

## Take Action

### Write

Write your federal Member of Parliament and member of your provincial legislature expressing your concern about the diminishing funds to community-based social services. Ask for a nationally recognized day to celebrate those working in community-based social services to appreciate their important contribution.

### Talk

If you are a union member, then talk to your union, federation of labour and labour council on the need for a nation-wide Day of Appreciation for community-based social service workers to bring attention to their issues of health and safety and sustainable funding for the broad array of community social services.

### Click on

[www.nupge.ca](http://www.nupge.ca)

### Order

More of these NUPGE publications for distribution at work and in the community:

- Women's Support Services
- Community-Based Social Service Workers Policy Paper, Convention 2007
- The Underfunding and Accountability Crisis in Canada's Community-based Social Service Sector
- Health and Safety in the Community-based Social Service Sector



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### **NATIONAL UNION OF PUBLIC AND GENERAL EMPLOYEES**

- B. C. Government and Service Employees' Union
- Health Sciences Association of British Columbia
- Health Sciences Association of Alberta
- Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union
- Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union
- Ontario Public Service Employees Union
- Canadian Union of Brewery and General Workers
- New Brunswick Union of Public and Private Employees
- Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union
- PEI Union of Public Sector Employees
- Newfoundland & Labrador Association of Public and Private Employees

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The National Union of Public and General Employees is an affiliate of the Canadian Labour Congress and a member of the Public Services International



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EMPOWERING  
WOMEN**



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## The Issue

AMNESTY International identifies that every minute of every day finds women and girls around the world are victims of assault; they're threatened, raped, mutilated and killed. In every environment - in their own homes, on the streets, in schools and workplaces women suffer daily abuse. It's time to see violence against women as a global human rights crisis.

Canada is not immune to this global crisis. A Statistics Canada report generated from police data found women to outnumber men nine to one as victims of assault by a spouse or partner. Girls between 12 and 15 are at a greater risk of sexual assault by a family member than any other age group. Women bear a disproportionate amount of the violence in Canadian communities.

In every corner of Canada, violence against women takes place in homes, workplaces, schools, institutions and community settings. Where violence occurs, it puts children who are exposed to it at greater risk of developmental, behavioural and emotional difficulties later in life. Violence affects women of all age groups, cultures, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds - violence doesn't discriminate.

Women who are new Canadians are in additional need of support as they face multiple issues and barriers. The whole process of immigration (uprooting and resettling), housing issues, language barriers, and income security are very stressful and can strain relationships. Cultural differences and variance in lifestyles can also create significant stress in the family dynamics as partners need to redefine their roles and establish new identities in a different socio-cultural context. Culture shock can be alienating and anxiety provoking and can cause abuse where there was none before, or escalate it.

Some women in our communities are homeless and hungry, and when they are, so are their children. Those with addictions and others needing mental health support have difficulty finding a welcoming space in the community and are marginalized. Many women are in need of support in our communities. To abandon them is to abandon our children and families, our sisters and mothers.

## The Services

WOMEN'S Centres across Canada go by different names and cover a diversity of services. In some provinces sexual assault centres, transition houses and addictions counselling provide specific services for women. From province to province we find a patchwork of services that support women.

Transition houses are temporary shelters for women and their children escaping abuse. With this basic need for shelter met comes the need for other services that support safety, healing and prevention of further violence. Other aspects of care supplied through transition houses include counselling for women and their children, basic necessities like food, clothing, toiletries, and support finding financial, medical and legal advice.

The entire issue of domestic violence requires many facets of care that community-based social services struggle to meet: inreach, outreach, follow-up, concussion watch, home detox, suicide watch and intervention are some of the services provided. Programs like "Stopping the Violence" in BC integrate crisis intervention with prevention. This program provides many communities with forums for education, opportunities for counselling, as well as step by step support for families building new lives.

Other services distributed unevenly across Canada are harm reduction programs for sex trade workers, addictions and trans-gender support. Immigrant women often require special support in navigating Canadian systems that are not in their first language and women's centres are a comfortable environment that can advocate on behalf of these women. Immigrant serving agencies and workers provide culture-sensitive and language-specific services to these women.

A number of challenges face women's services across Canada; primarily - the need is bigger than the availability of services.

Where there are services, these agencies are understaffed. When service 24/7 is essential, the result

is workers are exhausted, over-stressed and work alone far too often. There is no time for debriefing of staff to minimize vicarious trauma.

- Services across Canada, within cities and municipalities lack integration. The result is that gaps occur and one agency struggles to provide everything required in the chain of care. Other community services that should provide additional support, like police and hospital, are often not properly integrated as complimentary support.
- Agencies or centres are underfunded and are unable to pay decent wages or provide decent benefits to retain workers. Lack of funds results in a dependency on charity and results in thin services.



## The Workers

WORKERS in women's services are a passionate, dedicated group. The skills required to support and empower the women walking through agency doors are vast. They are required to be calm and focused to help those in crisis. They assess the need, from medical to legal attention, and put in place the steps to ensure women are cared for.

These workers routinely deal with clients in trauma. Many have dealt with the spin-off personal stress this causes, known as vicarious trauma. Employee assistance programs (EAPs) can provide support to workers in need of debriefing and counselling, but too often underfunded agencies are unable to offer EAPs.

They must always be thinking about the safety and security of their clients as well as themselves and co-workers. Maintaining client confidentiality and transition house anonymity is key to safety but often additional measures, like security cameras, need to be taken.

In spite of all their skills, the personal risks and sacrifices workers make to provide care and compassion to women in their communities, the work is still de-valued. A charity mentality pervades urban and rural communities, bringing with it the attitude that workers should expect little or nothing for their efforts. When clients and their problems are "invisible" or ignored in our society, so are the workers and services they provide.

It's time to recognize and honour the women workers who struggle daily with issues of violence and neglect in every community across Canada. Their compassion is the ingredient that brings hope into the lives of so many women and children.