

# Priorities for Manitoba's 2025 Budget

January, 2025



## Manitoba Budget 2025

The Manitoba Federation of Labour (MFL) is pleased to provide its submission on priorities for the 2025 Provincial Budget. The MFL is Manitoba's central labour body, and it represents the interests of more than 130,000 unionized workers from every sector and every region of the province in the public and private sectors, as well as the building trades. 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.

We note that the threat of potential U.S. tariffs being placed on Canadian exports hangs over this year's budget consultation process. As your government is well aware, the tariffs being floated by President Donald Trump would have a devastating impact on Manitoba's economy and on the livelihoods of Manitoba's workers. We encourage your government to develop substantial support programs to be enacted in the event that tariffs are imposed by our biggest trading partner. These support programs should focus on the following four key priorities:

- Business stabilization and preservation of existing jobs;
- New job-intensive stimulus investments in things like infrastructure;
- Income support programs in line with the programs developed to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- Lobbying the federal government to reform the Employment Insurance system to better protect workers who lose their jobs in the event of tariffs, including reinstatement of special measures adopted for COVID and the 2008/09 financial crisis.

The MFL stands ready to assist your government in developing responses that work for Manitoban workers and protect their jobs and incomes.

In Budget 2025, the MFL would like to see the provincial government focus on the following:

- Investing in strengthening the public services that we all count on and fixing the continued staffing crisis within these services;
- Investing to create good jobs, build better infrastructure, and grow a more equitable economy; and
- Reducing poverty and inequality, and building stronger communities.

## Rebuilding Public Services

The provincial government has made some progress on increasing public sector staffing levels, particularly in health care. But understaffing and serious vacancy rates remain a persistent issue across the public sector. As part of Budget 2025, we would like to see the provincial government take significant steps to rebuild public services after years of cuts that have led to a staffing crises across the public sector. These steps should include:

- Improving staffing levels in the civil service so that departments and government agencies are able to meet the needs of Manitobans;
- Fixing the staffing crisis in health care, education and social services, as years of cuts, underfunding, and aggressive vacancy management have led to overworked staff who are finding it increasingly difficult to keep up with service demands from Manitobans;
- Closing the wage gaps that exist between rural and urban public sector workers in order to recruit and retain staff throughout Manitoba; and
- Providing adequate funding to municipalities, including restoring dedicated provincial transit funding back to a 50/50 cost sharing agreement.

## Stengthening Public Health Care

We all depend on strong health care services to be there for us when we need them. But the strength of our health care system has been seriously compromised in recent years. As part of Budget 2025, we urge your government to address the health care staffing crisis and take immediate action to:

- Increase funding and hire more health care workers throughout the public system to address alarming staff shortages and facility closures, as well as to reduce the government's use of private agencies for service delivery;
- Increase funding for public sector mental health and addictions services rather than contracting these services to the private sector in and outside of Manitoba;
- Invest in continuing to build Manitoba's comprehensive, universal public home care program;
- Take action to address the alarmingly high injury rates in health care by requiring safe staffing levels across the health care system;
- Restore funding that was cut by the previous PC government for health care services like outpatient physiotherapy, the Mature Women's Centre, lactation consultants, emergency rooms and urgent care centres;
- Build more personal care homes to begin addressing the serious personal care home bed shortage and increase staffing levels, as well as introduce new standards for the number of hours of hands-on care patients receive in long term care facilities;
- Increase funding for midwifery services and provide accessible, client centred, culturally sensitive and inclusive birthing facilities;
- Look at ways to expand health care coverage to ensure that people are able to stay healthy, including services like massage therapy; and
- Restore access to public health care for international students.

## Safe and Healthy Workplaces

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. In Budget 2025, we urge your government to make investments to keep workers safe and healthy on the job by:

- Ensuring that Manitoba has the strongest workplace health and safety laws in the country by bringing in new protections against hazards facing workers today, including the explosion of workplace violence, the greater recognition of psychological hazards in the workplace, asbestos, and extreme temperatures.
- Supporting psychologically healthy workplaces by ensuring fair and equitable Workers Compensation Coverage for psychological injuries in legislation and adoption of the CSA national standard in all public sector workplaces;
- Requiring employers to provide menstrual products to employees free of charge, as there are already required to do with other hygienic products;
- Taking steps to ensure all public service workplaces are SAFE Work Certified;
- Working with health care employers and unions to ensure that all health care facilities have strong health and safety programs and to reduce the very high injury rates in the sector, which is leading to money being spent on higher WCB rates that could be going towards health care services for Manitobans instead;
- Hiring more workplace safety and health officers to strengthen the enforcement of workplace safety and health laws in private sector and public sector workplaces;
- Providing adequate resourcing for the criminal prosecution of employers responsible for workplace fatalities, and supporting victims and families of workplace injuries and illness;

- Ensuring staff throughout the civil service are provided with safe work procedures training, tools and resources;
- 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; and
- Providing adequate funding for the Workers Advisor Office to support injured workers in complex dealings with the WCB and re-establishing staff positions that had been eliminated.

## 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 2025 place a strong focus on education by:

- Providing consistent, fair, and equitable funding for our public school system to hire more teachers and educational support staff and reduce class sizes;
- 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 meet our commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action;
- Increasing provincial support for post-secondary education, on a multi-year and predictable basis and ensure that post-secondary education is affordable and accessible for all Manitobans;
- Investing in training opportunities for Manitobans with disabilities;
- Strengthening Manitoba's apprenticeship system, with a focus on preserving and strengthening training integrity and safe working conditions;

- Re-establishing apprenticeship opportunities at publicly-funded projects to help address skills shortages and recruit and retain skilled trades people; and
- Increasing funding for public libraries.

## **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 important programs and supports by:

- Establishing a guarantee of at least 10 paid sick days for all workers in Manitoba's Employment Standards Code;
- Creating a comprehensive child care expansion plan to reach the existing space expansion target of 23,000 pre-school spaces, including new models of public child care and requiring fair wages for early childhood educators to help recruit and retain staff;
- Increasing funding for foster parents;
- Strengthening 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
- Expanding licenced before and after-school programs to engage children and enrich learning opportunities.

## **Poverty Reduction and Protecting Vulnerable Manitobans**

According to a recent Campaign 2000 report, Manitoba has the highest child poverty rate among provinces in Canada. This is unacceptable. Budget 2025 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:

- Establish an annual process to enable government to make sure that Manitoba's minimum wage does not fall below a living wage and that those who work full-time on minimum wage do not live in poverty;
  - Right now, your government is operating under Brian Pallister's minimum wage legislation, which this year will limit the minimum wage increase to a mere 20 cents. Your government has said that focusing on affordability is a priority, but increasing the minimum wage by less than a quarter will leave minimum wage earners far below what they need to make ends meet.
- Improve affordable and supportive housing and invest in much-needed repairs to Manitoba's social housing stock;
- 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;
- Ensure that strong safeguards are put in place to protect international student workers against exploitation by employers;
- Provide increased funding for women's shelters as well as for emergency placement resources for youth and children's shelters;
- Ensure multi-year and increased funding for community-based social services and other not-for-profit social service agencies; and

- Launch a review of Manitoba’s taxation policy with the aim of creating a more progressive and equitable taxation system.

## **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 2025:

- Ensure that provincial infrastructure is built through project labour agreements that deliver high-quality work and community benefits, prioritize training opportunities and employ local hiring practices to create good union jobs in our province;
- Target investments in the green economy to create good, family-supporting jobs – Manitoba Hydro should be advancing plans for aggressive DSM, for future hydro-electric development, as well as for nearer-term plans for wind to be developed in partnership with Indigenous governments;
- Provide the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure with the resources that staff need to deliver its important services and stop further privatization of the department’s services;
- Invest in growing a diverse northern Manitoba economy and work with northern communities, labour, and business to develop proactive solutions to increase mining 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.