

2026 Budget submission from the MFL

The Manitoba Federation of Labour (MFL) is pleased to provide its submission on priorities for the 2026 Provincial Budget. The MFL is Manitoba's central labour body, made-up of more than 30 affiliated unions representing 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.

In Budget 2026, the MFL encourages the provincial government to focus on:

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

Our submission highlights several ways that your government can continue to improve the public services that Manitobans count on, build a fairer province, create good jobs and build quality infrastructure.

But we want to draw attention to an overarching budget priority that would help the provincial government deliver the public services that Manitobans count on: fixing the prolonged and serious staffing crisis in areas like health care and throughout our provincial public services. The staffing shortages are severe and continue to hamper public sector workers' ability to deliver the high-quality services they want to provide for Manitobans

Some particularly alarming staffing shortages exist in many areas of health care. Nursing vacancy rates range from 11.8 per cent and 19.7 per cent in the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and Shared Health respectively, to over 20 per cent in all other RHAs, with the worst being nearly 30 per cent in Prairie Mountain Health. Winnipeg health care facilities are currently struggling with a 25 per cent vacancy rate in critical care nursing positions.

And the problems extend well beyond nursing. For instance, on any given day half or more of our provincial ambulances are sitting idle due to the paramedic staffing crisis. Paramedics are struggling with 30 to 40 per cent vacancy rates across Manitoba RHAs, with more than 200 vacant positions provincewide and 47 vacant positions in Winnipeg alone. But Manitobans' demand for paramedic care only continues to grow as call volumes are up 64 per cent since 2018.

Respiratory therapist vacancy rates have reached 42 per cent at the Grace Hospital, 36 per cent at St. Boniface and 25 per cent at Health Sciences Centre. Health care vacancy rates are also particularly concerning with respect to health care aides, housekeeping, dietary and laundry services, medical device reprocessing technicians and unit clerks.

In the core civil service, most provincial government departments are struggling with severe staffing shortages. Over 2,300 positions remain unfilled in Manitoba's civil service today, adding up to nearly 20 per cent across the provincial public service workforce. And according to the most recent available statistics, the vacancy rate numbers are even higher in key departments like Innovation and New Technology (35.6 per cent), Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure (23.7 per cent vacancy rate), Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care (23.5 per cent vacancy rate) and the Department of Finance (20.6 per cent vacancy rate).

We acknowledge that the government is currently dealing with a serious deficit resulting from the decision to implement costly tax costs proposed by the previous PC government. This structural revenue problem calls for a structural revenue

solution, and an extension of the government's return to balance timeline. While governments' should always strive to keep their promises, it would be a major mistake to prioritize the uber-aggressive 4-year return to balance commitment over more important commitments to fix health care and make life more affordable for Manitoba families, which must include quality public services.

Rebuilding Public Services

As mentioned, understaffing and seriously high staffing vacancy rates remain persistent issues across the public sector. As part of Budget 2026, we would like to see the provincial government move forward with a deliberate strategy to rebuild public services and seriously fix the staffing crises across the public sector. These steps should include:

- Immediate action to reduce high vacancy rates and restore 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;
- Immediately address the serious staffing and resource shortages for wildland fire fighting, where one in four full-time positions and 64 seasonal fire ranger positions are vacant.
- Working with civil servants in the Vehicle and Equipment Management Agency to ensure training and tooling standards are kept up to date so that agency staff can fulfill their duties;
- 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. While the NDP government has clearly made significant efforts to hire more health care workers, the system requires many, many more. Health care workers are being asked to keep up with growing service demands while facing serious staffing shortages, leading to increased burnout and other mental health injury risks. In large part related to under-staffing, health care is tied with the provincial public sector for having the highest workplace injury rates in Manitoba. As part of Budget 2026, we urge your government to address the continuing health care staffing crisis and take immediate action to:

- Increase health care funding and hire more health care workers throughout the public system to address alarming staff shortages, as well as work with health care unions to reduce the government's reliance private agencies (in nursing, health care aides and other areas) for service delivery;
- Expand retention and recruitment incentives to attract and keep specialized professionals in hard-to-fill areas;
- Develop a forward-looking, well resourced health human resources plan, in consultation with health care unions;
- Increase funding and explore opportunities to expand public sector mental health and addictions services, including a focus on upstream care;
- 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 and independently certified high quality health and safety programs;
- Work with Indigenous governments, post-secondary institutions and regional health authorities to implement strategies to increase the number of Indigenous health care workers in Manitoba;

- 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 and culturally sensitive and inclusive birthing facilities;
- Create more opportunities for Manitobans to train as health care professionals in rural and northern areas of the province;
- Look at ways to expand health care coverage, such as massage therapy, to ensure that people are able to stay healthy; and
- Fulfill your election promise to restore access to public health care for international students.

Safer and Healthier Workplaces

All workers deserve to be safe and healthy on the job, and to come home to their families and loved ones. Unfortunately, more than 25,000 Manitobans continue to be injured on the job or develop illness from dangerous conditions at work every year; close to two dozen are killed at work every year. 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 2026, 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 protections in the country, including protections against hazards workers are increasingly exposed to today, including the explosion of workplace violence (up 40 per cent in the last two years) in areas like retail, public transit, health care, education and first responders, as well requiring employers to identify and remove psychological hazards in the workplace;
- Completing the 27 outstanding regulatory changes related to the provincial government's review of the Workplace Safety and Health Act which was completed over a year ago;

- 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 – this is both a health & safety and gender equity imperative, which has been endorsed by labour, employers and technical experts;
- Taking steps to ensure all public service workplaces have independently-certified high-quality health and safety programs – government should be setting the example on workplace safety and health, not standing out as the most dangerous employer;
- 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;
- Continuing to hire 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;
- Ensure staff throughout the civil service are provided with safe work procedures training, tools and resources;
- 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 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.

The MFL is disappointed that the provincial government failed to make a meaningful increase to Manitoba's K-12 education system this year, instead offering an operational funding increase that is below inflation. In effect, this is a cut to classroom funding and will only worsen the chronic underfunding of our public education system

We recommend that government reverse course and:

- Provide consistent, fair, and equitable funding for our public school system to hire more teachers and educational support staff and reduce class sizes;
- Increase 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;
- Invest in training opportunities for Manitobans with disabilities;
- Strengthen Manitoba's apprenticeship system, with a focus on preserving and strengthening training integrity and safe working conditions;
- Fund 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
- Increase funding available to Manitoba's museums and libraries.

Supporting Working Families and Building Stronger Communities

The provincial 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:

- Ensure Manitoba's minimum wage is a living wage;
- Establish a guarantee of at least 10 paid sick days for all workers in Manitoba's Employment Standards Code;
- Significantly increase the pace of childcare space creation through public models of childcare delivery in order to meet Manitoba's commitment to create 23,000 pre-school spaces, and ensure fair wages, adjusted for cost of living, for early childhood educators and other child care workers;
- Invest more in training opportunities for persons with disabilities to help them gain good jobs;
- Explore ways to encourage environmentally-friendly communiting for Manitoba 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

Manitoba has the highest child poverty rate among provinces in Canada. This is unacceptable. Budget 2026 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;
- Build more social, deeply affordable and supportive housing units 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;
- Increase funding for women’s shelters as well as for emergency placement resources for youth and children’s shelters;
- Explore new grocery affordability supports for people living in Northern and isolated communities.
- 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 2026:

- Ensure that all major infrastructure (including both provincial projects of \$50 million or more as well any project supported by more than \$50 million in provincial investment) is built through Manitoba Jobs Agreements to deliver good, family-supporting jobs for Manitobans, apprenticeship opportunities, union standards and an ending of the scourge of out-of-province license plates on construction sites;
- Re-establish apprenticeship opportunities at publicly-funded projects to help address skills shortages and recruit and retain skilled trades people;

- Hire more apprenticeship coordinators to address current completely unreasonable workloads, in order to support apprentices to succeed in becoming journeypersons in a reasonable amount of time.
- 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.

AT.USW9074