

# THE PINK BOOK:

*A Policy Framework for  
Canada's Future*

*Volume II*

*Liberal Women's Caucus, 2007*

A year ago, National Liberal Women's Caucus developed and released *The Pink Book: A Policy Framework of Canada's Future, Volume I*, which outlined a vision on a number of policy fronts. At that time, Women's Caucus made a commitment to do a follow-up to that document. As a result, I am pleased to present *The Pink Book: Volume II*.



The proposals in *Volume II* deal with violence against women, housing, Aboriginal women, immigrant and refugee women and rural women. As before, we based our recommendations on internal discussions and consultations with representatives of organizations that work on behalf of women.

The positive response from groups and individuals to *Volume I* was encouraging. It revealed that women in Canada are determined to continue the struggle to advance women's equality. They are not fooled by the actions of the present government that pretends to support women but is, in reality, systematically undermining the ability of women's groups to continue their work.

Often I am asked what women's organizations have achieved and whether or not we really need them. My answer is yes, we do need women's groups. It is thanks to dedicated women's groups that:

- maternity/parental benefits are part of the Employment Insurance program;
- immunity has been abolished for husbands who rape their wives;
- spousal assault is a criminal act;
- the confidential files of sexual assault survivors are protected in court; and
- the equality rights clause is included in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

It is important to note that none of these things would have happened under the current government. The elimination of the Court Challenges Program and the Law Commission in 2006, and the drastic changes made to Status of Women Canada pose enormous difficulties for women's equality-seeking organizations.

The National Liberal Women's Caucus will continue to work on behalf of the women of Canada. We will do this by bringing forward progressive and practical policies, speaking up in the House of Commons on issues of concern to women and working with women's organizations to ensure their voices are not silenced by the regressive actions of this government.

In closing, I wish to thank all members of the National Liberal Women's Caucus for their hard work in developing the ideas for *The Pink Book: Volume II*. Also, I want to thank the many organizations who provided input and feedback. Your contributions have been invaluable.

Yours sincerely,

Hon. Belinda Stronach, P.C., M.P. (Newmarket-Aurora)  
Chair, National Liberal Women's Caucus

Building on the success of *The Pink Book: A Policy Framework for Canada's Future, Volume I* the Liberal Women's Caucus is pleased to present *The Pink Book: Volume II*.

Following its release in the fall of 2006, I embarked on a series of roundtable meetings with women across the country to listen to their views on our policy document and take their recommendations back as input for *Volume II*.

Recommendations from rural women, First Nations women and Inuit women, senior women, and many others have been included in the policies that address women's economic security. *Volume II* focuses on challenges faced by our Aboriginal and Inuit peoples, by women in violent relationships, immigrant and refugee women, women in need of adequate and affordable housing and those living in rural Canada.

The Conservative government is ignoring these women and refuses to fund valuable research and advocacy work that would improve their lives. Along with my other colleagues in the Liberal Women's Caucus, I remain firmly committed to fighting for women's equality and working to reverse the backward policies of the Conservative government.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Maria Minna".

Hon. Maria Minna, P.C., M.P. (Beaches-East York)  
Liberal Critic for the Status of Women

Since taking power in 2006 the Conservative government has had ample opportunity to improve the lives of women in Canada. This has not happened. Regretfully, the government played politics with the Women's Program at Status of Women. The removal of "equality" from the goals of the program and the denial of funding to groups that advocate for change have had a profound impact on the ability of women to have their voices heard.

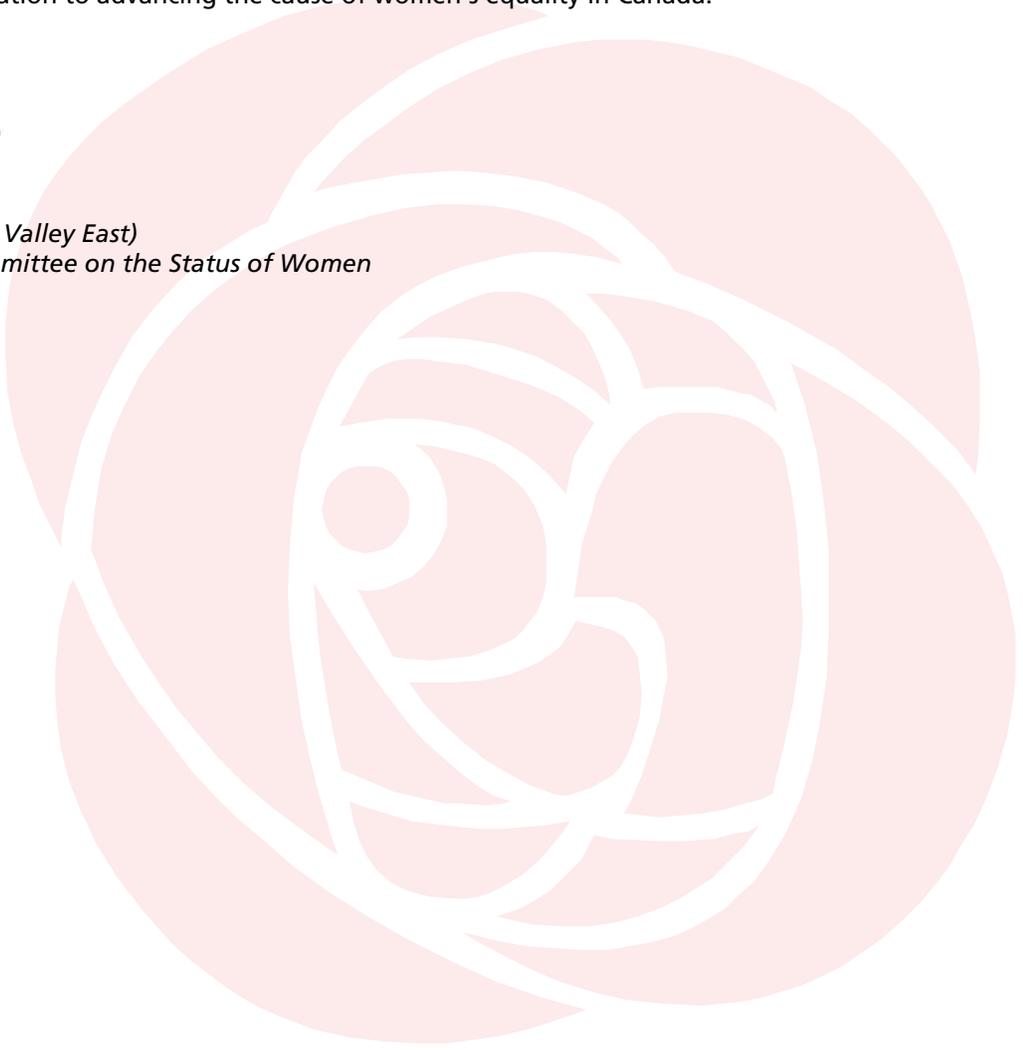
The National Liberal Women's Caucus has been working hard to provide leadership on policy issues of importance to women. *The Pink Book: A Policy Framework for Canada's Future, Volume I* released in 2006 was well received by women from across the country. Women told us that we were making a difference in their lives and were on the right track. *Volume II* follows up on the work began in *Volume I*. I believe we are heading in the direction that the women themselves want, and that is a good beginning.

I am proud to be a member of the National Liberal Women's Caucus. I believe that through the publication of *The Pink Book: Volumes I and II* my colleagues and I have made a significant contribution to advancing the cause of women's equality in Canada.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Y. Ratansi".

Yasmin Ratansi, M.P. (Don Valley East)  
Chair of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women





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# THE PINK BOOK:

*A Policy Framework for Canada's Future, Volume II*

## Introduction

In the fall of 2006, the National Liberal Women's Caucus released *The Pink Book: A Policy Framework for Canada's Future, Volume I* that outlined a progressive vision to advance the economic and social equality of women.

The reaction to *The Pink Book* was overwhelmingly positive. Feedback from individuals and equality-seeking organizations was supportive of the solutions proposed by Women's Caucus. A board member for the Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA) stated: "We are pleased to see the recommendations from the Liberal Women's Caucus because they reflect the efforts of women's groups to achieve greater equality for women in Canada. *The Pink Book* policies will help to alleviate women's economic insecurity."

At that time, Caucus Chair Belinda Stronach reiterated that *The Pink Book: Volume I* was only a beginning and that further recommendations would be made after consultations with women's groups and others who seek to improve the lives of women and their families.

*The Pink Book: Volume II* is the result of these consultations and deal with issues relating to violence against women, housing, Aboriginal women, immigrant and refugee women and rural women. *Volume II* builds upon the work done in the first publication and is intended to be part of an ongoing document that will be added to in the future.

Women's Caucus understands that economic insecurity is a root cause of women's inequality that often prevents women from participating as equals in all aspects of society. As indicated in *Volume I*, poverty comes in many forms and has a myriad of dimensions. It embodies much more than not having enough money to support a decent standard of living. It can also mean a lack of access to education, employment skills and language training for immigrant women, affordable and adequate housing, and child care. Poverty is inextricably linked to women's vulnerability to violence and their ability to leave abusive relationships. These and other barriers are exacerbated by



factors such as race, class, ethnicity, culture, language, geography (urban versus rural) and citizenship status.

Women's Caucus strongly believes that it is time to stop treating the symptoms of poverty with uncoordinated piecemeal programs. The best way to do this is by developing a federal poverty-reduction strategy that provides a framework for action and accountability.

With this in mind, the policy proposals found in *The Pink Book: Volume II* were designed to complement previous proposals and be part of a larger plan. Women's Caucus reaffirms the commitment made in *Volume I* that calls on a new Liberal government to work with the provinces and territories to establish a federal poverty-reduction strategy.

Canada is a wealthy nation that, in 2006-07, had a federal surplus of \$14.1 billion. Even when using cautious assumptions about economic growth, economists predict that the surplus will remain above \$10 billion over the next two years. Surely, there is no better time to tackle the issue of poverty and help thousands of marginalized Canadians enjoy an improved standard of living.

# Violence Against Women

## Introduction

Violence against women is multi-dimensional. It can be physical (punching, kicking, choking), sexual (rape, forced prostitution), verbal or psychological (repeated insults, threats, forced isolation), financial (taking away a woman's wages or forbidding access to family income) and stalking (persistent and unwanted attention)<sup>1</sup>. Women cannot achieve equality if they are subjected to violence in their daily lives. The opposite is also true; women's inequality increases their vulnerability to violence and limits their options for leaving abusive relationships.



The 1991 *Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women* recognised the interrelationship of equality and violence and made a commitment to the achievement of women's equality and the elimination of violence against women. While there has been some progress in the last decade, far too many women in Canada still experience violence at the hands of their intimate partners.

Women's Caucus proposes that a federal poverty-reduction strategy which addresses violence against women would include the policy options presented below, as well as those in *The Pink Book: Volume I* on pay equity, a national child care system, pension reform and the expansion of maternal and parental benefits. Approaching the issue in this manner will substantially increase equality for women and reduce the persistent rates of violence experienced by women.

## Context

In 2006, Canada had 553 shelters for women that, in the previous year, had admitted 105,711 women and dependent children.<sup>2</sup>

About three-quarters of women residing in shelters in 2006 were victims of abuse. The remainder were admitted for other reasons, such as housing problems.<sup>3</sup>

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1 CRIAW (Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women) Fact Sheet – Violence Against Women, 2002

2 Statistics Canada publication, *Canada's Shelters for Abused Women, 2005/2006* – Catalogue no. 85-002-XIE, Vol.27, no.4

3 Statistics Canada publication, *Canada's Shelters for Abused Women, 2005/2006* – Catalogue no. 85-002-XIE, Vol.27, no.4

Among the women admitted for abuse, 66 percent were fleeing psychological abuse, 55 percent physical abuse, 41 percent threats, 37 percent financial abuse, 28 percent harassment, and 23 percent sexual abuse.<sup>4</sup>

Over half (51 percent) of the women escaping abusive situations were admitted with their children; 67 percent of these children (1,998) were under 10 years of age.<sup>5</sup>

Spousal violence affects all socio-demographic groups, but certain segments of the population are more vulnerable than others. Those who are young, live in a common-law relationship, have been in the relationship for three years or less, are Aboriginal, or whose partner is a frequent heavy drinker, are at increased risk of experiencing violence at the hands of their intimate partner.<sup>6</sup>

There were 4,490 solved homicides between 1994 and 2003, of which 1,695 or 38 percent, were family related. Spousal homicides accounted for about 18 percent of all solved homicides and almost half (47 percent) of all family homicides. Women are much more likely than men to be killed by their spouse – the spousal homicide rate against females is five times higher than the rate for males.<sup>7</sup>

Women are more likely than men to suffer physical injury and to fear for their lives as a result of the violence endured at the hands of an intimate partner. Overall, 13 percent of female victims who reported spousal abuse in Statistics Canada General Social Survey of 2004<sup>8</sup> indicated that they sought medical attention, compared to two percent of male victims of spousal violence who sought medical intervention.<sup>9</sup>

## Policy Options

Women's Caucus believes that to successfully combat violence against women a sustained and co-ordinated effort involving all levels of government is required. However, there are concrete measures that the federal government can take that will have an immediate and significant impact.

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4 Statistics Canada publication, *Canada's Shelters for Abused Women, 2005/2006* – Catalogue no. 85-002-XIE, Vol.27, no.4

5 Statistics Canada publication, *Canada's Shelters for Abused Women, 2005/2006* – Catalogue no. 85-002-XIE, Vol.27, no.4

6 Statistics Canada, *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2005*

7 Statistics Canada, *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2005*

8 Statistics Canada's General Social Survey (GSS) includes a section on victimization that surveys random sample of approximately 24,000 women and men aged 15 years and older about violence that their marital or common-law partner may have committed against them in the 5 years preceding the survey.

9 Statistics Canada, *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2005*

Women's Caucus endorses the following policy options:

- (1a) Amending the federal *Divorce Act* regarding custody and access decisions. Currently these decisions are made using the "best interests of the child test", but the legislation does not outline specific criteria as to what constitutes best interests. The federal amendment should be modeled on Section 24 of Ontario's *Children's Law Reform Act*, which includes consideration of family violence in determining custody.<sup>10</sup>
- (1b) Section 16(10) of the *Divorce Act* presently requires the custodial parent to be willing to ensure maximum contact between the child and the parent who has access. This should be either removed or rewritten to protect children and/or their parent from an access parent who has a history of abuse.
- (2) Public education is largely within the purview of the provinces but there is a role for the federal government. Working in partnership with the provinces and territories, Women's Caucus recommends that the federal government develop a national public awareness campaign designed to highlight the magnitude of the problem and what can be done to eliminate it.
- (3) Presently, there is a dedicated fund for criminal legal aid under the Canada Social Transfer (CST). On the other hand, money for legal aid for family and civil law matters from the CST transfer can be spent in this category, but it is entirely up to the provincial or territorial government to determine the level of spending. As a result, many women cannot access legal aid for family law matters, even when they are leaving an abusive relationship.

While the administration of legal aid falls within provincial jurisdiction, the federal government can increase its financial contribution under the Canada Social Transfer. Women's Caucus, therefore, supports providing increased federal funds dedicated to civil legal aid under the CST<sup>11</sup> to ensure that women have much-needed access to legal representation in family law matters.

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10 Section 24 (4) In assessing a person's ability to act as a parent, the court shall consider the fact that the person has at any time committed violence against his or her spouse or child, against his or her child's parent or against another member of the person's household

11 This recommendation is endorsed by both the Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA) and the United Nations Expert Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

# Housing and Homelessness

## Introduction

Women's Caucus has advocated for many years for the need to have a co-ordinated housing policy and was instrumental in the creation of the National Homelessness Initiative in 1999. While Women's Caucus applauds the success of this program and other federal initiatives, members realize that a long-term coherent approach is required if we are to meet the basic housing needs of Canadians.

The magnitude of the problem is compelling - over 4 million people in Canada are in need of adequate and affordable housing. A disproportionate number of these people are Aboriginal women, single older women, single mothers and recent immigrants. The reality for these women is that the bulk of their earnings will go towards housing costs limiting their ability to provide for other basic needs.

Women's Caucus acknowledges that it is impossible to talk about housing for women without talking about poverty – any solution in one area requires action in the other. For example, increasing the stock of affordable housing would be a positive step, but without increased income supports the situation will not necessarily improve for low-income women.

## Context

Women are more likely than men to experience extended periods of low income and greater depths of poverty. In 2003, there were approximately 1.5 million adult women living in poverty.<sup>12</sup>

In 2003, 42 percent of renter families headed by single mothers had difficulty finding affordable housing.<sup>13</sup>

In 2003, 72 percent of single women over 65 who rented were considered to have housing affordability problems.<sup>14</sup>

Barriers to affordable housing force many women to stay in physically abusive relationships to avoid homelessness for themselves and their

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12 Townson, Monica, (August 2005) "*Poverty Issues for Canadian Women*". 2003 is the most recent year for which information is available.

13 Statistic Canada, *Women in Canada* (March 2006)

14 Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada*, (March 2006)

children. Studies emphasize a strong link between stable, affordable housing and women's personal safety and economic participation.

Homelessness is devastating to women's physical health and mental well-being.<sup>15</sup>

The death rate for homeless women is ten times that of women who are housed.<sup>16</sup>

Between six to 12 percent of the homeless in large cities across Canada are teen girls.<sup>17</sup>

Often girls leave their homes and communities to escape violence. A 2001 survey of homeless girls in British Columbia showed 87 percent of the girls had been physically and/or sexually abused.<sup>18</sup>

Statistics on shelters and street homelessness do not adequately capture women's and girls' real incidence of housing inadequacy or homelessness. Women and girls experience homelessness in a variety of different ways, including: living with the threat of violence because there are no housing options; living in unsafe or unhealthy accommodation; sacrificing necessities such as food, clothing and medical needs to pay rent or to make mortgage payments; moving into overcrowded accommodation with family or friends; being forced into a sexually exploitative arrangement in order to secure shelter and avoid the perils of life on the street; and, losing custody of their children because of inadequate housing.<sup>19</sup>

Most of these individualized "housing crises" do not show up in homelessness counts or media portrayals of homelessness, but they increasingly define the lives of low income women in Canada today.

## Policy Options

The National Liberal Women's Caucus proposes that a national poverty reduction strategy which addresses women's housing inequality would be based on two core principles: (1) any housing policy must address the needs of the most disadvantaged and poorest women in Canada including Aboriginal women, single mothers, girls, immigrant/refugee women,

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15 E. Ambrosio, L. Baker, C. Crowe, & K. Hardill, *The Street Health Report*. (Toronto: Street Health, 1992); Kappel Ramji Consulting Group, *Common occurrence: The impact of homelessness on women's health. Phase II: Community based action research final report*. (Toronto: Sistering, A Woman's Place / Brown Books Inc 2001).

16 Cheung & Hwang (April 2004), "Risk of death among homeless women: a cohort study and review of the literature" CMAJ at 1243.

17 Based on compilations of statistics from across Canada found in the *On Her Own: Young women and Homelessness in Canada* report, March 2002

18 *No Place to Call Home: A profile of Street youth in BC*, 2001

19 Taken from information provided by the National Working Group on Women and Housing, 2007

disabled women and women in receipt of social assistance; and (2) any housing policy must advance women's equality.

To date, despite women's disproportionate experiences of poverty, and need for adequate and affordable housing, no federal government program has identified low-income women as a priority population. This needs to change and in addition, a new housing strategy must be subject to a gender analysis and be consistent with Canada's international human rights obligations.

Women's Caucus endorses the following policy options:

- (1) The development of a National Housing Strategy inclusive of women. Access to safe affordable housing is a foundation upon which other economic and social incomes (e.g., health, employment) depend. For low-income women this need is particularly acute, as housing will always constitute a significant expenditure of their income and therefore be a main determinant of their well-being.
- (2) It is often suggested that the only way to assist low income tenants in need of adequate and affordable housing is to build new social housing. Not only is the creation of new subsidized housing costly, but subsidized housing benefits only a small number of households who are in need. Many women in critical need of a housing subsidy will not receive it because they do not have access to subsidized unit.

One solution to this persistent problem is a portable shelter subsidy<sup>20</sup> that is tied to need rather than to designated units. The portability allows a woman to choose where she would like to live, be it closer to family, social support networks, schools, etc. It also avoids the stigma that can come with living in social housing. This change would significantly increase the number of women who could receive the assistance they need to live in adequate, affordable housing.

There are other benefits to a portable shelter subsidy. It is administratively convenient and can be allocated as a direct cash transfer or tax credit. This eliminates the discriminatory consequences of lengthy waiting lists and other restrictions of social housing. One of the most attractive aspects is that a portable shelter subsidy would be determined by need rather than by whether a woman has access to a social housing unit.

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<sup>20</sup> National portable shelter subsidies are an essential component of the housing strategies of most other developed countries. Shelter subsidies have been a fundamental component of many reports on homelessness in Canada including former liberal Housing Minister, Joe Fontana's report: *Toward a New Canadian Housing Framework* (July 15, 2005). In addition, portable shelter subsidies are supported by private sector landlords (see: Federation of Rental-housing Providers of Ontario, *Improving Access to Housing for Families in Ontario: A Response to the Ontario Human Rights Commission Discussion Paper: Human Rights and the Family in Ontario*).

# Rural Women



## Introduction

Rural women face a unique set of challenges distinct from those faced by urban women. A 2006 Senate report revealed that poverty plays out differently along gender lines in rural Canada. For women, poverty is exacerbated by issues around transportation, child care and work. Rural women also are frequently trapped in low-wage or minimum wage jobs.<sup>21</sup>

The National Liberal Women's Caucus believes that rural women have been invisible for far too long. The issues they deal with on a daily basis seldom receive political attention. This policy document recognizes the need to develop policies that take into account rural realities. Whether it is access to child care, transportation, education, training, or language assistance for immigrant women, it is time to speak up for the 20 percent of women who live in rural areas.<sup>22</sup>

## Context

According to the 2006 Census, of Canada's total population of 32 million people 6,262,154, or less than one in five Canadians, live in rural and remote parts of the country.<sup>23</sup>

Canada's population in small towns and rural areas only grew by one percent between 2001 and 2006, after declining by 0.4 percent in the previous period.<sup>24</sup> As well, rural areas close to urban centres grew much faster, by 4.7 percent in 2006, than remote rural areas, where populations declined by 0.1 percent.<sup>25</sup>

Not all rural women live on farms, in fact, the largest share of rural women (17 percent) live in rural non-farm areas, while 2 percent live on farms.<sup>26</sup>

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21 *Understanding Freefall: The Challenge of the Rural Poor*, Interim Report of the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, December 2006

22 Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada: A gender-based statistical report*, (2005)

23 Statistics Canada, *Census 2006*, (2006)

24 Statistics Canada, *Census 2006*, (2006)

25 Statistics Canada, *Census 2006*, (2006)

26 Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada: A gender-based statistical report*, (2005)

## Policy Options

Women's Caucus endorses the following policy options:

- (1) Reoccurring themes for rural women are the barriers that their counterparts in urban communities do not encounter. Women in rural areas often lack access to social services, education, well-paying jobs and health care services. Poverty in rural areas tends to be invisible. The rural poor don't congregate in downtown cores. They rarely line up at homeless shelters because, with few exceptions, there are none. They seldom go to the local employment insurance office because the local office is closed down.

The rural poor are also under-researched. With few exceptions, academics have been preoccupied with studying and highlighting the plight of the urban poor.<sup>27</sup> It is time to shine a light on the issues affecting the women and their families who live and work in rural and remote areas of the country.

Women's Caucus endorses the creation of a Liberal taskforce that would travel across the country meeting with organizations and individual women from rural Canada to discuss their concerns and priorities.<sup>28</sup>

- (2) The Caucus realizes the importance of building an early learning and child care system that reaches rural families. Access to affordable and regulated child care helps to alleviate poverty by providing women with the time to improve their education or gain new skills in order to return to the workforce. In farming communities, many women are working off the farm to supplement farm income or are heavily involved in the operation of the farm itself. Child care is a necessity, not an option, for most rural families.<sup>29</sup> Child care and early learning facilities can also furnish a source of employment for rural community members.

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27 *Understanding Freefall: The Challenge of the Rural Poor*, Interim Report of the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, December 2006

28 This process could build upon the work already started by Maria Minna MP, Critic for Status of Women, who in August and September held roundtables in Newfoundland, British Columbia, Manitoba, Alberta and Ontario with women's groups interested in rural issues.

29 *Rural Child Care – We're worth it: Strategic Directions For Moving Ahead on a National Child Care Strategy for Rural, Remote and Northern Communities*, Discussion Paper from Rural Voices and the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada (February 2005)  
[http://ruralvoices.cimnet.ca/cim/dbf/Rural\\_Remote\\_Northern\\_1.doc?im\\_id=4968&si\\_id=86](http://ruralvoices.cimnet.ca/cim/dbf/Rural_Remote_Northern_1.doc?im_id=4968&si_id=86)

Safety of children is also a consideration. From 1990-2000, 115 children 0 to 6 years of age died of farm-related injuries and 1,849 children aged 0 to 14 were hospitalized for agricultural injuries.<sup>30</sup>

Delivery of early learning and child care services is more complex in rural communities due to the high cost of transportation and other infrastructure challenges. Rural areas do not have the luxury of dense populations living in a concentrated space.

The challenge is to provide a high quality service for families that live in sparsely populated parts of the country. One way is to have an integrated hub model. This approach was recommended during consultations on the Child Care Spaces Initiative held by Human Resources and Social Development Canada in 2006. An integrated hub model was widely recognized as a way to meet the needs of families, particularly those living in rural and remote communities. Several jurisdictions have developed integrated hub models that offer a multitude of family services in one centralized location.<sup>31</sup>

The National Liberal Women's Caucus re-affirms their commitment to the policy options proposed *The Pink Book: Volume I* to provide a system of early learning and child care (ELCC) across the country. This includes honouring the bilateral agreements that the previous Liberal government signed with the provinces and territories; increasing federal funding for child care to one percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP); re-investing the \$1,200 per year from the Universal Child Care Benefit into the Canadian Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) and directing the value of the Spousal Credit to the spouse who remains at home.

The National Liberal Women's Caucus wants to ensure that a new national early learning and child care system will reach families in rural areas. Therefore, they endorse, as part of the commitment, provisions that build on existing community strengths to meet the unique challenges facing rural families.

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30 Rural Child Care – We're worth it: Strategic Directions For Moving Ahead on a National Child Care Strategy for Rural, Remote and Northern Communities, Discussion Paper from Rural Voices and the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada (February 2005)  
[http://ruralvoices.cimnet.ca/cim/dbf/Rural\\_Remote\\_Northern\\_1.doc?im\\_id=4968&si\\_id=86](http://ruralvoices.cimnet.ca/cim/dbf/Rural_Remote_Northern_1.doc?im_id=4968&si_id=86)

31 Summary of Consultations on the Child Care Spaces Initiatives 2006, Website of Human Resources and Social Development Canada

# Aboriginal Women

## Introduction

The National Liberal Women's Caucus recognizes that many Aboriginal women are confronted by a number of challenges – racism, sexual violence, extreme poverty, lack of adequate housing and chronic health problems. Statistically, Canadian Aboriginal women lag behind their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

The plight of Aboriginal women reaches beyond the borders of Canada. In 2003, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women highlighted the need to improve conditions for Aboriginal women stating that it is seriously concerned about the persistent systematic discrimination faced by Aboriginal women in all aspects of their lives. It went on to express concern that Aboriginal women are over-concentrated in lower-skill and lower-paying occupations, constitute a high percentage of those women who have not completed secondary education and suffer high rates of domestic violence.<sup>32</sup>

## Context

There are just under a half a million Aboriginal females in Canada. Of these, only 28 percent live on reserve.<sup>33</sup>

The life expectancy of Aboriginal women is 76.8 years, versus 82 years for non-Aboriginal women.<sup>34</sup>

Aboriginal women are more than three times as likely to report being victims of spousal violence than non-Aboriginal women. In 2004, 24 percent of Aboriginal women reported they had been the victims of some form of spousal violence in the previous five years, compared with seven percent of their non-Aboriginal counterparts.<sup>35</sup>

In 2004, 41 percent of Aboriginal women victims stated that they had either been beaten, choked, sexually assaulted, threatened, or had a gun or knife

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32 Report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General Assembly, Official Records, 58th Session.

33 Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada 2006*

34 Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada 2006*

35 Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada 2006*

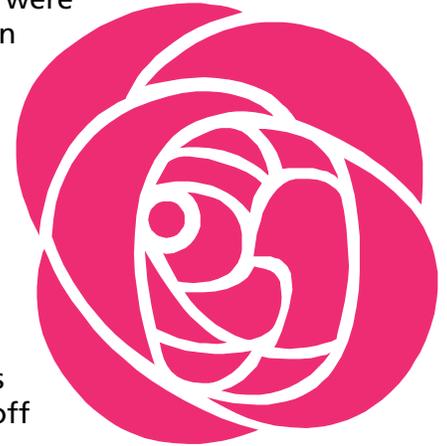
used against them. In contrast, 27 percent of non-Aboriginal women victims reported these levels of violence.<sup>36</sup>

The average annual income of Aboriginal women is \$13,300, compared to \$18,200 for Aboriginal men, and \$19,350 for non - Aboriginal women.<sup>37</sup>

In 2001, 17 percent of Aboriginal women in the labour force were unemployed; the rate for non-Aboriginal women was seven percent.<sup>38</sup>

According to Statistics Canada, in 2000, the median income of Aboriginal women was \$12,300 about \$5,000 less than non-Aboriginal women who had a median income of \$17,300 that year.<sup>39</sup>

Aboriginal women are also more likely than Aboriginal men to be trapped in low-paying jobs, and because of the continuing effects of the *Indian Act*, they face insecurities related to housing, access to services and abuse both on and off reserve.<sup>40</sup>



Related to the challenges faced by Aboriginal women are those confronting their children. A disproportionate number of Aboriginal children are in the child welfare system. Less than five percent of children in Canada are Aboriginal, yet Aboriginal children comprise approximately 40 percent of the total number of children in care.<sup>41</sup>

The numbers show no sign of improving. In British Columbia, Aboriginal children made up 37 percent of children in care in 2000 and by 2005, that percentage was 50 percent.<sup>42</sup> The need to address this gross over-representation of Aboriginal children in care is compelling.

On February 23, 2007 the Assembly of First Nations and the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada filed a complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission regarding lack of funding for First Nations child welfare. National Chief Phil Fontaine stated: "There are more than 27,000 First Nations children in state care. This is a national disgrace

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36 Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada 2006*

37 The Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement Women (CRIA), *Fact Sheet: Women and Poverty* (2003)

38 Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada 2006*

39 Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada 2006*

40 The Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement Women (CRIA), *Fact Sheet: Women and Poverty* (2003)

41 "Pathways to the Overrepresentation of Aboriginal Children in Canada's Child Welfare System," *Social Service Review* 78.4 (2004) 578.

42 National Council of Welfare Reports, *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Children and Youth: Time to Act*, Vol. 127, 2007

that requires the immediate and serious attention of all governments to resolve.”

## Policy Options

The Kelowna Accord, an initiative of the former Liberal government, was an innovative and serious attempt to improve the quality of life for Aboriginal people, especially women. One of the guiding principles was to work collaboratively with First Nations, Inuit and Métis women to address their needs through their participation in the development of culturally-relevant policies and programs. Unfortunately the Conservative government, when it took power in January 2006, refused to implement the agreement. The members of Women’s Caucus remain committed to the policy principles of the Kelowna Accord.

For Aboriginal women to achieve their rightful place in Canadian society they must have access to equality under the law like their non-Aboriginal counterparts and an improved standard of living.

A key issue for First Nations women and their families is that they are under a separate jurisdiction from other Canadians. One consequence of this is that First Nations women and their families do not have the same level of funding for programs and services that other Canadians can access. This is particularly true for child welfare, education and health services. It is important to factor this reality in to any policy development process.

Women’s Caucus endorses the following policy options:

- (1) Women’s Caucus reaffirms the commitment in *Volume I of The Pink Book* that the financial resources to Aboriginal women’s organizations be increased to the same level as their male-led counterparts. This recommendation is one of several made to Canada in 2003 by the United Nations Expert Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women.
- (2a) To address the rising number of Aboriginal children in care, Women’s Caucus recommends the approach proposed by the National Council of Welfare. The council states that Aboriginal peoples are best positioned to make decisions about Aboriginal children and youth. To do this, there is a need for adequately funded, Aboriginal controlled, culturally-based models.<sup>43</sup>
- (2b) Furthermore, the Caucus recommends the adoption of Jordan’s Principle by the federal government to address inter-departmental

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<sup>43</sup> National Council of Welfare Reports, *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Children and Youth: Time to Act*, Vol. 127, 2007

issues in a timely manner so that the welfare of the child is a main priority.

Jordan was a young First Nations boy in Manitoba who suffered from various severe birth defects and died during a lengthy hospital stay while provincial and federal agencies argued over who should cover the costs of medical care related to a home placement.

Jordan's Principle states that the jurisdiction of first contact should pay, and final responsibility is determined later. In cases where there is a dispute about the jurisdiction of first contact, the federal government would cover the cost of the necessary services and pursue payment later.

- (3) Women's Caucus believes that the most effective way to eliminate violence against Aboriginal women is to have a nation wide violence prevention strategy for Aboriginal peoples that allows for regional flexibility in policy, programming and funding. The strategy would be culturally-appropriate, holistic and include services for the victim, the abuser and their families and would also address the jurisdictional issues affecting both First Nations and Inuit women.

# Immigrant and Refugee Women

## Introduction

The National Liberal Women's Caucus recognizes that immigrant and refugee women face complex barriers to adapting to life in Canada. They must deal with a myriad of social, educational and cultural challenges and are often targets for ethnic and racial discrimination. Their skills and qualifications are often undervalued or overlooked in the labour market. To improve Canadian society, we must address the complex hurdles immigrant and refugee women face as they adapt to the Canadian way of life.

## Context

In 2001, there were 2.8 million foreign-born females living in Canada, making up 19 percent of the total female population.<sup>44</sup>

Over 2.5 million female Canadians, 18 percent of the total population, had a mother tongue other than English or French.<sup>45</sup>

More immigrant women (9 percent) than men (5 percent) do not speak either English or French, affecting their ability to fully participate in Canadian society.<sup>46</sup>

Currently there are 37,253 female refugees in the country out of a total refugee population of 156,955.<sup>47</sup>

The majority of females immigrating to Canada come with their families. Of all foreign-born females admitted to Canada between 1994 and 2003, 36 percent were family class immigrants. Another 37 percent came as the spouse or dependent of an economic immigrant.<sup>48</sup>

In 2005 there were over twice the number of men admitted in the economic class as women: 42,253 male applicants versus 19,361 female applicants.<sup>49</sup>

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44 Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada*, (March 2006)

45 Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada*, (March 2006)

46 CRIAW, *Immigrant and refugee women fact sheet*, (No. 5-2003)

47 Facts and Figures: Immigration Overview, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2006

48 Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada*, (March 2006)

49 Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration, 2006.



Immigrant women have relatively high unemployment rates. In 2001, 8.1 percent of all female labour force participants born outside of the country were unemployed, compared with seven percent of those born in Canada.<sup>50</sup>

A significant proportion of immigrant women have incomes that fall below Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-offs (LICO). In 2000, 23 percent of foreign-born females lived in a low-income situation, compared with 16 percent of Canadian-born women.<sup>51</sup>

In 2001, 46 percent of immigrant women in the labour force were in administrative, clerical, sales or service positions. Only 22 percent of immigrant men had jobs in these areas.<sup>52</sup>

According to Statistics Canada foreign-born women who arrived in the past decade have particularly low incomes.

Women born outside of Canada are more likely to have a university degree than their native-born counterparts. In 2001, 18 percent of all immigrant women had a degree, compared with 14 percent of Canadian-born women.<sup>53</sup>

## Policy Options

Women's Caucus endorses the following policy options:

- (1) Women's Caucus reaffirms the commitment in *The Pink Book: Volume I* recommending that government policies for immigrant women must provide sufficient access to profession-specific language training, skills upgrading and back-to-work mentoring and bridging programs.
- (2) In addition, Women's Caucus reiterates that, like other women in Canada, immigrant and refugee women need access to an affordable and high quality early learning and child care system, as outlined in *The Pink Book: Volume I*.
- (3) Women's Caucus supports changing the work permits under the Live-in Caregiver Program from employer-specific to sector specific. The Program allows workers from overseas to provide support for children, elderly and disabled persons, and enables approximately 3000 to 5000 caregivers to work in Canada each year.<sup>54</sup>

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50 Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada*, (March 2006)

51 Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada*, (March 2006)

52 Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada*, (March 2006)

53 Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada*, (March 2006)

54 Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2005) "*Report of the National Roundtable on the Live-in Caregiver Program*"

One of the major concerns about the Program is that the work permit is employer-specific, making the caregiver dependent on the employer for employment, housing and immigration status. This creates an unequal power dynamic that keeps women from standing up for themselves when their rights are violated. The permit change would continue to restrict caregivers to live-in work, but would grant the caregiver flexibility to change employers if necessary.<sup>55</sup>

- (4) Women’s Caucus supports the elimination of the processing fees for refugees. Currently, processing fees are required as part of the application for permanent resident status. For example, a refugee family of four would have to pay \$1,400 – more than a month’s salary at minimum wage.<sup>56</sup> Many refugees come from the poorest parts of the world and have little or no savings to bring with them.

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55 The Maytree Foundation, a policy brief, *The Live-in Caregiver Program*, July 2007

56 Processing fees are \$550 for the principal applicant, \$550 for family members 22 years or older, \$550 for family members under 22 who are not spouses or partners, and \$150 for family members under 22. Minors who are principal applicants, some of whom are war orphans, must also pay the \$550 fee.

# THE PINK BOOK:

*A Policy Framework for Canada's Future, Volume I*

## Summary

*The Pink Book* is built upon the work done over many years by Liberal women Parliamentarians with input from women's groups across the country. It highlights a list of priority policy recommendations that deal with some of the most pressing issues facing Canadian women and their families. The members of the Liberal Women's Caucus stand firmly behind the positions presented in this document.



At the time the first *Pink Book* was released the Liberal Women's Caucus felt compelled to speak out about the cuts to Status of Women Canada and the cancellation of the Court Challenges Program. They called for the reinstatement the funding cuts, the reversal of the program changes made to Status of Women, and full funding for the Court Challenges Program.

The members of Women's Caucus acknowledged the complex nature of women's poverty. But, as Parliamentarians, they constantly have to balance what is desirable with what is possible. After intense discussions, the Caucus agreed to pursue under a framework of a federal anti-poverty reduction strategy: (1) early learning and child care; (2) income security reform; and (3) employment insurance.

### (1) **Early Learning and Child Care**

The Liberal Early Learning and Child Care plan must continue to be a centrepiece of any Liberal election platform. Women's Caucus recommended that the bilateral agreements signed with the provinces for a national child care system be reinstated; re-investing the Conservative child benefit \$1,200 to the base of the Canada Child Tax Benefit and direct the value of the Spousal Credit to the spouse at home.

### (2) **Income Security Reforms**

Pay Equity: The social consequences of pay inequity are profound for women and their families. The Liberal Women's Caucus therefore,

proposed that a new Liberal government implement pro-active pay equity legislation as recommended by the 2004 federal Pay Equity Task Force.

Initiatives for Seniors: The Women's Caucus proposed that seniors be allowed to earn additional money that would not affect their public pensions; application forms for the GIS be eliminated; the GIS be divided between couples in proportion to the couple's income and in consultation with the provinces, the 11-month retroactivity restriction on CPP benefits be removed.

Caregiving: On the important issue of caregiving, the Liberal Women's Caucus proposed that a new Liberal government should: invest \$1 billion over five years towards the development of a national caregiving agenda and as a longer term measure extend the Canada Pension Plan drop-out provision to unpaid caregivers. This measure will address the future economic security of those who drop out of the labour force to provide care.

(3) **Employment Insurance:**

Expanding Maternity and Parental Benefits: The Liberal Women's Caucus proposed that a new Liberal government should, using the Québec model, open discussions with all provinces and territories to discuss ways to construct an improved income replacement program for parents.

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