding agreements with D.V. agencies providing clear expectations to the funded agencies and clear accountability to tax payers. Up to 2006, Manitoba would have received an A or an A+ grade for its creativity in responding to the needs of victims and offenders in the area of Family Violence.

In the past five years, however, the Manitoba government has cut back critical programs and made announcements that have failed to follow through. In 2008, the Manitoba government announced that it would be forming a committee to examine the feasibility of developing a Domestic Violence Death Review Committee. Several meetings were held in late 2008, but since then there have been no further meetings and nothing has happened. In response to the growing public concern about murdered and missing Aboriginal women, the Manitoba government announced last fall the creation of the Manitoba Action Group on Exploited and Vulnerable Women. This was to be a collaboration of the departments of Justice and Indian Affairs with a number of Aboriginal Agencies. Six months later no further announcements have been made, no policies developed and nothing has happened despite the fact that Aboriginal women continue to be at heightened risk of interpersonal violence and homicide. In Winnipeg, a woman in distress has to wait 7 weeks on average in order to get an appointment with a counsellor. This retreat from previous progress means that Manitoba is not living up to its commitments to women under CEDAW even though important steps had been taken previously.

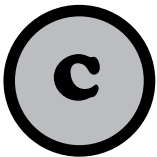


## **Access to Justice**

In many ways Manitoba is attentive to the legal needs of women. It is one of only three provinces in Canada that extend property rights to spouses in common-law relationships, a significant protection for women. It is the first province in the country to have achieved gender balance in the provincial court where 50% of judges are women and diversity of representation is increasing. The Manitoba Human Rights Commission serves all claimants without charge and will follow through to resolution within a reasonable timeframe. The Commission also

provides important public education programs that advise employers and landlords of their obligations and alert the public to their rights. Women have access to a dedicated legal clinic at Nor'West Women's Centre that is responsive to their particular experiences and interactions with the justice system, and test cases to establish equality rights or address poverty issues can be brought forward with the support of the Public Interest Law Centre. Finally, in terms of access to legal services through legal aid, Manitoba women and their families can use a collaborative process that helps to resolve family law issues without the courts and with less stress and turmoil for all involved.

Despite many positive aspects of women's access to justice in Manitoba there are still significant barriers. The income levels to qualify for legal aid are drastically low (as low as \$14,000 for a single individual and \$34,000 for a family of 6 to qualify for free legal assistance with very slightly higher amounts allowed if the claimant pays part of the legal costs) making it difficult to qualify for legal aid. Furthermore, with a priority for legal aid going to serious criminal matters, and men vastly more likely to be accused of such offenses than women, almost 60% of legal services are provided to men. Approximately 80% of criminal law legal aid certificates go to men, less than 20% to women. Manitoba funds legal aid at lower per capita rates than other provinces and the gap in service is filled by the lawyers of the province who will work for lower rates or for free in order to help ensure that needs for representation are met. In fact, the Law Society of Manitoba (and not the province) has recently implemented a family law access program that will provide reduced cost legal representation to middle income families. Expanded and stable core funding to the Nor'West women's legal clinic and others like it would go a long way to addressing some access to justice issues for women.



## **Post-Secondary Education**

Manitoba is richer now that all members of society are permitted to deepen their understanding of the world through post-secondary pursuits. Sixty-nine percent of undergraduates enrolled in universities in the 2007-8 academic year were women. At the same time, an increased number of women are working at universities. While celebrating how far we have come, we must not forget that there is still work to be done to meet the unique needs and situations of all members of our society.

Although they represent a majority of students, women are more likely than men to be studying part-time. Part-time students are not eligible for Manitoba Student Aid and bursaries. The full-time eligibility requirement disproportionately affects women and is compounded by the lack of adequate child care services. In their submission to the Levin Commission last year, the Canadian Federation of Students highlighted that: "Women account for much of the increase in part-time studies at the university level over the past 30 years." Of those women attending classes full-time, 62% take on student loans to be able to get this education. As tuition fees in Manitoba rise, women will pay more for their degrees than men through increased student debtload and longer interest payment periods, related to women's reduced earning potential due to lower wages and greater caregiving responsibili-

ties. Manitoba women also remain under represented in non-traditional fields which are higher-paying; more needs to be done to address this. Only through continued pressure for equitable wages, affordable education, accessible child care and reduced debt levels will women truly see fairness both during and after their studies.



## **Childcare**

In 2001, Manitoba had a total of 23,022 full and part-time childcare spaces, in regulated family homes, nursery schools and centres. By 2008, the supply of childcare spaces had grown to 27,189, bettering the number of children and families who had access to licensed service – from 12.4 percent of children in 2001 to 15.5 percent in 2008. Still, fewer than one in six children – even fewer in poorer communities – has access to childcare. Manitoba has relatively flat fees, charging parents the lowest cost outside of Quebec.

However, where work-family reconciliation services like childcare are under-developed, it is women who suffer. Very low-income families have poor access to childcare services, since the subsidy system requires families to generally be below the poverty line to receive the maximum subsidy. Moreover, even the poorest parents still pay a surcharge of up to \$2/day per child. Wages for early childhood educators (almost all of whom are women) are very low, causing chronic province-wide staff shortages. For over a decade, more than one-third of Manitoba centres have not been able to attract and keep the required number of trained staff, due to funding shortages. Almost all of Manitoba's childcare centres are owned and operated by non-profit community groups; just 5 percent of centres are commercially operated. In funding, policy and delivery there is little recognition that childcare and early childhood care and education are inseparable. Improvements will require close and supportive relationships with school systems or public delivery.

Many Manitoba children, including large numbers of Aboriginal children, are growing up marginalized by poverty. High quality childcare services can help to mitigate some of their disadvantage, including by helping to close some of the school-readiness gap. Manitoba must increase the quality of and access to childcare services and ensure early childhood educators earn worthy wages to meet its obligations to women under CEDAW and its obligations to children under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is clear that Manitoba needs significant improvement.



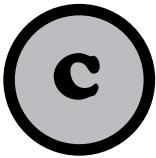
## **Arts**

The vast majority of the Manitoba Government's funding of the arts is conducted through its arm's length granting agency, the Manitoba Arts Council. The Arts Council is responsible for the second highest granting level per capita in the country (second only to Quebec). Despite the recession, Manitoba has not cut arts funding, unlike other provinces. From

January 1 through October 15 of 2009 (the period for which statistics are available), women were well-supported through the Manitoba Arts Council. In fact, the MAC Major Awards to senior artists were, for the first time, granted to a roster of exclusively women artists.

From January until October, grants to individual artists, for the purposes of research, production and professional development, totaled \$1,030,547. Of this amount, \$566,186 was awarded to women artists and \$464,361 to male artists. When the MAC Major Awards to senior artists are removed from these totals, the gender gap in dollars is less than 5%, with a slightly lower amount of \$444,658 being awarded to 145 individual women and \$464,361 being awarded to 128 individual men. This indicates that, with the exception of the MAC Major Awards, although men are receiving fewer awards they receive larger dollar amounts per grant than female artists.

Although funding amounts are for the most part proportionate and in this past year unusually generous in its support of women through the MAC Majors, gender bias does exist with respect to artistic disciplines. In some of the Manitoba Arts Council competitions, all of the filmmakers receiving funding were male; in other competitions all of the dancers receiving funding were female. There were also many more awards to male composers than female, and many more awards to female craftspeople than male. In other words, Manitoba funding for the arts is equitable with respect to gender, but some artistic disciplines are still primarily male or female. Although women make up a higher percentage of practicing visual artists (54%), women have a lower income in the sector: the average Canadian male artist earns \$24,400/year from all sources whereas the average Canadian female artist earns \$13,800/year from all sources.



## **Housing**

Recent changes within Government are raising hopes amongst the more than 55,000 Manitoba women living in inadequate housing. We laud the Government for the creation of a dedicated Department of Housing, and for their commitment to building 1500 new social housing units in the next five years.

In spite of these important commitments, the need remains enormous. Women earn less than men, are the majority of single parents and perform the majority of unpaid work. Quality, affordable housing is critical in supporting women in their work and providing safety and stability for families and communities. Housing is a foundational issue yet Manitoba women and their families daily face infestations, unsafe locks, discrimination and harassment from landlords, and rents that are unaffordable. Women live longer than men and have an increased rate of disability; their particular housing needs are often unmet. Although women are less likely to use homeless shelters, due to safety concerns and lack of dedicated beds for women, women are more likely to be among the hidden homeless. Women couch surf or stay with friends and family or “choose” to remain in abusive relationships because there is no other suitable place to go.

On average, 11.3% of Manitoba women are in core housing need (defined as living in housing that is in need of major repair, does not have enough bedrooms for the number of people or costs more than 30% of their income). For certain groups of women this number is much higher: 36.1% of women who are lone parents in Winnipeg, 30.7% of Aboriginal women and 20% of senior women in Manitoba are living in core housing need. The housing allowance for social assistance recipients in Winnipeg is \$285/month for individuals and \$387/month for a single parent family with one child. In 2006, the average 2-bedroom apartment in Winnipeg rented for \$709/month.

The effects of inadequate housing are far-reaching and cost all of us. Women in unsafe and unhealthy housing get sick more frequently. They also move more often interrupting both their children's health and education. Home ownership is not the answer for many women; we need quality rental housing with rents that match income. All women in Manitoba – and their families – deserve a safe and stable roof over their heads.

## **B** Health

Manitoba women are on the whole healthy and live long. Most women (60%) over the age of 12 report their own health to be “excellent” or “very good”. Life expectancy at birth is 81.3 years, very close to the Canadian average of 81.4 years, and life expectancy has been increasing for some time. However, there are disparities across the province. Age, place of residence, income and identity all influence women's health. Both rural and urban women with higher incomes, for example, are considerably more likely to enjoy better health and are less likely to have chronic conditions. The historical and current contexts for the health of First Nations women are beginning to be understood, but there are other groups of women about which we know very little. We do not know much about the health of new immigrants in this province nor immigrant women who have been living in Manitoba for some time. We also know very little about the health status of women with physical disabilities or what issues lesbians and trans-gendered women consider essential to their good health.

Nevertheless, Manitoba has shown leadership in supporting and articulating the role gender plays in determining women's health and there have been some thoughtful policy changes to reduce inequities and improve health equality. Manitoba Health and Healthy Living has supported the development of Gender Based Analysis and gendered research for the province. Programs including Healthy Child, Healthy Baby and Families First support young mothers with children. Manitoba Home Care improves quality of life and health for women who receive care (the majority of Home Care users) but also can relieve stress for women who provide care.

There is still room for improvement. Violence against women remains a serious women's health issue and Manitoba needs to invest in changing underlying gender-based power differences that perpetuate violence and the acceptability of violence against women in our society. The shortage of core housing,

along with poverty and food insecurity, is dire and women have said this is a fundamental detriment to their health. CEDAW calls for equality of access to health services, particularly for family planning. Manitoba provides abortion and reproductive care, but rural and remote living women are at a disadvantage in getting timely services. A much-needed birth centre was just announced for Winnipeg by the government and can be one more step to relieving fragmented maternity care, but Manitoba does not yet have a full midwifery education program. Mental health services are not evenly distributed, and women cannot always get the mental health care they need. Reduced hospital stays increase women's unpaid work and can affect their health as they are usually the caregivers at home.



## **Decision-Making**

Manitoba has an impressive record of women in political office. Manitoba has the highest representation of women in provincial or territorial governments at 31.6% compared with a national provincial average of 24.7%. Manitoba also has a record number of women in Cabinet at 42.1%, a close second to Quebec and well above the national provincial average of 29.8%. Manitoba recently appointed its first female Minister of Finance. And there has also been steady progress at women's representation at all levels of civil service; women make up 39.4% of Civil Service Commission Senior Officials (ie. Directors, Executive Directors, Assistant Deputy Ministers and Deputy Ministers). The Government of Manitoba invests in developing women's leadership skills through the Civil Service Commission's women's leadership program. Manitoba should also be commended for keeping the Manitoba Status of Women – a department which some provinces have eliminated.

Our current reality matches Manitoba's history as the first province to give women the right to vote and hold office in 1916 and reflects the deep commitment of Manitoba women to serve their communities, as well as political commitment to women's representation. Manitoba has also introduced a consultative process in many government decisions. We laud their commitment to budget consultations and processes such as the Women's Health Strategy and the Opening Doors consultation with women living with disabilities. Manitoba's politicians must also continue to provide leadership in establishing working conditions that work for women. Balancing work and family commitments is a challenge for many of Manitoba's female elected leaders, particularly those from rural areas.

However, despite women's presence in government, there still seems to be a nervousness around using the W word (Woman) within the halls of power. The decision to absorb Status of Women into the Ministry of Labour is indicative of this, as is the nearly non-existent public comment on the need to address women's inequality. The push for diversity in government policy and programs is real and seems somewhat more acceptable than the push for gender equality. Given Manitoba women's lived experiences of inequality, the need for increased training around gender and diversity issues is critical. Without political will, equality will never become entrenched in government practice and policy. We look to our government to provide leadership on gender equality.

## Recommendations

The gap between rich and poor impacts women more negatively than men and women's poverty creates and reinforces other inequalities in women's daily lives. Women can only move closer to equality with men when they move out of poverty. With this in mind, we strongly urge the Manitoba Government to resist the push to cut taxes and, where necessary to implement progressive tax increases in the interest of the well-being of the whole community. Governments should implement specific strategies that address women's specific needs, thus **we recommend that the Manitoba Government:**

- 1.** Commit to measures that will address economic inequality including increasing minimum wage and social assistance rates and implementing a gender-based budget process and a timeline of five years for its full integration within all government departments.
- 2.** Keep and act upon all previously made, as well as future, commitments related to women's equality including the establishment of the Manitoba Action Group on Exploited and Vulnerable Women and respond to the Manitoba Association of Women and the Law's 20 year report on the equality guarantee in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.
- 3.** Increase stable core funding for services and supports for vulnerable women in line with gender-based research and in response to affected women (eg. counselling, housing, resource centres, child care, etc.).
- 4.** Implement province-wide targets or mechanisms for growth in the current five-year plan on child care.
- 5.** Increase housing-related benefits, including Employment and Income Assistance Shelter Allowances and Manitoba Shelter Benefits, by 20% and index them to annual increases in the Rent Increase Guidelines. At the same time build more new affordable housing units while upgrading and maintaining current housing stock.
- 6.** Push the federal government to live up to its commitments under international covenants including CEDAW as well as to sign on to other covenants that are important to women such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

**Thanks to:** CCPA Manitoba, Equal Voice, LEAF Manitoba, Manitoba Status of Women, PEI Status of Women, University of Winnipeg Student's Association, West Central Women's Resource Centre, West Coast LEAF, Marianne Cerilli, Jennifer deGroot, Shawna Dempsey, David Jacks, Jackie Hogue, Suzanne Hudson, Susan Prentice, Kelly Ross, Muriel Smith, Gerri Thorsteinson, Lorna Turnbull, Jane Ursel, Susan Wadien.

**UNPAC is an organization of Manitoba women committed to women's equality and empowerment. For more information about our work and for additional copies of this report please contact:**

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