

Moving Through the City

How do City services touch women's lives?

Women who live in Toronto are affected daily by the decisions made by the City. This includes sorting and taking out the garbage, walking with their children in the park, riding the bus to work, accessing essential services like transit, community centres, housing, and much more.

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In Toronto, women outnumber men in their regular use of public transit to get to and from work. According to the 2006 Census, public transit is the regular mode of transportation for 28% of women with paid employment to get to and from work, compared to 17% of men. However, for women of all ages and backgrounds it is often too expensive and inhibits mobility. For some women, the geographical coverage and frequency of buses is inadequate.

Availability and Affordability

"TTC is very expensive so we walk all the winter. Because it's very cold, I used to pay only for my two girls, so they used to take the bus. Me & my son we used to walk. Because it is very expensive, I cannot pay \$10 daily just to go to the school. This is affecting us a lot." – Mother living in a women's shelter

Public transportation is incredibly important for women. Women are struggling to afford the costs

of public transportation, and sometimes must choose between transit fares and food or going to medical appointments. Part of the problem is that 70% of TTC costs are covered by riders through fares - the highest percentage in North America.

This means that the increasing costs of the transit system fall disproportionately on the shoulders of riders, the majority of whom are female.

Physical Accessibility

"Getting around the city is different for an older person, older woman. They often may not have a car or not have access to a car. They're almost totally dependent on either walking or public transit." - Older Woman

Access to public transit and safety on transit is a problem for many women, including those with babies and strollers, and those with mobility devices. Many subway stations are not equipped with elevators. Many women reported that the elevators that do exist are often not working and the TTC's information line does not provide updated information on the status of elevators, leaving many women with health problems, mobility devices or strollers stranded.

Geographic Accessibility

"It takes me an hour and a half to get from home to downtown where I work and two hours to get home. If I'm coming home late and I miss my bus, it's a 20 minute wait in the cold or a 40 minute walk through dark streets." - Young working woman

Many women and girls living away from the city centre face long commutes to the downtown core. For individuals who rely on public transit, it is essential that transit is available close to their homes, workplaces, and schools.

Recent cuts to bus routes will impact many students and late night workers who rely on night-time routes to get them to work or school and back home safely.

Safety

"I wear fitted caps and hoodies and so my appearance would be that I am a male even though I am a female. Sometimes I go and request a stop... (and I'm told) you're not a lady kind of thing. So I'm like 'excuse me sir can I please get off here... I take off my stuff and show them my face, sometimes I undo my jacket to

show that I have cleavage in order to get a requested stop and that's a safety issue....I shouldn't have to dress a certain way just to request a stop." – Young racialized woman from Scarborough

Safety on transit is a major problem, particularly for women. The 'Request Stop' program is designed for women's safety but many women report that not all bus drivers are willing to let them out between designated bus stops.

On a daily basis, women and girls face sexual harassment and assault while travelling on transit. Often times, these incidents go unreported. Transit planning and management needs to include the voices and experiences of women and girl transit riders so that its design, lighting, routes, scheduling, stops, etc. reflect their safety concerns.

Women want:

- Re-establishment of TTC bus routes that have been cut.
- Continued implementation of Transit City and the involvement of women and girls in its development.
- Increased affordability and accessibility to public transit.

TORONTO WOMEN'S CITY ALLIANCE

Making Equality Matter...

TWCA calls for the establishment of a Toronto Women's Equalities Office that could spearhead the development of an action plan for equality for women in all their diversity. This office could monitor city services, create recommendations to end the systemic discrimination against women, prepare a Report Card and connect with and provide support to organizations working with women across the City.

Email: info@twca.ca
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For the complete research report, go to:
http://www.twca.ca/TWCA-publications/uploads/TWCA_June_2010a.pdf

Taking Care of Our Children

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Affordable, high quality child care is critical for women who want to work outside the home, or pursue education or training. Early learning and quality child care are also important for infants, toddlers and children as they are provided with stimulating and caring environments that enhance their development and well-being. Lack of affordable and accessible childcare is taking a toll on family life, affects relations between parents, and sometimes locks women inside their homes undermining their income generating capacity, community engagement and well-being.

"You know, when we are both working, leaving home at 7:30 am, for a 7 or 8 year old, it is no way to live. At 7:30 you cannot leave your child anywhere. It's very difficult... I could take care of some of the friends who could take my child from morning till 7:30 in the evening

when I get home. And it's a very long time. I don't know sometimes even if I'm getting later than that. I used to call her and she used to literally feed and do everything. It's very difficult because now my husband has given up his job because we cannot both afford to go out from morning till evening. We cannot keep our child out for that long so one person has to give up either their total career, everything, or otherwise..." – Working immigrant mother

Accessibility

Without access to adequate childcare, many women are forced to give up opportunities that would otherwise be available to them. Women and their families are bound by childcare options that do not meet their needs. For those who do shift work or work far from home, finding care for one's children is a major challenge and places stress on both the parents and the children. Some parents are forced to stay home and forego employment opportunities because of lack of accessible and affordable childcare.

"I cannot go outside because I have kids... I cannot go anywhere, I cannot see anything. Just like for work, just like for tourist, nothing because I have kids. [If the] government give us lots of subsidy, we take subsidy, then we can go outside for our educations and job..."

So, first we need lots of subsidy and then we can do things properly and in full concentration. I realize this is my problem. Not only my problem, lots of women suffer from this problem.” – Newcomer mother

Affordability

Daycare fees per child are about \$40 - \$60 per day. While just over 114,000 children, age 12 and under, live in low income families in Toronto, available funding provides for only 24,000 child care subsidies. As of June 2010, over 17,800 children are on the waiting list for subsidies. Lack of affordable child care disproportionately affects women who have lower incomes and bear the major responsibility for rearing children.

Women want:

- Adequate and sustained funding for child care from all levels of government.
- A National Child Care Programme.
- The expansion of child care services and the number of subsidized spaces to include universally accessible, high quality, and regulated child care.
- Equity of access and quality for all families.

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Housed and Sheltered

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In Toronto, for almost 20% of women and girls, housing is neither affordable, available, nor appropriate. This is because on average, women are poorer than men, especially when we are lone parents, elderly, live with a disability, victims of violence or belong to a marginalized group. In Toronto, there are more than 70,000 households on the waiting list for affordable housing.

Canada has endorsed housing as a human right. This makes the supply of housing a social responsibility and not something to be left solely to market forces. Until this commitment is realized, Canada's governments remain in violation of human rights.

Availability and Affordability

"If you notice lately, all the big shelters are closing in downtown Toronto. These are all downtown shelters. They're closing them down and they're putting condos in these places."

Building rental housing is not as profitable for private developers as ownership housing, resulting in a shortage of rental housing and an escalation of rents. Tenants face greater affordability problems than owners and spend a larger amount of their income on shelter costs than home owners. Women-led single-family households, single women, and senior women are also more likely to be tenants than homeowners and often spend more than 50% of their income on housing.

Appropriate, Quality and Safe Housing

"Bed bugs is a torture to us... it has become an epidemic and our lives almost totally ruined." – Low-income newcomer mother

Many women, especially single parents, are forced to live in substandard housing that may be far from services, transportation or jobs and has insufficient space to accommodate special needs or children.

Bed bugs, unsafe neighbourhoods, property standards violations, and harassment are just some of the conditions that women face when they are forced to live in inadequate housing. Recent budget cuts to funding for tenant

organizations will make it more difficult for women to access information and advocacy to help them battle slum landlords and poor living conditions.

Women want:

- All levels of government to fund social and cooperative housing construction to eliminate homelessness and the social housing waiting list within 10 years. At the very least, Toronto needs to provide 1000 affordable units a year, as recommended in the HOT Report which Toronto City Council has adopted.
- Developers of multiple residential housing to provide 25% of their units as affordable, family-sized units.
- Toronto Community Housing to stop privatising any of its housing stock unless it obtains double the units in return for every unit sold and improve its existing housing stock.
- The City of Toronto to reverse the cuts to funding for the Tenant Defense Fund.

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Recreation and Leisure

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Recreation is vital to the health and well-being of women, especially those who experience isolation due to poverty, immigration, cultural or language barriers. Recreational activities bring women together and provide a space to connect, engage and create dynamic and inclusive communities. For some women, especially those on limited incomes and older women, the cost of attending cultural activities is prohibitive. Others cannot access recreational or cultural activities due to lack of transport or lack of child care. In some cases, recreational programs may rely on assumptions about program participants which limit their interest and participation.

Affordability

"How can we afford to go to the museums and galleries and things like that. ... You know when you're worried about your next meal." - Young, racialized single mother

In the 2011 Operating Budget, Toronto City Council voted on the elimination of free adult programming at Toronto's Priority Centres. Priority Centres are recreational centres that the City has designated as important for the multiple benefits they provide to the communities they serve. These Priority Centres are often located in low-income communities.

The City's decision to eliminate free adult programming will affect over 9,000 residents. City staff estimates that 20% of program registrants will drop out due to the introduction of user fees.

Women told TWCA that recreational programs are critical to their well-being. TWCA is opposed to the charging of fees for women in low-income communities. Loss of recreational programmes will have a devastating effect on women's stress levels and overall health. It will increase their isolation and thus have an effect on the well-being of the family as well.

Appropriate

"I would like parks and rec to have a little more sensitivity to the fact that not every senior wants to play bingo and sign songs from WW1. The program is so patronizing." – Senior woman

Women's experiences and backgrounds differ widely and as such, recreational programming must be responsive to the interests and priorities of

different groups of women. Many newcomer women we spoke with also reported that recreational programming was not culturally appropriate and they did not feel comfortable attending. Many of the open court basketball and hockey programs are dominated by young men and the young women we spoke with reported that they needed more sports and fitness programming available to them.

Women want:

- The reinstatement of free programmes in Toronto's Priority Centres.
- Programming that is culturally-sensitive and appropriate for the needs of diverse girls and women of Toronto.
- Programming with flexible and extended services and hours.
- Programming for senior women and men that is developed in consultation with them.
- Washroom facilities and shelter in the parks maintained throughout the year so people can spend time outdoors.

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