



# Manitoba Budget 2019

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**Manitoba Federation of Labour**

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# Manitoba Budget 2019

The Manitoba Federation of Labour (MFL) is pleased to provide its submission on priorities for the 2019 Provincial Budget. The MFL is Manitoba's central labour body, chartered by the Canadian Labour Congress, and we represent the interests of more than 100,000 unionized working people from every sector and every region of the province. The MFL works to promote good jobs, fairness, and social and economic justice for all. The priorities outlined in this submission are informed by long-standing MFL policies, Convention resolutions and emerging needs identified by our members.

As overriding priorities, the MFL would like to see your government's Budget 2019 focus on the following:

- Protecting and improving high quality public services that working families in Manitoba depend on;
- Investing to create good jobs, build better infrastructure, and keep our economy growing; and
- Reducing poverty and inequality, and building stronger communities.

Your government's cuts to front-line services in our province are having harmful impacts on working families and vulnerable people. All Manitobans count on health care, education, and social services to be there when they need them.

And Manitobans know that cuts and privatization are not the answer. The provincial government needs to make strategic investments to protect and enhance the services delivered by our dedicated public-sector workers. Manitobans are disappointed by your abandonment of your election promise to protect front-line services, as well as your decision to put the bottom line ahead of people and the services that they count on. That is not an approach that will help move our province forward.

And the provincial government continues to erode its own revenue base by flip-flopping on its prior decision to institute a carbon tax, while at the same time missing out on anticipated revenue transfers from a federal government that has decided to issue individual carbon rebates rather than direct transfers to provinces to help transition towards a lower carbon economy and green job creation.

Our members have prioritized a number of areas of government services that we hope you will consider and review for improvement:

## Protecting Public Services

As part of Budget 2019, we recommend that the government change course and take steps to protect public services by:

- Reversing the provincial government's policy of aggressive vacancy management, which is resulting in dangerously inadequate staffing levels for many core services and compromising service levels and outcomes for families who depend on them;
- Abandon your government's plans to privatize Government Air Services, including Lifelight and forest fire suppression, because it is too risky and will not generate savings without compromising quality and safety;
- Reverse the decision to freeze dedicated transit grants to municipal governments and fully restore dedicated transit funding back to a 50/50 cost sharing agreement between the Province and municipalities, including the City of Winnipeg;
- Restore funding cuts and positions in French translation services recently eliminated by your government; and
- Ensure adequate funding levels for interpretation services in health care and other public services to ensure that all Manitobans have equitable access to services they require.

## Health Care

We all depend on strong health care services being there when we need it. As part of Budget 2019, we recommend that the government prioritize health care services that families depend on, and look for opportunities for improvement, like the following:

- Reverse your government's decision to limit health care services and access in Winnipeg and commit to reopening emergency rooms that have or are planned to be closed at the Victoria General Hospital, the Seven Oaks General Hospital and the Concordia Hospital, as well as reopening the Urgent Care Centre at Misericordia;
- Invest in continuing to build Manitoba's comprehensive, universal public home care program rather than continue down the dangerous path of privatizing home care services, like contracting out services to out of province for-profit corporations;
- Work in partnership with other provincial and territorial leaders to push the federal government on developing a National Pharmacare Program similar to Canada's universal healthcare system, which the Parliamentary Budget Officer recently reported would save Canadians approximately \$4.2 billion annually;
- Work with health care unions on establishing Union Bargaining Councils, similar to the Employer Bargaining Councils established in the Health Sector Bargaining Unit Review Act, to take over responsibility for bargaining to support and respect healthcare professionals in their demanding work and respect the democratic decisions already made by health care workers about their current union representation;
- Quicken the pace of your government's delayed plan to build 1,200 PCH beds by 2025 by increasing investment in staffing;
- Adequately fund reproductive services so that women throughout Manitoba have equitable access to reproductive health, including the abortion pill, no matter where they live;

- Commit to reopening the 18 emergency medical services stations that the government is closing in rural Manitoba;
- Significantly increase the number of midwives working in Manitoba to help meet the unmet demand for critically-important midwifery services;
- Strengthen investments in public mental health and addictions services, with a focus on improving accessibility and reducing stigma, and look seriously at the need for a safe consumption site and managed alcohol program in Winnipeg;
- Work with unions representing health care support services across the province to standardize wages and job duties as an important part of ensuring high quality care; and
- Work in partnership with federal and local governments to address the serious problem of boil water advisories and to ensure safe, clean drinking water for all Manitobans, including our many First Nations citizens who are presently without access to this basic and essential right.

## Workplace Safety & Health:

All workers deserve to be safe on the job, and to come home to their families and loved ones. Unfortunately, thousands of Manitobans continue to be injured on the job or develop illness from dangerous conditions at work. Some never make it home at all. Workplace tragedies don't have to happen. With the right laws, policies and investments, we can ensure that all workers stay safe on the job. But your government is weakening Manitoba's health and safety laws, putting workers safety and lives at risk.

Just this fall, your government has weakened hearing protection for Manitoba workers. Hearing loss is one of the most common work-related injuries. And your government has also gone against the recommendation of both business and labour to set the safe working age at 14, instead instituting a lower age of 13. This means that Manitoba has weaker child labour laws than our neighbours in Saskatchewan and Ontario. In Budget 2019, we urge your government to reverse course and make investments in keeping workers safe and healthy on the job, like:

- Extending paid leave for victims of domestic violence and partnering with the MFL to promote awareness of the right workers have to employment leave when escaping domestic violence;
- Restoring your government's funding cuts to workplace health and safety supports;
- Restoring funding for the Minister's Advisory Council on Health and Safety and the Brandon and District Worker Advocacy Office;
- Continuing to investment in SAFE Work Manitoba on public campaigns to raise awareness and strengthen prevention programming;
- Developing new resources to support psychologically healthy workplaces, including ensuring fair and equitable Workers' Compensation Coverage for psychological injuries;
- Increasing the number of workplace inspectors and strengthening enforcement of workplace safety and health laws in private sector and public sector workplaces, including provincial government departments and agencies;
- Providing adequate resourcing for the criminal prosecution of employers responsible for workplace fatalities, and supporting victims and families of workplace injuries and illness;
- Devoting resources towards the establishment of a provincial registry of buildings containing asbestos;
- In co-operation with SAFE Work Manitoba and Safe Workers of Tomorrow, developing targeted strategies to protect especially vulnerable workers, such as youth, new workers and newcomers;
- Providing adequate funding for the Workers Advisory Office to support injured workers in complex dealings with the WCB and re-establishing eliminated staff positions within the office;
- Continuing public awareness and targeted workplace campaigns and strict enforcement against employer claim suppression activities; and

- Developing a concrete action plan to address hazards and improve health and safety standards for workers, inmates and others within correctional institutions, including providing for appropriate staffing levels.

## Education and Training:

Quality public education and post-secondary opportunities support Manitobans in getting good jobs and providing for a stable and secure future. Education supports greater equality, empowerment, participation in our society, and overall economic prosperity. We recommend that Budget 2019 place a strong focus on education by:

- Supporting high quality public education for all Manitoba students;
- Reversing your government's increases to the costs of tuition and its deregulation of course-related fees, decisions which will add hundreds of dollars of new costs on families and students each year;
- Increasing provincial support for post-secondary education, on a multi-year and predictable basis;
- Ensuring that quality English as a Second Language training is available for newcomers at no cost, and Adult Learning Centres are resourced to deliver specialized supports for adults in need;
- Strengthening Manitoba's apprenticeship system, with a focus on preserving and strengthening training integrity and safe working conditions;
- Investing in skills training targeting at Indigenous Manitobans' participation in the workforce;
- Recognizing Powerline Technicians as a Red Seal trade in Manitoba and utilizing the standard 1:1 apprentice: journey person ratio;
- Establishing new apprenticeship opportunities within the civil service to help address skills shortages and recruit and retain skilled trades people (we recommend a careful review of serious staffing recruitment and retention problems affecting Manitoba Infrastructure maintenance yards);

## Supporting Families:

The department of Families is responsible for many vital programs that support all kinds of families in a multitude of crucial ways: child care to allow parents to return to work or school, child welfare services for children and families in need, critically-important community living and disability services, and many more. We urge the government to prioritize the following important programs and supports:

- As we know that privatized child care delivery does not help working families, take concrete steps to reduce the waiting list for child care spaces by increasing the number of publicly-funded, not-for-profit, affordable child care spaces accessible in all regions of the province (including in connection with post-secondary institutions), improve child care subsidies for lower income families, improve accessibility to outdoor green spaces for children, and expand service times to accommodate parents working evening, night and weekend shifts;
- Reconsider your government's Social Impact Bonds scheme that will see private corporations profit from the provision of social services, relied on heavily by the most vulnerable in our province. Manitoba is fortunate to have the in-house expertise within the public and non-profit sectors to deliver high-quality social services right here in Manitoba, and there is no need to outsource the financing, planning and evaluation of social programs to wealthy consultants and corporations;
- Continue working with existing non-profit service providers on long-term funding agreements to enable greater focus on service delivery and attainment of outcomes, and less focus on project-by-project funding applications and other administrative work, without resorting to privatization through Social Impact Bonds;
- Invest in affordable and social housing to support low-income Manitobans;
- Provide fair wages for early childhood education and youth care workers;
- Review and overhaul the existing funding process for Community Living Disability Services to better resource current service requirements,

accommodate reassessment of needs and changes to service levels required over time, and address serious wage gap and other barriers to staff recruitment and retention;

- Accelerate the implementation of recommendations from the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry – especially reducing longstanding excessive social worker caseloads to a cap of no greater than 20 – to address serious gaps in Manitoba’s child welfare system and ensure the safety, care and security of children and proper safety and support for child welfare workers;
- Strengthen investments in preventative services (including cultural supports) for families to enhance their capacity to care for children and reduce the number of children coming into care; and
- Expand licenced before and after-school programs to engage children and enrich learning opportunities.

## Poverty Reduction and Protecting Vulnerable Manitobans

Too many Manitobans are living in poverty, especially women and children. Budget 2019 must make targeted investments that help lift Manitobans out of poverty and help them create brighter futures here at home. Specifically, we call on your government to:

- Commit to a phased-in increase of the minimum wage to a living wage level of \$15-an-hour in order to lift low income Manitobans working full-time above the poverty line, enabling them to be able to at least afford their basic needs and live with dignity;
- Commit to working with the City of Winnipeg on implementing a low-income bus pass to support low-income people access public transportation;
- Reinstate full funding to the Rent Assist program to support low-income Manitobans access safe and affordable housing;
- Reinstate your government’s funding cuts to women’s shelters, resource centres, and transitional housing programs to provide stable and consistent support for women seeking safe places;

- Work with the federal government to renew housing subsidies for low-income seniors;
- Increase funding to agencies in the assisted living sector to ensure quality service provision to vulnerable Manitobans who rely on their care; and
- Provide stable funding for men’s shelters and resource centres.

## Jobs, Infrastructure and the Growth:

Now, more than ever, Manitobans are looking for leadership from the provincial government in creating good jobs, building critical infrastructure and supporting strong economic growth. We recommend that Budget 2019:

- Prioritize the creation of good jobs and restore your government’s deep cuts to the infrastructure budget in order to tackle Manitoba’s significant infrastructure deficit, including taking full advantage of joint federal funding opportunities for cost sharing infrastructure projects;
- Abandon your government’s risky plan to ban project labour agreements while there is still time, as these agreements have proven successful at delivering high quality and high value projects, built safely by skilled labour, on-time and on-budget;
- Re-institute openness and transparency when considering the use of public-private partnership (P3) funding models for capital projects to protect Manitoba taxpayers against the higher long-term costs that P3 funding models have created in other provinces;
- Reverse this government’s decision to freeze the wages of security guards and allow for mandatory wage increases as set out in legislation as supported by business and labour;
- Reconsider Community Benefit Agreements as a model for providing lasting socio-economic benefits in First Nation and other communities;
- Work in partnership with the northern communities, labour, and business to develop proactive solutions to protect mining sector jobs in Thompson, and

prevent mining sector job losses in Flin Flon, including working to maximize the use of the Manitoba Mining Reserve Fund;

- Develop a plan to ensure that proper communication services, including cellular service, are available in remote areas of the province to assist in dealing with health and safety needs, emergency situations and regular day-to-day social and economic requirements;
- Lobby the federal government to fully restore door-to-door mail service for Manitobans who have lost it, and encourage the development of postal banking and other opportunities to sustain a strong national postal service; and
- Cease wasting taxpayer dollars on high-priced consultants to advocate for privatizing Manitoba Hydro in whole or in part, especially given your government's decision to break apart Manitoba Hydro's energy efficiency programs into a separate Crown utility.