New Brunswick Women's Council | Conseil des femmes du Nouveau-Brunswick

Response to the "Right Thing, Right Now" Consultation

Submission to the New Brunswick Child, Youth and Senior Advocate

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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The "Right Thing, Right Now" Consultation

The Council welcomes the New Brunswick Child, Youth and Senior Advocate's consultation on how government and community-based organizations can better collaborate and ensure that social services are timely, equitable, and effective.

This submission's first three recommendations speak to the consultation process itself, as the Advocate's relationship with these organizations is an opportunity to shift unequal power dynamics and model a better way forward for government. The subsequent six recommendations respond to the themes of questions posed in the consultation's discussion paper.

A note on terminology: the social services that this consultation focuses on are largely delivered by registered charities. Charities and non-profits are distinct types of not-for-profit organizations. They are treated differently by the Canada Revenue Agency, which shapes their structure and activities. In 2023,[1] just over half of all not-for-profit organizations in Atlantic Canada were registered charities (53.7 per cent). Of all not-for-profit organizations in Atlantic Canada, only 10.8 per cent delivered social services. Given this, data and research about the broader not-for-profit sector should not necessarily be taken as reflective of social service charities specifically. Accordingly, this submission is intentional about which terms are used and largely references charities offering social services.

Recommendations on the "Right Thing, Right Now" consultation

1. Recognize that this issue is gendered

Society is structured to rely upon caring and social service labour being provided by women for free[2] or at a cut rate.[3] Government's relationship with charities that provide social services is built on this inequitable and unfair structure.

While all sectors provide these services to some extent, charities providing direct services are largely dedicated to them—and therefore subject to the full brunt of society's entitlement to having access to caregiving and social service labour while simultaneously failing to value its provision.

The result is that government, over decades, has downloaded the delivery of significant amounts of caring and social services from the public sector to charities, often with inadequate and precarious funding. The unspoken expectation is always that the sector will simply make it work.

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[1] Statistics Canada, Percentage of total non-profit organizations, 2023 (table 33-10-0753-01, March 2024).

[2] S. Besporstov and A. Sinclair, Estimating the economic value of unpaid household work in Canada, 2015 to 2019 (Statistics Canada, catalogue no. 13-605-X, March 2022).

[3] F. Khanam, M. Langevin, K. Savage, and S. Uppal, Women working in paid care occupations (Statistics Canada, *Insights on Canadian Society*, catalogue no. 75-006-X, January 2022).

Any efforts to evolve the material conditions of the sector and its relationship with government must address this gendered power dynamics or else risk recreating it. These dynamics not only impact the sector's capacity to sustainably deliver high quality services, they perpetuate and normalize the kinds of systemic and structural inequity that are at the root of the need for many of these services. Centering an analysis of power in this work can also help ensure that ensuing recommendations are focused on the right issues at the right scale.

2. Acknowledge existing work

There are decades of relevant sector-led research, advocacy, and recommendations on the challenges that charities delivering social services face in New Brunswick, including the relationship between the sector and government.

For example, the 2007 *Blueprint for Action* report produced by the Premier's Community Non-Profit Task Force[4] explored many of the same questions now being posed by the Advocate. The report outlined a comprehensive roadmap for sustainable sector development, including recommendations to:

- move away from short-term, project-based funding;
- increase access to core and multi-year operational funding;
- address root causes of issues, not just symptoms;
- value the sector's labour by investing in fair wages, benefits, and decent work; and
- build public understanding of the sector's role and expertise.

The Council's 2017-2018 Resonate initiative gathered information from more than 35 not-for-profit organizations, including a significant number of charities providing social services. Organizations named challenges with government that included funding, inclusion, and engagement. These findings affirm that recommendations in *Blueprint for Action* remain relevant today.

Drawing on existing work will strengthen the Advocate's recommendations. Directly acknowledging the history of efforts like the current consultation will build trust with charities. It would also play a small role in disrupting the pattern of gendered entitlement, devaluing, and erasure toward the sector's labour and expertise.

3. Share more information on the consultation

The Council encourages the Advocate to share more information publicly regarding the consultation's process, timeline, and specific anticipated outcomes.

This would strengthen the charitable sector's trust in the process and resulting recommendations. It would also model the kind of intersectoral transparency and mutual accountability that the Council recommends

[4] Premier's Community Non-Profit Task Force, *Blueprint for Action* (Province of New Brunswick, 2007).

later in this submission. As with recommendation two, it would play a small role in disrupting the existing gendered power dynamics between government and the charitable sector.

Recommendations in response to the themes of the "Right Thing, Right Now" consultation questions

1. Engage in co-creation

Co-creation is referenced in the consultation's discussion paper and is a longstanding recommendation of the Council. Co-creation also aligns with the current government's commitment to the disability justice principle of "nothing about us without us."

It is important to define co-creation, as governments increasingly use the term without necessarily evolving their ways of working. In the Council's view, co-creation means involving the people and communities (including but not limited to charitable service providers) who are impacted by an issue 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 humility from those in decision-making positions.

Blueprint for Action recommended a similar approach, using different language. It advised that not-for-profit organizations must be engaged from the outset during problem identification, priority setting, and policy or program design.[5]

Too often, 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 evaluation criteria. Additionally, the gendered power dynamics between government and the sector often mean that charitable service providers are treated only as sources of labour, not expertise or leadership. Given all this, governments may rely on superficial engagement and consultation, which erodes public trust.

For co-creation to be possible, the gendered power dynamics between government and charities must be addressed. Charities need to not only be at the table, but able to fully participate and co-lead.

To do this, large-scale changes to the material conditions of the charitable sector are needed; these are addressed in other recommendations. On a smaller scale, government can materially support the participation of charities by providing honoraria and paying for accessibility and care-related costs (e.g., childcare, transportation). This funding should be made available through processes that provide accountability for public dollars while minimizing the administrative burden on charities. This funding should also be available to individuals who participate in co-creation, such as service users.

[5] P. 28.

Decentering government culture and perspectives in collaboration is another way to shift power dynamics. Collaborations tend to default to government's culture, including what the Advocate observed in the "How It All Broke"[6] report: rigidity and a focus on adhering to established government practices instead of outcomes. Government's perspective—its priorities and vantage point—can also dominate collaborations. This can lead to what the Council terms "govsplaining," an adaptation of the colloquialism "mansplaining."

Mansplaining involves a man patronizingly explaining something to a woman—typically, attempting to correct her on something she has expertise in and he does not—and often begins with the phrase "Well, actually…" Govsplaining is when government seeks to convince a person or organization that that their valid perspective on an issue, typically rooted in on-the-ground expertise and experience, is incorrect because it does not centre the conditions and constraints that government culture has created around the issue. It often begins with "What you need to understand is…"

To enable co-creation, government needs to engage with charities and other partners in ways that signal that it truly welcomes external expertise and partnership. Decentering its culture and perspective—and avoiding govsplaining—would support this.

2. Measure social deficits and debts

The work that charities do is often referred to as filling cracks or gaps in public systems and services. To emphasize that these cracks and gaps are the result of deliberate public policy choices—and to make the impact and cost of those choices more visible to government—the Council often frames them as social deficits and debt.

Social deficits are the gap between what people need in terms of services and supports and what is available to them. 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. Where fiscal and infrastructure deficits and debts are concrete figures, social deficits and debt are left vague and are therefore easily minimized, overlooked, or ignored.

The concept of social deficits and debts aligns with the Advocate's observation in the "How It All Broke" report that "we often overpay for addressing crises and underbudget for the things that might have avoided the crisis in the first place."[7] The report provides many examples of situations in which underfunding of upstream services results in much more costly downstream crisis intervention.

Accounting for social deficits and debts is a necessary step toward government being able to provide adequate funding to social services in the public and charitable sectors. It would contribute to the

[6] New Brunswick Child, Youth and Senior Advocate, "How It All Broke" (Province of New Brunswick, 2024).

[7] P. 37.

conditions needed for co-creation, both in terms of having the necessary information and combatting the devaluing and erasure of social service labour.

3. Use Gender-Based Analysis Plus

As government hopefully begins to build a new relationship with the charitable sector and move toward co-creating services, it must use Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+). GBA+ is a government tool used to assess how specific populations may experience policies, programs, and initiatives differently than others. It goes beyond sex and gender to consider intersecting factors including age, location, race, ethnicity, culture, class, disability, and language.

In New Brunswick, GBA+ formally became part of government's decision-making and policy development process in 2016. 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. In 2021, government began publishing a Gender Impact Statement (GIS) alongside the budget. The GIS provides information on if and how GBA+ was applied to a sampling of budget items. In the GIS for the 2025-2026 budget, 43 per cent of sampled items had no GBA+ undertaken at any stage.[8]

From the Council's perspective, GBA+ is underused because government has not fully committed to equitable public policy or institutionalized equity-based work and approaches in the public service.

In using GBA+, the Council recommends that government orient toward intersectionality. Intersectionality is a Black feminist framework, grounded in an analysis of power, for understanding and accounting for people's experiences of multiple forms of oppression. Because of its origins and purpose, government's ability to fully engage in it is limited. Instead, government can orient toward intersectionality or potentially engage in it within a context of co-creation.

4. Develop a clear rationale for which sector delivers services

Currently, government may opt for charitable delivery of social services because, in the short term, it is cheaper than public delivery. This should not be the deciding factor in what sector provides a service—and if government begins to properly resource the sector, as per recommendation five, it no longer will be. A new rationale for whether services are delivered publicly or by charities will be necessary.

Services for victims and survivors of gender-based violence are a good example of work that should be delivered by charities with public funding. Victims and survivors often do not trust government institutions due to histories of systemic harm and neglect. Charities focused on gender-based violence—many of which are survivor-led and grounded in feminist, trauma-informed frameworks—are more likely to be trusted by victims and survivors. Here, the value of charitable service delivery is clear.

[8] Gender Impact Statement 2025 (Province of New Brunswick, March 2025), p. 14.

Charitable service delivery is also often appropriate for services focused on (or more likely to be accessed by) populations that have historical and ongoing reasons to distrust government, fear institutional surveillance, or need services delivered in culturally-affirming contexts. This includes many people who are racialized, living with disabilities, immigrants or newcomers, 2SLGBTQIA+, and in conflict with the justice system, among others.

In other cases, public delivery of services may be preferable because services should fall under the purview of legislative officers, like the Ombud, the Commissioner of Official Languages, or the Advocate. Capacity to deliver services in various regions or in both official languages must also be part of the rationale.

This rationale must be co-created by government, charities, service users, and others. This process must include representation from systemically marginalized and vulnerable populations. Many charities have the relationships and reputational trust that is necessary to bring these populations into co-creation processes and to support their ongoing participation.

5. Appropriately resource the sector

The fact that some services are better suited to delivery by charities does not mean they should be treated as second-tier. These services must be resourced and supported at the same level as public systems, with long-term, stable funding that reflects their essential role in the social safety net. *Blueprint for Action* called for "stabilization of funding" for these services more than 15 years ago.[9]

Currently, the funding charities delivering social services receive is inadequate, focused almost exclusively on direct service and is short-term and project-based. This makes service provision precarious, which negatively impacts clients. It limits organizations' capacity for collaboration and long-term systems-change work. The funding model impacts the sustainability of the organizations themselves, limiting their ability to plan long-term or develop corporate services and infrastructure. It also leaves many services unfunded, as charities must now deliver services that are not related to their core mission or that would be better addressed by specialized providers. For example, domestic and intimate partner violence shelters are now routinely tasked with supporting clients to access income assistance, immigration processes, and mental health care. These are specialized services well beyond their original mandates or current funding.

The impact of this funding model on the sector's workforce merits particular attention. *Blueprint for Action* addressed this, stating: "The reality is that non-profit staff and workers are treated like second-class citizens in terms of their wages and working conditions. This must stop."[10] Since then, that crisis has only

[9] P. 13.

[10] P. 23.

deepened.[11] This not only impacts service users, staff, charities, and the sector overall, it also normalizes and further entrenches inequality at a societal level.

Finally, government's bias toward funding "innovative approaches" has unintended consequences. First, it erases that service providers operating with inadequate resources are already constantly innovating. Second, innovation is often a euphemism for optimization and scaling. While social services should always strive to be more timely, equitable, and effective, the barriers to this are often resourcing. Focusing on innovation can indicate a misunderstanding or devaluing of social service work and sap attention away from addressing the foundational challenges the sector faces—as well as the root causes that drive the need for social services in the first place.

Government must provide core, multi-year operational funding to social service charities. This funding must adequately resource direct services as well as charities' participation in collaboration and co-creation and the development of robust organizational infrastructure. It must be enough to not only ensure compensation is equitable for staff (including access to health care benefits and pensions) but that there are structural supports tailored to the challenges of the work, including supporting staff in individually and collectively stewarding the trauma to which they are often exposed.[12]

An appropriately resourced sector is not only essential to high-quality service delivery, it is a precondition for the kind of partnership with government that this consultation seeks to foster. Anything else is premised on the gender-based exploitation of labour and will perpetuate the kind of structural and systemic inequality that drives many of the issues that cause social services to be needed to begin with.

6. Build capacity for data collection and reporting

Evaluation frameworks imposed by government on charitable service providers rarely reflect the goals or values of the organizations that are reporting on them. Most indicators are output-focused (e.g., number of workshops delivered), not outcome-driven (e.g., increased safety or trust).

To strengthen evaluation practices, part of the co-creation process must involve charities working with government and service users to define outcomes and indicators that align with their mission. Data collection from service users should not be transactional or extractive and evaluation reporting should not only be available to them, but useful and meaningful. Evaluation frameworks overall must move toward

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[11] Ontario Nonprofit Network, *The nonprofit HR crisis* (Ontario, March 2024).

S. Fernandes, S. Lanthier and E. Whitmore, Findings from EVA Canada's National Questionnaire on the GBV Workforce in Canada (Ending Violence Association of Canada, Ottawa, March 2024).

Katherine Scott, *Women, work, and COVID-19* (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, March 2021).

[12] K. Maki, Building collective care and collective power: Lessons learned from anti-violence workers (*The Philanthropist Journal*, May 2025).

shared, community-driven measurement models such as collective impact,[13] and create space for qualitative data that demonstrates impact in ways that quantitative data cannot.

Government also relies on charitable organizations to provide data that it needs for internal use (including in GBA+ processes) and its own bilateral agreements with the federal government. For example, under the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence, provincial and territorial governments must submit results-based reports to the federal government, much of which depend on data provided by community organizations. As a result, charities are asked to report on indicators that may not align with their own data tracking and outcome measurement priorities.

If government moves toward co-creation and accounting for social deficits and debts, the need for data and reporting is likely to increase, as well.

To address all of the above, social service charities need the training, tools, and staff necessary to collect, analyze, and produce meaningful data and conduct complex reporting in ways that build reciprocity and relationships.

Finally, governments should not only expect reporting from charities, it must also share its own program evaluations and report back on how data has been used. Strengthening the bond between sectors—and continuous service improvement—requires mutual transparency and accountability.

Conclusion

The issues raised in this submission are not new and neither are the recommendations. The most meaningful step the government can take is to stop seeking new recommendations and start implementing the ones it already has.

[13] For example, The Tamarack Collective Impact Toolkit.