

## Fair Recovery

The COVID-19 pandemic did not affect everyone equally. Income inequality grew as billionaires saw their wealth grow to unprecedented levels, while many of us struggled to get by. Unless governments tackle income inequality head-on, income inequality will get worse, and many of us will be left behind.

Fortunately, there are measures governments can take to ensure we have a fair recovery that allows us to “build back better”:

- strengthening our health care system and social programs;
- strengthening workers’ rights and making it easier for workers to organize;
- tackling the barriers that women, racialized Canadians, Indigenous people, and people with disabilities face;
- making sure that we rebuild in ways that are environmentally sustainable, and that green jobs are good jobs;
- supporting fair taxation so the wealthy and large corporations finally pay their share.

The financial resources of the federal government mean that whichever party is in power federally will affect what provincial governments are able to do, even in areas that are provincial responsibilities.

### Liberal

The Liberal platform includes extending wage subsidies through the Canada Recovery Hiring Program, subsidies for the tourism and arts and culture sectors, and COVID-related insurance coverage for the film and television industries. There is a proposal to amend the *Canada Labour Code* to provide 10 days of paid sick leave, and the federal minimum wage is supposed to go up to \$15 per hour in December.

Measures to strengthen public services include a program offering \$10-a-day child care, with new spaces primarily in the not-for-profit sector. There has been additional funding for long-term care, home care, and for the health care system to assist in dealing with the COVID-19-related backlog. There has also been significant infrastructure funding, including for infrastructure projects to respond to climate change. However, based on the government’s track record, a significant portion of those funds may go to P3 privatization schemes.

### Conservative

The focus of the Conservative proposals for the recovery from COVID-19 is providing more assistance to businesses through wage subsidies and tax credits. P3 privatization schemes would be encouraged, and rules on federal funding for green infrastructure would be loosened. The Canada Workers Benefit would be increased to a maximum of \$2,800 for individuals, or \$5,000 for families. There is a proposal to “remove barriers that prevent unions from organizing large employers with a history of anti-labour activity,” but no details are provided.

There is a proposal to increase the Canada Health Transfer by 6% per year. Instead of a pharmacare program, the Conservatives propose reaching agreements with the pharmaceutical industry to lower prices. Employee Savings Accounts, which are a privatized version of CPP and Employment Insurance, are proposed to meet the needs of gig workers.

## NDP

The NDP is proposing that the richest pay their fair share towards the recovery with tax fairness measures that would increase taxes for corporations and the wealthy. Steps to increase the number of good jobs include green infrastructure projects with requirements that materials be Canadian made. Labour rights would be strengthened with measures like anti-scab legislation, a federal minimum wage, rising to \$20/hour and then be indexed to the cost of living, and a minimum of 10 paid sick days in federally regulated workplaces. Large businesses receiving recovery funding would have to commit to a plan for net-zero emissions and ensure funds supported domestic jobs.

Measures to strengthen public services include expanding Medicare to include services like dental care and universal prescription drug coverage (pharmacare). The same 5 principles of the *Canada Health Act* would be applied to long-term care, though it appears this would be done through separate legislation. Pay equity would be made a priority; there would also be a comprehensive review of the existing employment equity regime to help close the racialized wage gap.

## Green

The Green proposals for the recovery include infrastructure projects intended to help respond to climate change, including a national electricity corridor, and building retrofits. To be eligible for financial assistance, corporations would have to maintain their Canadian workforces, and provide plans for addressing environmental issues. There are proposals for a “fair” minimum wage and pay equity.

Measures to strengthen public services include federally funded child care, national universal pharmacare and bringing seniors’ care under the *Canada Health Act*. A guaranteed livable income would replace income assistance and support programs. Both the amount people would receive and the programs to be eliminated would be determined by a council with representation from federal, provincial, municipal, and Indigenous governments. This approach means that until the different levels of government reach a decision, there is no way of knowing whether a guaranteed livable income will leave people better or worse off.

## Conclusion

Whether we have a fair recovery will depend on whether the federal government we elect on September 20 is willing to learn from the mistakes of the last 30 years. Will the government assume handouts for corporations will be enough, or will it seek to lift everyone up with improved public services, stronger labour rights, and by tackling barriers that have held back women, racialized Canadians, Indigenous people, and people with disabilities.

