



Voices of New Brunswick Women
Consensus-Building Forum

Annual Report
2015–2016



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Province of New Brunswick
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The Voices of New Brunswick Women Consensus-Building Forum is New Brunswick’s independent advisory body on women’s equality issues. It is mandated to provide independent advice to the provincial government on matters of interest to women while bringing the issues to public attention to work toward a future where the women and men of New Brunswick are equal.

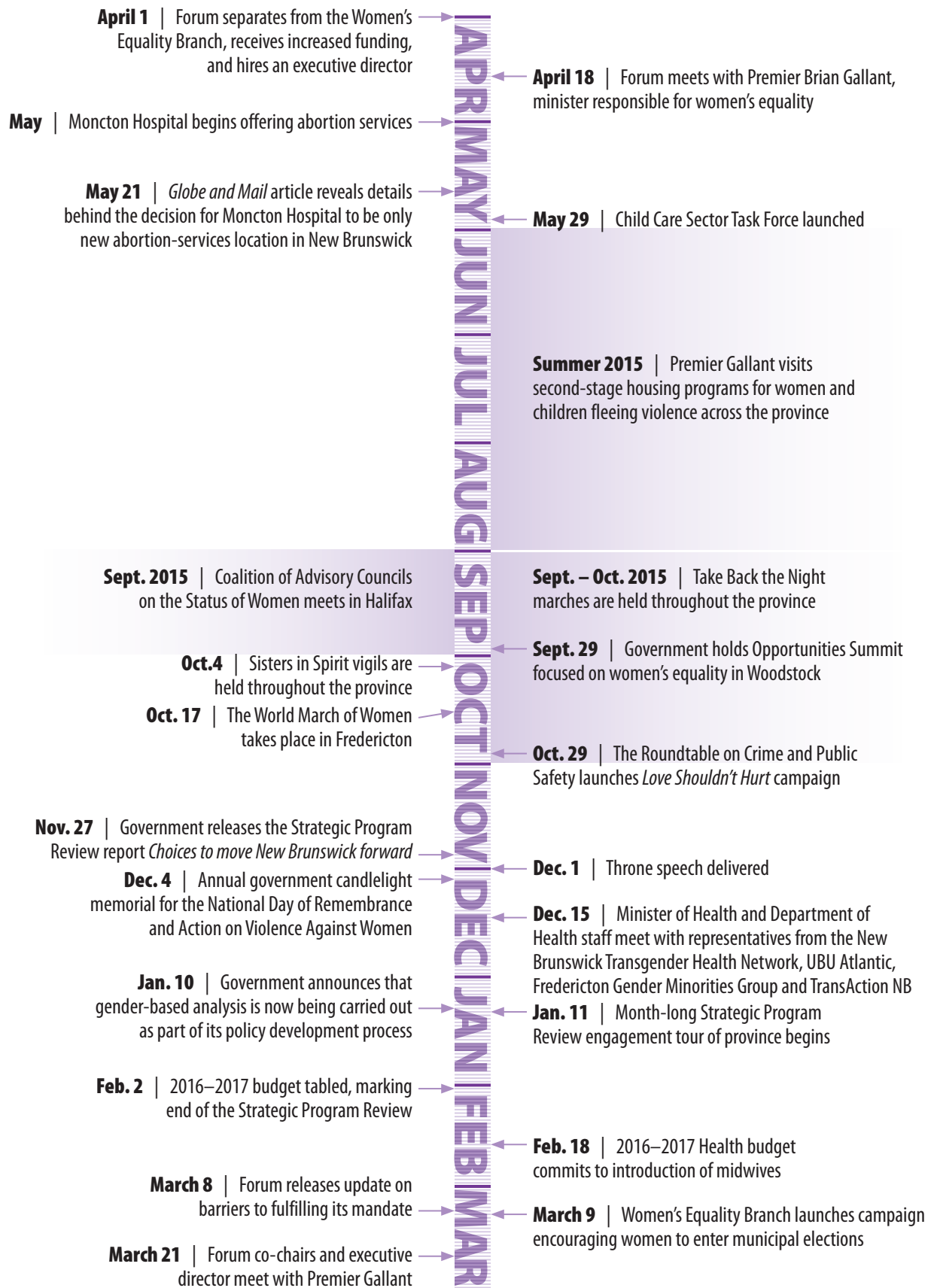
Independent means that the forum sets its own policy agenda; determines its own analysis of issues; and can autonomously commission research, publish reports and recommendations, and provide public commentary.

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2015–2016 in New Brunswick



Message from the Co-chairs

The April 2015 to March 2016 fiscal year was both challenging and transformative for the forum.

It began and ended with significant changes to the forum's status — changes that will lead to the forum becoming truly independent and able to fulfil its mandate, beginning in the 2016–2017 fiscal year.

The year started with excitement and renewed optimism as the forum's funding was significantly increased and separated from the budget of the Women's Equality Branch. This set the forum on a path to become a more robust entity, operating with increased independence and capacity.



As members and staff began working under these new conditions, however, it became clear that further changes to the forum's structure were needed. Essentially, we needed to establish exactly what kind of entity the forum was, as well as its relationship with government. Ultimately, *what* the forum is determines how it does its job.

To ensure that this critical issue was addressed, much of the forum's work during the past year has been internally-focused. This was an intentional choice. Members and staff knew that we had to ensure the forum was built on a solid foundation, given our mandate to provide independent advice to government and to bring issues to public attention.

As a result of these efforts, the year ended with work underway on a legislative framework that would evolve the forum into a statutory entity, with clear standing and a strong mandate, called the New Brunswick Women's Council.

Other accomplishments during the past year include developing a number of policy positions, creating strategic directions and operating standards to guide our work, and supporting a number of community-based events. Information on these, as well as a detailed account of our work to address the forum's status, is presented in this report.

Annual reports are primarily about the past — sharing the work done and accounting for the outcomes achieved and resources used. We hope, however, that you see the future in this report, too — a future in which the council is strong and uniquely focused on addressing the issues affecting women and girls in our province.

Jody Dallaire, Jennifer Richard
Co-chairs, Voices of New Brunswick Women Consensus-Building Forum

Members and staff

Members

The forum's work is informed by its volunteer membership, which includes organizations (represented by a woman staff member or volunteer) and individual women committed to women's equality. Members are appointed by the minister responsible for Women's Equality.

Members shape the forum's issue-based work by collaborating with staff to identify and analyze priority issues and propose solutions. Members also ensure that the voices of women from diverse identities, communities, and experiences are represented within the forum. The membership also has a governance role that includes developing policies to direct the forum's operations at a high level.

2015–2016 membership

Organizations

- CBDC New Brunswick (represented by Line Doiron)
- Fredericton Sexual Assault Centre (represented by Jennifer Richard)
- Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre (represented by Rina Arseneault)
- New Brunswick Coalition for Pay Equity (represented by Jody Dallaire)
- Regroupement féministe du Nouveau-Brunswick (represented by Sylvie Morin and Lyne Chantal Boudreau)
- Saint John Women's Empowerment Network (represented by Joanne Britton)
- Sussex Committee for the Prevention of Family Violence
- University of New Brunswick Gender and Women's Studies (represented by Wendy Robbins)
- YWCA Moncton (represented by Jewell Mitchell)

Individuals

- Stéphanie Beaulieu
- Kim Nash-McKinley
- Noëlla Richard
- Paulette Sonier Rioux
- Phylomène Zangio



Ex officio members

- Hon. Brian Gallant, Premier and Minister responsible for Women's Equality
- Jocelyne Mills, Assistant Deputy Minister, Women's Equality Branch
- Beth Lyons, Executive Director, Voices of New Brunswick Women Consensus-Building Forum

Notes on membership

In April 2015, Jody Dallaire and Jennifer Richard were selected by the membership to succeed Kim Nash-McKinley and Phylomène Zangio as co-chairs. Insofar as their co-chairing responsibilities are concerned, Dallaire and Richard hold the position as individuals and not on behalf of the organizations they represent.

The Sussex Committee for the Prevention of Family Violence and Nash-McKinley ended their terms early (in November and February, respectively).

The terms of the Saint John Women's Empowerment Network (WEN), University of New Brunswick's Gender and Women's Studies, YWCA Moncton, and Stéphanie Beaulieu ended on March 31 (WEN and YWCA Moncton were later reappointed for a second consecutive term).

Staff

The work of the forum was supported by a small staff in 2015–2016. On April 1, 2015, the forum welcomed its first executive director, Beth Lyons, to provide leadership in advancing the work of the forum and to manage daily operations. During 2015–2016, the forum also received administrative support services from Valerie Kervin and Chantal Teixeira.

Meetings and committees

Meetings

Members are engaged year-round in the work of the forum via regular email communications and committee work. They also meet multiple times a year in-person and via teleconference. In-person meetings allow members to discuss issues and develop policy positions in real-time, as well as provide opportunities to connect with communities in the province.

In 2015–2016, the forum held six meetings:

- Fredericton, April;
- Teleconference, June;
- Teleconference, September;
- Edmundston, October;
- Teleconference, February (in camera);
- Moncton, February.

Minutes for all meetings (excepting those portions or whole meetings that are in camera) are available on the forum's website at nbwomenscouncil.ca or by contacting the forum.



Committees

The forum uses standing and ad hoc committees to advance various pieces of work between meetings and ensure accountability. Staff and members sit on committees; special contributors may be invited to join as well. In 2015–2016, the following committees were active:

- Finance (standing);
- Governance (standing);
- Communications (disbanded in February);
- Issues advisory (created in February; standing);
- Strategic planning (ad hoc; finished mandate in October);
- Membership selection committee (ad hoc; finished mandate in February).



Governance

Internally-focused work to ensure the forum is fulfilling its mandate and is doing so in ways that uphold its vision.

Status of the forum

The 2015–2016 provincial budget effectively transformed the forum into a distinct entity within the Government of New Brunswick (previously, the forum’s funding was part of the Women’s Equality Branch’s budget).

This change in budgetary structure raised a number of questions. For instance: what kind of entity was the forum now that it was no longer part of the branch’s budget structure? What would its relationship to government be? What mechanism would capture these details?

The answers to these questions would affect everything from how the forum hired staff to the nature of its independence. Additionally, aspects of the forum’s operations would be limited until those questions were answered, affecting the forum’s ability to fully deliver on its mandate.

To inform the forum’s contribution to decision-making on these questions, staff gathered information on the structure and enabling mechanisms used by other

independent public entities in New Brunswick, as well as the eight other provincial and territorial public advisory bodies on women’s equality in Canada. The forum identified that most independent public entities in New Brunswick are governed by legislation, as are each of the other eight provincial and territorial advisory bodies on women’s equality.

During this process, members and staff discussed the best options for the forum; collaborated with branch staff as potential solutions were identified; and advised the public of the challenges being faced. Finally, the co-chairs and executive director met with Premier Gallant, who is also minister responsible for Women’s Equality, to share their concerns and possible solutions.

By the end of 2015–2016, the branch was leading the development of a legislative framework for the forum with input from its staff and members. The forum also requested that the framework reflect a new name it proposed: the New Brunswick Women’s Council.

Mission, vision and strategic directions

During the forum’s October meeting, the membership adopted mission and vision statements as well as strategic directions.

Mission: To further gender equity in New Brunswick by strategically addressing ongoing and emerging issues through research, informed and committed membership, and engagement with government and the public.

Vision: A diverse and inclusive New Brunswick of real and deeply-rooted gender-equity.

Strategic directions: Become a leading voice on issues of importance to women and girls and relating to gender-equity in New Brunswick.

- Establish clear positions and, where appropriate, tools and recommendations on key issues;
- Become a leading resource for research, analysis, commentary and recommendations;
- Be able to identify and respond nimbly to emerging issues and opportunities.

Be engaged with and informed by the women and girls of New Brunswick in their full diversity.

- Membership and analysis reflect the diversity of women’s identities, experiences and communities;
- Provide opportunities for women to identify and share priorities, needs and solutions;

- Build connections with women and girl-focused and equity seeking groups throughout all regions.

Develop robust membership and internal processes centred on consensus-building and anti-oppression.

- Develop policies and processes that are sound, equitable and reduce barriers to participation;
- Foster a committed membership in which members experience solidarity, trust and respect with one another.

Advocate, educate and partner strategically.

- Focus on systems-level change;
- Take a collective impact approach;
- Identify strategic roles for the forum given its unique mandate, resources and relationship to government.

Operating standards

In 2015–2016, the forum established a set of standards by which it will operate. They address:

- mandate, mission and vision;
- interface with the government;
- membership;
- co-chairs;
- meetings;
- decision-making;
- role and accountability of the executive director;
- financial management;
- language;
- research, projects, initiatives and ongoing work; and
- external engagement.

In instances in which the Government of New Brunswick already has a policy addressing a topic included in the standards, the standards reflect the policy and provide further direction.

As the standards are fairly high-level, they also call for the development of accompanying policies and guiding documents with further details. Financial policies were completed and work on guiding documents began late in the fiscal year.

The standards consistently affirm the importance of the forum:

- being driven by its mandate and membership;
- engaging with women, as well as groups working on women's and other equity issues, in our province; and
- ensuring that the forum's membership and work is inclusive of women of diverse identities, experiences, and communities.

Consensus-based decision-making

Throughout 2015–2016, the forum strengthened its use of consensus-based decision-making by building group cohesion, explicitly accepting intersectionality and anti-oppression as key elements of its work, and identifying a process for making urgent decisions between meetings.

The consensus-based model of decision-making was adopted in the 2014–2015 fiscal year. In replacing traditional majority-rules votes with consensus-based decision-making, the forum is striving to be a space in which everyone around the table is heard. This approach supports the inclusion of a diversity of voices and an intersectional analysis of issues and proposed solutions.

Membership call

In early 2016, the forum held its first call for membership. The forum worked closely with the Women's Equality Branch and Executive Council Office and followed the Government of New Brunswick's *Changing the Way Appointments Are Made* policy to develop and execute the call.

The governance committee developed the process and tools for the call and the full membership subsequently reviewed and accepted them. The membership agreed to delegate the review of expressions of interests to a selection committee comprised of both co-chairs and two external members (Nancy Hartling and Marie-Thérèse Seguin) who had served on the Voices of New Brunswick Women Working Group (the group that tabled the [2013 report](#) that laid the foundation for the forum's creation). The executive director served as an ex-officio member.

The call was posted from the end of January to early February via the Government of New Brunswick's online listing of opportunities to serve on agencies, boards and commissions. The forum and the branch also distributed the call within their networks.

The selection committee met twice in person to review applications. In addition to the strength of individual applications, the committee considered:

- that the forum's membership is intended to be primarily composed of organizations; and
- the current composition of the forum's membership and whether an applicant's addition to it would contribute to linguistic and regional balance and/or enhance representation of voices from marginalized identities, experiences, and communities.

In March, the forum advanced (via the branch) six names for consideration to the Office of the Premier.

Issues

Work on issues that affect women and their substantive equality in New Brunswick.

Priority areas

During the February meeting, members decided to continue to focus on the four priority areas identified in the previous year. They are:

- participation and representation;
- wellness and access;
- economy and self-sufficiency; and
- violence.

Early learning and childcare

The forum submitted a brief to the Child Care Sector Task Force that was announced in May. Recommendations were:

- Commit to a conceptual shift in which early learning and child care (ELCC) is understood as a critical infrastructure investment and as an essential component of women's equality and improved future outcomes for marginalized and vulnerable children;
- Ensure that rigorous gender-based analysis is a foundational component of all consultations and policy deliberation on ELCC and that advancing women's equality is a key priority in final decision-making;
- Increase public investment in ELCC;
- Implementation of increased public investment moves ELCC away from patchwork, market-driven services and toward a vibrant, responsive system of accessible, affordable, high-quality ELCC;
- Investment in the ELCC system translates into improved compensation for ELCC educators and caregivers;
- Measures are put in place to ensure that changes to existing investment approaches do not destabilize existing ELCC facility operators or leave them without supports to align with new ELCC investment priorities.

The forum also encouraged Premier Gallant to prioritize ELCC in discussions with the newly elected Government of Canada.

Gender-based analysis

In December, the forum urged the government to release findings from the gender-based analysis completed as part of the Strategic Program Review (SPR). The forum stated that because the SPR was rooted in public consultation the findings of the analysis should be made publicly available so they could inform the feedback New Brunswickers provided on the SPR options.

The forum supports increasing the levels of government using gender-based analysis in decision-making, the public release of the gender-based analysis tool used by government and public release of results of gender-based analyses completed by government.

Federal election with the Coalition of Advisory Councils on the Status of Women

As a member of the Coalition of Advisory Councils on the Status of Women, the forum supported the coalition's release of a postcard featuring questions and statistics on gender equality for individuals to use in discussion with local candidates in the federal election.

KICK-START THE CONVERSATION

ASK CANDIDATES WHAT WILL YOU DO TO ADDRESS GENDER INEQUALITY?

What policies/initiatives would you support to increase women's participation? Women make up 29% MP's in Canada. They are grossly under-represented in the Canadian political system.

How will you ensure a healthy and prosperous life for Canada's female seniors? Rising rents, unaffordable for many women, including seniors, across the country.

How will you decrease the growing economic inequality and income gap between genders? Women live longer than men, but are less healthy. Women are twice as likely to live in poverty as men.

How will you contribute to national public inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women? Majority of Canadian mothers with young children are part of the labour force, yet affordable child care is severely available.

How will you contribute to national public inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women? On average, every six days a woman in Canada is killed by her intimate partner. More than 3,000 women sleep in emergency shelters on any given day.

How will you contribute to national public inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women? Women continue to earn 22% less than their male peers for the same work. They are more likely to be poor, and do twice as much unpaid work at home.

How will you contribute to national public inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women? Since 1982 over 1,000 Indigenous women and girls in Canada have been murdered, with a great many more remaining missing.

Use these questions to kick-start the conversation when talking to candidates. Pose them to your local candidates and national party leaders.

VOTE OCT 19

Health care

The forum supports the following changes to abortion access in New Brunswick:

- increasing hospital access to abortion services, with consideration to equitable regional access;
- public funding for abortions performed outside of hospitals in New Brunswick (e.g., at Clinic 554) for New Brunswick residents; and
- ensuring Mifegymiso has a unique billing code.

The forum supports midwifery access and trans health care in New Brunswick.

Housing

The forum identifies housing as a gendered issue linked to poverty and violence. Work on homelessness must include a gender-lens and housing programs must recognize the complexity of women's lives (including the likely presence of trauma) and therefore be flexible, responsive and offer accommodations.

Violence against First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women and girls

The forum encouraged Premier Gallant to prioritize a national inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in discussions with the newly elected Government of Canada.

The forum supported a collaborative research project to improve policing and justice system responses to missing Aboriginal women, and their families and friends, in New Brunswick. The project is being led by the New Brunswick Aboriginal Peoples Council and includes the Government of New Brunswick, Gignoo Transition House, Indigenous Women of the Wolustukyik and Mi'kmaq Territory, Families of Sisters in Spirit and Julia Hughes of the University of New Brunswick's Faculty of Law.

Pay equity

The forum supports:

- improving the current pay equity evaluation methodology;
- the platform commitment to require that businesses of more than 50 people doing business with the government through procurement or financing programs implement pay equity plans;
- full implementation of current pay equity laws; and
- a pay equity law for the private sector.

Community-based events

The forum supported the Oct. 17 World March of Women in Fredericton. The forum also supported a youth-led and -focused feminist forum in Fredericton in November.

Finances

Due to the challenges outlined in the Status of the forum subsection, a significant portion of the forum's funding for 2015–2016 was unused by the end of the fiscal year.

Expenditure status report by primary fiscal year ending March 31, 2016		
	Budget (\$000)	Actual (\$000)
Personal services	206.3	103.6
Other services	199.2	103.4
Materials and supplies	8.8	8.1
Property and equipment	5.0	7.6
Contributions and grants	–	10.0
TOTAL	419.3	232.7