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CANADA

Federal budget measures assessed based on impact on women

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OTTAWA—In what was billed as an historic first, the Liberal government says the entire 2017 federal budget was considered through a gender-based prism, with specific investments framed to promote equality and bring more women into the workforce.

Speaking to Parliament on Wednesday, Finance Minister Bill Morneau said all measures in the new budget were assessed based on their impact on women.

“We did something that, frankly, should have been done a long time ago,” Morneau said, according to prepared remarks of his budget speech.

“As a country, we aren’t taking full advantage of the talents, insights and experience of more than half of our population.”

[Read more on the federal budget](#)

The “Gender Statement” in the 2017 budget outlines the persisting wage gap between men and women in Canada, as well as the overrepresentation of women in lower income sectors and the low proportion of women in management and boardroom positions.

To address this, the new budget proposes to spend \$7 billion over 11 years on early learning and child care, though the new spending doesn’t kick in until the 2018-19 fiscal year. Morneau said, in working with the provinces and territories, this could create 40,000 new child care spaces over the next three years.

According to the budget document, the cost of a single child care space in Toronto can exceed \$20,000 a year.

Another measure aimed to help women is the creation of a national strategy to address gender-based violence. The budget proposes \$100.9 million over five years for the strategy, starting in 2017.

The government is also pointing to \$11.2 billion for affordable housing, most of it slated for spending after 2020, as another measure to help women. It also frames new investments in skills training and student financial assistance as particularly helpful to women.

Anuradha Dugal, director of violence prevention for the Canadian Women’s Foundation, said after the budget’s release that the move to adopt a gender based analysis—a system of thinking that’s been around for decades—is “exceptional” but long overdue.

“I think it’s a good start,” she said. “I would just like to see it continue.”

Dugal added that she’d like to see more clarity on how budget items like the national housing funds—\$11.2 billion over 11 years, though only \$20 million this year—will actually help women.

But she said the Trudeau government has made it “very clear... that they take women’s issues very seriously.”

Ceta Ramkhalawansingh, who managed the city of Toronto's equity and human rights program for 30 years before she retired in 2010, was also pleased the government has begun to use a gender equity lens in budgeting.

"It's a great start," said Ramkhalawansingh, named a YWCA Woman of Distinction earlier this month for her pioneering work on employment equity.

"But I would have liked to have seen more done with their infrastructure funding," she said. "They need to set community benefit and employment equity targets. They are going to have to dig deeper next time."

"I am pleased they are talking about gender but also looking at the intersecting aspects of people's identity and how that shapes where they stand and the barriers they face in their life," said Etana Cain, 29, an advocacy and communications officer for YWCA Toronto.

"I am black and I am a woman and sometimes we don't feel that our experiences are heard or that the barriers that are facing our communities are taken into account," she said.

On issues such as housing, women often have different experiences than men, said Cain, a former board member for Equal Voice.

"Violence is often what plunges women into instability, poverty and homelessness," she said. "So it's positive to see the government is using this type of lens to look at budget decisions."

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