

To:

The Honourable Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau
The Honourable Seamus O'Regan, Minister of Natural Resources
The Honourable Anthony Rota, Chair of the Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic

cc:

MP Jack Harris, St. John's East
MP Gudie Hutchings, Long Range Mountains
MP Yvonne Jones, Labrador
MP Ken McDonald, Avalon
MP Churence Rogers, Bonavista - Burin- Trinity
MP Scott Simms, Coast of Bays - Central - Notre Dame

Re:

NL Coalition for a Just Recovery

COVID-19 has had devastating economic impacts across the country, including in our province of Newfoundland and Labrador, a province already facing significant economic challenges.

Together, the agencies who are signatory to this document support thousands of people and hundreds of organizations in this province, and together we want to outline a vision for an inclusive, empowering, and just recovery from the pandemic.

We ask that the Government of Canada, in planning its investments in our economic recovery, look to these recommendations as a guide to maximizing both their social and economic impact.

It is critical to recognize that the social and economic impacts of the pandemic are not distributed equally. That must shape how we approach recovery. Specifically, we collectively agree that:

Individuals who have been the most disproportionately impacted by the pandemic are prioritized and engaged in recovery efforts. This means prioritizing youth who are justifiably concerned about their future prospects, precarious workers challenged by the lack of employment stability, individuals living with disabilities, homeless and precariously housed individuals, people facing food insecurity, seniors facing higher health risks and economic hardships, and women losing work and taking on the burden of an increasingly demanding home environment.

Economic development and community development reinforce one another. A recovery plan must create space for entrepreneurship, applying an anti-poverty framework to public investments, and building resiliency into communities. In particular, there is an opportunity to leverage this time of change to build a sustainable future for rural and remote communities in the province.

Our recovery must enable systemic change. This means clearly integrating Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations; diversity, gender and anti-racism efforts; housing affordability; and economic diversification as integral components of how these recommendations are realized. This type of transformative approach to economic recovery is one that can adequately embrace and invest in the social determinants of health for all Canadians.

Universal Design thinking is critical: Both physical and policy/program infrastructure built as part of any recovery effort should be designed so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.

Interventions must be data-driven: There is a great deal of data and literature available around each of these points to inform the policy development process. Our organizations are happy to help identify it. Likewise, any of these interventions should be accompanied by appropriate and thoughtful data collection.

Our proposed Just Recovery for Newfoundland and Labrador consists of **10 defining initiatives** that the remainder of this document will lay out.

To be clear, this document is not meant to capture the full range of social change our organizations and the communities we serve want to see. Instead, we aim to answer a specific question: if the Government of Canada is going to invest in restarting our economy, where will that investment do the most good?

The ten points we lay out are big ideas to move us towards innovative policy and program solutions. Our Coalition has assembled as an ad-hoc group to establish a starting point. Moving forward, we welcome anyone who agrees with these proposals to sign on, or to participate in further dialogue around the content and context of the recommendations.

By writing to you, we hope to see these proposals prioritized in the critical conversations taking place between this province and the Government of Canada as we plan a recovery from some of our most challenging times. We know that progress on any of these ideas will involve not only federal resources but also provincial commitment and support, and we will continue to engage with our provincial government colleagues on these ideas as we move forward.

1 Invest in reconciliation

Communities across Newfoundland and Labrador are coping with the cross-generational impacts of colonization. Investments in economic recovery must support the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and should prioritize Indigenous organizations and communities as both partners and leaders in this work.

Investments and progress must recognize the unique needs of Indigenous communities both living on and off reserves (rural, remote, urban and Northern), and embrace the rich diversity that exists amongst Canada's Indigenous peoples. It is also important to recognize and account for the high costs of living, working, and travelling in Northern Labrador in particular.





2

Pilot a widespread basic income program for individuals between 18 and 64

Newfoundland and Labrador is an ideally-sized jurisdiction to pilot the provision of a basic income. Specifically, we would support a model based on one of the policy options advanced by Basic Income Canada. This is the single policy intervention that would do the most to make a difference in the lives of all the diverse populations our organizations serve, by providing people with the resources they need to make the choices that are critical to their wellbeing.

Additionally, a basic income will be a particularly effective economic stimulus due to the high marginal propensity of consumption for lower-income households. Finally, a universal basic income would support the sustainability of communities dependent on seasonal employment and the gig economy, something that the current EI system is not well-designed to handle.

3

Invest in an expanded short-term child care cost subsidy program as a bridge to a universal, non-profit day care model.

There is ample evidence regarding the developmental, social, and economic benefits of universal childcare. In Newfoundland and Labrador, we suggest that an immediate, strong investment be made in the current child care subsidy program in the short term to allow more families to avail of this support, more children to access these vital developmental supports, and more people - primarily women - to enter the labour market. This should include opening up this program to the many families accessing non-regulated providers, and raising the associated income threshold.

Advancing women's economic participation drives economic growth, while boosting the income of Canadian families. Further investments should be directed towards the establishment of a universal non-profit daycare model for the province.

While giving more women the opportunity to have economic independence, a universal, non-profit daycare model more importantly ensures that children across the socioeconomic spectrum receive the same access to educational opportunities. Making affordable, high-quality, early learning development and childcare accessible to all families will enhance children's well-being while also growing the economy, promoting gender equality, and increasing women's labour force participation.



¹ https://www.basicincomecanada.org/policy_options



4

Accelerate pathways to labour-market attachment for the most disadvantaged.

Equitable access is critical to ensuring that individuals facing the greatest barriers to meaningful engagement in the workforce can participate in programs without risking benefits and support systems they have come to rely on.

To achieve this requires broadening eligibility of programs, allowing for and encouraging the use of overlapping benefits across systems (e.g. housing subsidies, drug benefits, etc.) for an extended transitional period; and investing in digital connectivity for rural, remote, Northern and low-income communities.

5

Invest in retraining and labour force readiness.

The combined impact of a universal basic income and universal childcare would be to massively increase the number of people who can engage in the labour market. Many of these new entrants will have faced significant and systemic barriers, and will face new ones created by the pandemic. An investment in training and labour force readiness for these entrants is essential. Additionally, access to these programs will help equip people for long-term sustainable employment in growth fields, and help address gendered wage gap resulting from disproportionate numbers of women being employed in low-wage positions, positions that have also disproportionately borne the brunt of the current recession.

With the technology sector growing exponentially in NL and facing challenges finding skilled local labour, there is a need for training and incentives, particularly for currently underemployed women and youth. Participation of these groups in the sector will provide a much needed labour force along with boosting their economic independence.

6

Strengthen local economic development and supply chains

A continuous circulation of value in communities is needed now more than ever to give local businesses and entrepreneurs the opportunity to flourish during this recovery period. With this in mind, investments in recovery could include incentives for customers to buy local, benefits for businesses that hire and buy local, and investments in the vibrant local social enterprise sector.

There is also an opportunity to leverage community benefit agreements and procurement legislation (particularly the re-tabling of Bill C-344) to maximize the regional impact of public expenditures. As recovery investments are made in partnership with municipalities and provinces, purchasing provisions to target locally driven social outcomes will be critical to maximize the impact of these funds.

At a broader level, the implementation of the Social Innovation and Social Finance Strategy provides an opportunity to enable social-purpose organizations to expand, to innovate, and to take risks, all of which will be particularly important as they play their role in the economic recovery.

7

Move forward with Universal Drug & Dental Coverage

Implementation would produce immediate improvements in health outcomes and improve labour mobility with employees no longer dependent on their employers for coverage. Additionally, implementing a universal drug & dental plan would remove one of the key barriers to leaving the income support system, which is loss of drug & dental benefits.

As we reflect on the human toll of the COVID-19 pandemic and its particular relationship to underlying health conditions and risks. As we look ahead to a strong and diverse labour force, Universal Drug and Dental Coverage enhances the ability for all Canadians to maintain their well-being.



8

Invest in affordable and supportive housing

Self-isolation and social distancing is impossible for homeless and precariously housed people. The pandemic has shown more explicitly than ever that access to safe, affordable, accessible and adequate housing is a public health necessity. There is a clear need to rapidly increase affordable housing stock and grow federal investments in programs to redirect individuals away from shelter services and into supportive and transitional housing programs. Should the Government of Canada seek to make investments in capital infrastructure, there is no better place to do it.

Investing in the transformation of underused buildings and land into affordable housing, increasing flexibility for projects to move forward within the National Housing Strategy, and accelerating the progressive realization of housing as a Human Right as laid out in the National Housing Act will ensure community safety in the pandemic, provide a foundation for people to thrive, support diverse local neighbourhoods, and provide an economic stimulus.



9

Strengthen public transportation

Transportation is one of the most significant barriers that people face on a daily basis in accessing their basic needs; including affordable housing, healthcare, and employment opportunities. This is particularly true outside of major cities. There are many communities in Newfoundland and Labrador that are not served by any regular transportation service, and others where existing transportation links could be strengthened and made more accessible in partnership with the many different agencies looking to enhance service provision.

10

Improve access to broadband internet

There is a profound digital divide in Newfoundland and Labrador. Whole communities are cut off from vital information and resources, along with virtual learning and online health (including mental health) services. Improving access to broadband internet is critical to equitable access to services, and to enabling a broad-based economic recovery. In some cases this is a call for the creation of the necessary physical infrastructure, but in other communities there's a need for programs that expand access to broadband for those who don't currently have it. The digital divide is particularly evident within vulnerable populations, many of whom face multiple barriers to being a part of a digital community. These barriers include literacy and poverty as well as access to necessary assistive technology.



As we look ahead, this growing coalition is excited to collaborate towards a Just Recovery for our province. We look forward to the dialogue, planning and policy work that lays ahead and are committed to contributing the time, expertise and capacity of our organizations and our communities in this effort. We also want to thank you all for your leadership in the face of COVID-19 and readiness to embrace innovative ideas and explore new ways to stimulate economic growth, invest in Canadians and protect our collective well-being. We look forward to your response to the ideas presented here and moving forward together.

Sincerely,

Signatories as of August 17th, 2020

Elaine Balsom, Executive Director, Single Parents' Association NL
Lisa Browne, CEO, Stella's Circle
Kim Campbell-McLean, Executive Director, AnânuKatiget Tuningit Regional Inuit Women's Association
Angela Crockwell, Executive Director, Thrive
Kimberly Dawson, Executive Director, Empower
Jennifer Elson, Executive Director, Labrador Friendship Centre
Darren Feltham, Executive Director, Conservation Corps NL
Stacey Howse, Director of Programs, First Light
Darrell Jackman, Executive Director, Smallwood Crescent Community Centre
Dan Meades, Provincial Coordinator, Transition House Association of NL
Doug Pawson, Executive Director, End Homelessness St. John's
Sheldon Pollett, Executive Director, Choices for Youth
Paula Sheppard, CEO, Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women
Joshua Smee, CEO, Food First NL
Frank Skeard, Ward Councillor (Glenwood), Qalipu First Nation
Joanne Thompson, Executive Director, The Gathering Place
Laura Winters, Executive Director, St. John's Status of Women Council

National Partner Endorsements as of August 17th, 2020

Stephen Gaetz, Director, National Observatory on Homelessness
David LePage, Managing Director, Buy Social Canada
Jeff Morrison, CEO, Canadian Housing Renewal Association
Melanie Redman, CEO, A Way Home Canada
Gisele Yasmeen, Executive Director, Food Secure Canada

Contact: info@justrecoverynl.ca