

Submission to the 2025-2026 pre-budget consultation

About the New Brunswick Women's Council

The New Brunswick Women's Council is an independent advisory body for study and consultation on matters of importance, interest, and concern to women and their substantive equality. Its objectives are:

- a) to be an independent body that provides advice to the Minister on matters of importance to women and their substantive equality;
- b) to bring to the attention of government and the public issues of interest and concern to women and their substantive equality;
- c) to include and engage women of diverse identities, experiences and communities, women's groups and society in general;
- d) to be strategic and provide advice on emerging and future issues; and
- e) to represent New Brunswick women.

In delivering on these objectives, the Council may conduct or commission research and publish reports, studies, and recommendations. The Council is directed by an appointed volunteer membership that includes both organizations and individuals. The work is executed by a small staff team.

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2025-2026 budget

New Brunswick is currently facing significant economic uncertainty due to political volatility at national and international levels. Government's reflex may be to deprioritize or delay work related to advancing equality until this upheaval has calmed. The Council recommends that government not take this approach.

Periods of economic and political instability exacerbate the inequality that women and people who belong to gender minorities are already navigating. Such times are, therefore, precisely when it is particularly critical to prioritize and resource work related to advancing equality.

Consider that the [rate](#) and [severity](#) of intimate partner violence (IPV) committed by men against women increases during recessions. Recessions also increase women's economic precarity, which is a significant barrier to escaping IPV. Many of the organizations that women seek out to survive and escape IPV are community-based and rely significantly on charity to be able to provide services—a [source of funding that shrinks during economic downturns](#).

This is only one example of why the conditions that the province is facing are a reason to deliver on, rather than delay, commitments related to advancing equality such as investing in long-term and sustainable core funding for frontline domestic violence services, including shelters, transition homes, and additional support services.

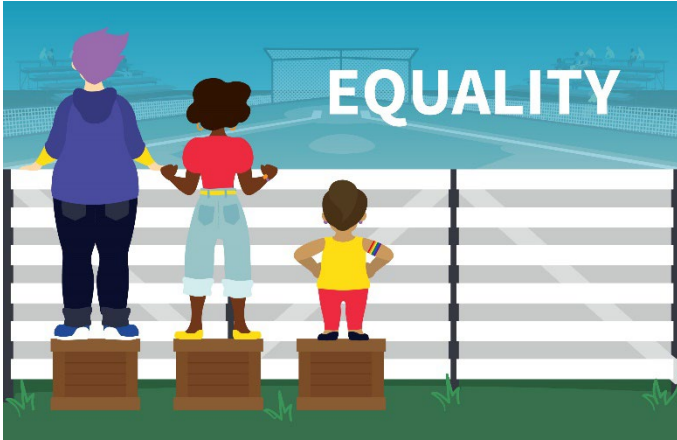
Keeping equality front-of-mind supports government decision-making during fast-moving, challenging times. Considering equality implications, risks, and opportunities in decision-making requires information, insight, and analysis. It involves identifying impacts of decisions that may not be immediately obvious to those who don't have expertise in the specific issues. This enables decision-making that is more likely to be evidence-based and effective. It can help government identify unintended consequences that may arise from decisions, providing an opportunity to avoid or mitigate them. In periods of crisis, advancing equality is not a barrier to responding effectively—it is, instead, part of the foundation on which an effective response is built.

To support government in keeping equality front-of-mind and delivering effective public policy, programs, and services under current conditions, this submission shares relevant concepts, approaches, and tools before concluding with recommendations.

Concepts, approaches, and tools

Equality, equity, and justice

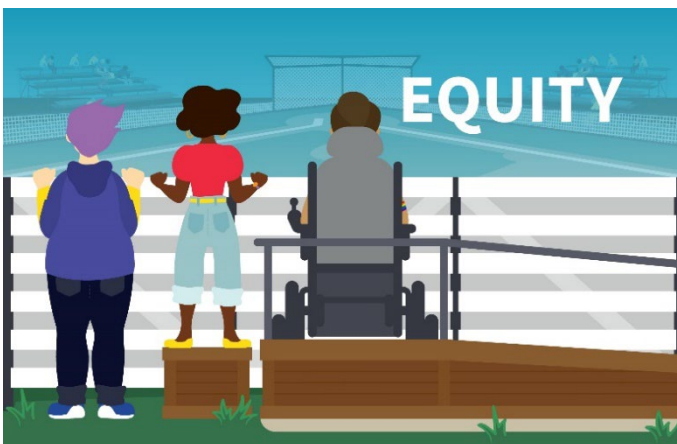
Equality is a term that is often used interchangeably with equity; though related, they are not actually the same thing. Both are also often misunderstood. An illustration of individuals trying to look over a fence at a ballfield is a commonly used as a metaphor to explain these terms.



In the first image, crates are distributed equally. Everyone is a different height and so giving each person a crate boosts them up the same amount but doesn't ensure they can all see over the fence. In this image, the fact that everyone gets the same intervention (a single crate) is why things are considered equal.



In the second image, height differences are accounted for in crate distribution. Everyone gets what they need to achieve a comparable outcome in terms of being able to watch the game. In terms of interventions, the image contrasts the sameness of equality with the responsiveness of equity. The image demonstrates that equity-based interventions are required to ensure equal opportunities and outcomes for people in the face of circumstances that disadvantage them or privilege others. In situations of unequal circumstances, equity-based measures contribute to equality of opportunities and outcomes.



The image also has limitations. It shows the same intervention (a crate) effectively meeting everyone's needs. A more robust version would show different interventions to meet different needs; for example, a wheelchair user being provided with a ramp to a platform rather than a crate.

The image also portrays naturally occurring differences between individuals (height differences or, in the third image, the use of a wheelchair) as the reason people require equity measures to reach equal opportunities and outcomes. In reality, equity measures are required because of systemic oppressions like poverty, racism, colonialism, ableism, and gender-based oppression like misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia. These are neither naturally occurring nor meant to be understood at the scale of the individual. Increasingly, an additional image is used to convey this.



This image shows that the cause of inequality in opportunities and outcomes, as well as the reason for equity-measures, was never individual differences but the fence—a literal barrier that was an issue for some people but not others. It also makes it clear that while equity-measures are important, they are not justice. While we need equity-measures, we also need to dismantle the oppressions that necessitate them.

When the Council refers to equality, we are referring to equality of opportunity and outcomes, supported by equity measures, and with a longer-term goal of moving toward justice.

Social deficits and debts

Social deficits are the gap between what people need in terms of services and what is available to them (these services may be offered publicly or by the community sector). Like fiscal deficits, social deficits do not simply disappear at the start of a new year; they become debt with interest. The interest looks like problems becoming more entrenched and complex, both in individuals' lives and as public policy issues, the longer that adequate services are missing.

When government does not account for social deficits and debt, it does not have the full picture of its fiscal reality as these deficits and debt have a financial cost that eventually comes due. As individuals go without the supports they need, they have fewer meaningful options in their lives and are more likely to end up subsisting in survival-mode. Their friends and family, as well as community organizations, will rally to attempt to cover the gap in services. As service shortfalls persist and challenges become more intractable, those trying to cover the gap—disproportionately women—will burnout from doing too much for too long with too little.

Co-creation

Co-creation means involving the people and communities who are impacted by a situation in the process of identifying the problem, designing the solution(s) to address it, and establishing how the outcomes will be evaluated. It is an approach that is rooted in sharing power and requires those in decision-making positions to adopt a stance of humility.

Too often, however, this is not what happens. Due to capacity challenges, timing constraints, and deeply entrenched ways of working, public servants who have technical expertise but are disconnected from the on-the-ground reality of situations are charged with defining the problem, developing solutions, and establishing the evaluation criteria. Governments may rely on superficial engagement and consultation,

which erodes public trust. Co-creation will not only result in better services but will also increase public trust in government.

Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+)

GBA+ is a tool used to assess how specific populations may experience policies, programs, and initiatives differently than others. GBA+ goes beyond sex and gender to consider intersecting factors that shape individuals' experiences, including age, location, race, ethnicity, culture, disability, and language. In New Brunswick, GBA+ formally became part of government's decision-making and policy development process in 2016.

Gender Impact Statement (GIS)

GBA+ was not part of the budget process in a systematic way until 2020 when departments were required to include gender impact assessments in their submissions to the budget process. These assessments were not full GBA+ processes and were not shared publicly. In 2021, government expanded its use of GBA+ and published its first-ever GIS alongside the 2021-2022 budget. The GIS provided information on how GBA+ is used within government and information on if and how it was applied to various budget items. The last four provincial budgets have included a GIS.

Recommendations

A budget that accounts for equality

The Council recommends that government deliver on, rather than delay, commitments related to advancing equality and ensure that advancing equality remains front-of-mind and foundational in government's work to respond to current conditions.

In taking this approach, government must understand that commitments that tie into strengthening social safety nets are equality commitments, even if they are not framed as such. Strengthening social safety nets to shrink social deficits and debt will be critical coming months and years as economic and political instability will have unique and heightened impacts on those who are experiencing inequality, marginalization, and vulnerability.

GIS

The Council recommends that government maintain the current approach of publishing a GIS (as well as the current format of the GIS) for the 2025-2026 budget. It is critical that this work not be paused or discontinued.

For future budgets, this work should be strengthened. Consulting with GBA+ experts will be an essential part of this, as it will help determine if the GIS is the best format for facilitating GBA+ work on the budget and producing a public report-back. In future iterations of this work, it will be essential that government not only use GBA+ on specific policies, programs, services, and initiatives included in the budget but also on departmental budgets and the provincial budget as a whole. This is critical because inequality can occur not

just at the level of specific policies, programs, services, and initiatives, but in the trends and patterns of which policies, programs, services, and initiatives are prioritized and which are not.

Resourcing equality work within government

The Council recommends that the 2025-2026 budget include appropriate resources to support GBA+, accounting for social deficits and debts, and co-creation within the public service. This is skilled, specialized work that requires staffing, materials, and time.

This, as well the delivery of several specific equality-related commitments, will require increases the funding for the Department of Women’s Equality (WE). Within government, WE is the lead department on work related to advancing gender equality. WE holds the majority of government’s work on gender-based violence and women’s economic security (including pay equity) while also providing institutional leadership on GBA+. They are also responsible for the production of the GIS.