

# Manitoba Budget 2023

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The Manitoba Federation of Labour (MFL) is pleased to provide its submission on priorities for the 2023 Provincial Budget. The MFL is Manitoba's central labour body, representing more than 30 affiliated unions with 125,000 members from every sector and every region of the province. The MFL works to promote good jobs, fairness in the workplace, 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 affiliated unions.

As overriding priorities, the MFL would like to see your government's Budget 2023 focus on the following:

- Fixing the public sector staffing crisis and strengthening the public services that all Manitobans count on;
- Investing to create good jobs, build better infrastructure, and keep our economy growing; and
- Reducing poverty and inequality, and building stronger communities.

Over the past seven years, your government's cuts to public services to fund tax cuts which have disproportionately benefitted the wealthy have put serious strain on public sector workers and the services they provide. All Manitobans count on health care, education, and social services to be there when we need them.

And Manitobans know that privatization is not the answer. The provincial government needs to make strategic investments to protect and enhance the services delivered by our dedicated public-sector workers. We are concerned about your continued cuts to and underfunding of

these services, as well as your decision to pursue privatization and put the bottom line ahead of people and the services that they count on.

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

## **Strengthening Public Services**

As part of Budget 2023, we recommend that the government change course and take steps to strengthen our public services by:

- Making hiring throughout the public sector an urgent priority. Years of cuts, underfunding, and aggressive vacancy management have led to overworked staff who are finding it increasingly difficult to keep up with service demand;
- Improving staffing levels in the civil service so that departments and government agencies are able to meet the needs of Manitobans;
- Providing adequate funding to municipalities after years of freezes under your government, including restoring the dedicated transit funding back to a 50/50 cost sharing agreement; and
- Halting your government's attempts to privatize public services, including in provincial parks, infrastructure maintenance, and at Crown corporations.

## **Public Health Care**

We all depend on strong health care services being there for us when we need them. As part of Budget 2023, we urge your government to address the health care crisis you have done much to cause. Take immediate action to:

- Substantially increase funding to the public health care system, and hire more health care workers in the public system to address the alarming shortages and wait times, and reduce the government's use of private agencies;

- Increase funding for public sector mental health and addictions services rather than contracting these services to the private sector in and outside of Manitoba;
- Commit to working with health care employers and unions to ensure that all health care facilities have strong health and safety programs, as health care workplaces continue to see very high injury rates even as other industries such as mining and construction have seen reductions in injury rates;
- 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;
- Finally start your long-delayed plan to build 1,200 PCH beds and increase investment in staffing;
- Significantly increase the number of midwives working in Manitoba to help meet the unmet demand for critically-important midwifery services;
- Look seriously at evidence and the need for a safe consumption site and managed alcohol program in Winnipeg;
- Look at ways to expand health care coverage to ensure that people are able to stay healthy, including services like massage therapy; and
- Work with municipalities to explore opportunities to better integrate health care facilities into transit routes and reduce costs for patients.

## **Workplace Safety and Health**

All workers deserve to be safe and healthy 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. Unfortunately, your government has weakened

Manitoba's health and safety laws, putting workers' safety and lives at risk. But it is not too late to reverse course.

In Budget 2023, we urge your government to make investments in keeping workers safe and healthy on the job, like:

- Supporting psychologically healthy workplaces, including ensuring fair and equitable Workers Compensation Coverage for psychological injuries in legislation and adoption of the CSA national standard;
- Reversing your government's decision to weaken apprentice training and safety and restore the 1:1 apprentice-to-journeyperson ratio;
- 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;
- Developing targeted strategies to protect especially vulnerable workers, such as youth, new workers and newcomers in co-operation with SAFE Work Manitoba and Safe Workers of Tomorrow; and
- 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.

## **Education and Training**

Quality public education and post-secondary opportunities support Manitobans in being good citizens, finding good, family-supporting 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 2023 place a strong focus on education by:

- Providing consistent, fair, and equitable funding for our public school system that provides for sustainability and a reduction in class sizes, and ending the education property tax breaks that disproportionately benefit wealthy people and corporations;
- Establishing a universal meal program for all school-aged children so that kids do not go hungry while they are learning;
- Funding the development of anti-racist, anti-oppressive and decolonial policies to enhance equity and address systemic barriers that impact the school experience and achievement of Indigenous students, and meeting our commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action;
- Reviewing and updating Kindergarten to Grade 12 curricula that is older than seven years, and ensuring that curriculum related to sexuality and relationships meets comprehensive sex education standards as outlined by the Sex Information and Education Council of Canada;
- Increasing provincial support for post-secondary education, on a multi-year and predictable basis;
- Strengthening Manitoba's apprenticeship system, with a focus on preserving and improving training integrity and safe working conditions;
- Establishing new apprenticeship opportunities at publicly-funded projects to help address skills shortages and recruit and retain skilled trades people; and
- Lifting the funding freeze for the Manitoba Museum, and adjusting the funding to address inflationary pressures to ensure that the museum can fulfill its mandate to document, collect, research, and educate about the human and natural history of our province.

## Supporting Working Families

Government is responsible for many vital programs that support all kinds of families, including 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 to:

- Establish a guarantee of at least 10 paid sick days for all workers in Manitoba's Employment Standards Code;
- Join every other province in Canada and start reducing child care fees, with the goal of getting to \$10/day child care as promised in the federal child care agreement (with subsidies to reduce fees below \$10/day available for low income Manitobans).
- Provide fair wages for early childhood education and youth care workers and standardize pay for rural and urban direct support workers who provide essential services for people with developmental disabilities;
- 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;
- 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. In fact, according to a recent Campaign 2000 report, Manitoba has the highest child poverty rate among

provinces in Canada. This is unacceptable. Budget 2023 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:

- Improve affordable and supportive housing models and stop selling off Manitoba Housing units;
- Reinstate full funding to the Rent Assist program to support low-income Manitobans' access to safe and affordable housing;
- Work with the federal government to renew housing subsidies for low-income seniors;
- Increase funding to agencies that employ direct support workers to ensure decent wages, as well as to develop minimum training standards, mandate a higher minimum wage for support workers and introduce a professional designation for people working in this field; and
- Ensure multi-year, adequate funding for community-based social services and other not-for-profit social service agencies, and cease your government's preoccupation with private sector social impact bonds, which have proven to be both expensive and ineffective.

## **Jobs, Infrastructure and the Growth**

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 2023:

- Establish an annual process to allow government to engage labour, management, and other stakeholders in the determination of a living wage level for Manitoba's minimum wage to ensure that workers who earn minimum wage earn enough to live above the poverty line;



- Engage labour and employers in the development of a made-in-Manitoba jobs strategy to support working families, retain young Manitobans and grow our economy;
- Deal seriously with the fact that too many jobs go to out-of-province workers because of this government's refusal to pursue community benefit agreements and other types of agreements that promote local and inclusive hiring policies;
- Focus on growing a diverse northern Manitoba economy and work with northern communities, labour, and business to develop proactive solutions to protect mining and other natural resource sector jobs in northern Manitoba; and
- Develop a plan to ensure that proper communication services, including cellular and broadband 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.