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**Sent:** Friday, November 16, 2018 10:35 AM  
**To:** Engages-Mobilisation (WD/DEO) <wd.engages-mobilisation.deo@canada.ca>  
**Cc:** Jennifer Holmes-Weier <Jennifer.Holmes-Weier@ymca.ca>  
**Subject:** Input into the Western Canada Growth Strategy - YMCA Canada

Good morning,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the development of the Western Canada Growth Strategy. Please find YMCA Canada's submission attached.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us directly.

Kind regards,  
Jessica Stepic

**Jessica Stepic**  
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# Western Canada Growth Strategy

## Submission to Western Economic Diversification Canada

November 2018

*Building healthy  
communities*

**YMCA Canada**



## Introduction

The YMCA is a powerful association of people joined together by a shared passion to foster a sense of belonging for all. In an age of complex social challenges, the YMCA is steadfastly dedicated to building healthy communities by inviting and encouraging Canadians to join in, to give back, and to gain the connections, skills, and confidence they need to thrive.

Across western Canada, the YMCA is at the heart of communities, serving evolving needs and providing vital community services through 14 YMCA Member Associations and approximately 400 program sites.

YMCA Canada is pleased to have the opportunity to respond to Western Economic Diversification Canada's request for input into the development of the Western Canada Growth Strategy. In consultation with YMCA Member Associations across western Canada, we have responded to the questions that reflect our experience, expertise, and work. Should there be any questions or follow-up required, please do not hesitate to contact us directly.

## Consultation Response

### ***What does a stronger western Canadian economy look like 10 years from now?***

The future of the economy in western Canada will be defined by how we manage today's population growth, system gaps, emerging needs, and social inequality.

Western Canada has the fastest growing provincial populations in the country. Between 2011 and 2016, the western provinces' populations grew at a faster rate than the national average of 5%, with Alberta's population growing more than twice the national average at 11.6% during this period.<sup>1</sup> Even though the population growth is largely due to an increase in immigration, western provinces also continue to experience a higher fertility rate and stronger interprovincial migration, particularly to British Columbia, from other parts of Canada.

While population growth signals healthy provincial economies and a good quality of life, it puts tremendous pressure on existing infrastructure, as well as programs and services, in order to be able to meet the increasing demand and evolving needs of residents.

Across western Canada we continue to see challenges in accessing adequate and affordable housing, education and employment opportunities, high-quality child care, and other fundamental programs that people need in order to grow and thrive. Furthermore, challenges such as the labour shortage, are intensifying across the country, with almost 400,000 vacant jobs reported in Canada in the fourth

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada. *Population size and growth in Canada: Key results from the 2016 Census*. February 8, 2017.



quarter of 2017, an increase of 10.5% in just three months.<sup>2</sup> This is felt particularly strongly in British Columbia, which experienced the highest job vacancy rate of 3.9%.<sup>3</sup>

To strengthen the western Canada economy over the next 10 years, we must address the challenges and factors that prevent people from being active participants in the economy.

### **The YMCA's role in building strong communities in western Canada**

Partnerships and collaboration between all levels of government, community partners, private and not-for-profit sectors, and residents of western Canada is critical to building strong economies and communities.

YMCAs across western Canada are committed to building new social infrastructure, and to creating and implementing programs that address unmet needs related to physical activity and healthy living, child care, housing, settlement and migration, and employment. Over the next decade, we are focused on meeting the unique and evolving needs of the communities where we are currently located, and expanding into new communities in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. We value and have experience in collaborating with governments and stakeholders, and continue to be willing partners in tackling issues impacting residents in a sustainable manner.

In our responses to the questions below, we have provided a number of recommendations and opportunities to address challenges such as housing shortages, precarious work, and access to child care, which all have a significant impact on the economy in western Canada.

### ***What are the best ways to spur new growth in western Canada?***

#### **The impact of social infrastructure in generating economic growth**

Increasing access to social infrastructure with services that positively impact unemployment, chronic disease, poverty, social isolation, and inequality is critical to economic growth.

Looking at the impact of physical activity alone, evidence shows that Canadians living longer, healthier lives would increase GDP by a cumulative \$7.5 billion by 2040, and modest physical activity could reduce health care spending on hypertension, diabetes, and cancer by \$2.6 billion during the same time frame.<sup>4</sup>

Social infrastructure offers programs and services that help families stay physically active, productive and at work; help people secure housing and employment; and provide access to safe, developmentally-appropriate care and learning environments for children. In addition to providing vital programs and services that people need to be successful in life, access to social infrastructure fosters a sense of belonging, and provides a meeting place that is inclusive and open to all.

Throughout western Canada, residents continue to experience individual and societal barriers, such as access to transit and financial constraints, which impact their ability to access social infrastructure. Likewise, while maintaining existing infrastructure is important, Canada is growing and the pace of building new social infrastructure is not keeping up. Opportunities exist to open new social

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<sup>2</sup> Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB). *Help Wanted Survey, Q4 2017*. March 13, 2018

<sup>3</sup> Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB). *Help Wanted Survey, Q4 2017*. March 13, 2018

<sup>4</sup> The Conference Board of Canada. *Moving Ahead: The Economic Impact of Reducing Physical Inactivity and sedentary Behaviour*. Page 2.



infrastructure facilities, such as YMCA Centres of Community, across western Canada through multi-sectoral partnerships, which would have a positive impact on individuals, communities, and the economy.

Western Canadian YMCA Centres of Community bring together health, social, cultural, and recreational services that foster a sense of belonging for all. Last year, over 563,000 people were served by YMCAs in western Canada; and YMCA Member Associations are planning to invest an estimated \$242 million by 2021 into five new YMCA Centres of Community across western Canada. In addition to this, YMCA Member Associations continue to look for opportunities to support communities in meeting the needs of their residents, and have regular discussions with jurisdictions on the feasibility of expanding into new areas in partnership with philanthropists, governments, Indigenous communities, charities and not-for-profit organizations, and the private sector.

Given the evidence supporting the positive impact of social infrastructure, we recommend that the Government:

- *Open intake for federal funding to support the development of new social infrastructure, such as YMCA Centres of Community, in western Canada.*

### **The impact of the charitable sector on the economy**

When thinking about the drivers of economic growth, the charitable and not-for-profit sector does not initially come to mind for most. Yet the charitable and not-for-profit sector is one of the largest economic sectors in Canada, and it plays a vital role in providing services and opportunities that improve the lives of individuals, in addition to generating economic growth. Recent studies show that the sector employs over two million people and contributes an estimated 8% to the national GDP.<sup>5</sup>

Despite evidence that supports our sector as a significant economic contributor, programs that aim to stimulate growth, innovation, and employment often exclude us, leaving potential contributions and opportunities untapped. A vibrant and competitive charitable and not-for-profit sector makes Canada stronger through evidence-based advocacy, high-quality programs and services, and contributing to a more civil society. The YMCA, and our colleagues and sector partners, have long been voices for opportunities that foster innovation, productivity and growth in the sector, given its importance to the economy.

As one of Canada's longest standing and largest charities employing over 7,200 individuals in western Canada in 2017, we recommend that the Government:

- *Explore opportunities to foster innovation, productivity, and growth in the charitable and not-for-profit sector, given its size and importance to the economy.*
- *Commit multi-year funding that recognizes the true cost of program delivery and evaluation, acts in a manner that reflects a shared commitment to transparency, and values continuous improvement of administrative processes.*

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<sup>5</sup> Imagine Canada. *Narrative Core Resource. The Beginnings of a New Discussion with Canadians about the Charitable and nonprofit Sector.* February 2014. Page 12.



## ***How can we improve economic participation in the west of underrepresented groups, including women, youth and new immigrants?***

### **Increase access to early learning and child care**

For Canadians with young children to participate fully in the economy, they need to know that their children are in safe, developmentally-appropriate care and learning environments. Offering widespread access to high-quality early learning and child care programs not only gives children the opportunity to grow and succeed, but it gives parents, particularly mothers, more choices when it comes to their participation in work, education, and training.

The Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework and Canada Child Benefit are important steps forward in increasing the number of high-quality child care spaces available to families. However, the demand for accessible, high-quality, affordable child care spaces continues to exceed supply. A recent study found that the largest difference in labour market participation between women with and without children occurred in western Canada (British Columbia, Alberta, and Manitoba).<sup>6</sup> This same study also found that Quebec has the lowest rate of women not in employment, education or training, largely due to the availability of affordable government-subsidized child care programs.

Additional investments in early learning and child care would have significant near term benefits for the western Canadian economy as a result of an increase in women entering the workforce. The YMCA is Canada's leading not-for-profit provider of high-quality child care. In 2017, YMCAs across western Canada nurtured the development of more than 15,000 children. As Canada's leading provider child care for families, we recommend that the Government continues its investments in early learning and child care to:

- *Ensure that every family has access to high-quality, affordable child care.*

### **Create more employment, education and training opportunities for young people**

Young people today are faced with an increase in casual, part-time, and temporary work which lacks the benefits, stable income, and job security of traditional employment opportunities. A recent study shows that 20% of young people, ages 20-34, are precariously employed, and the incidence of precarious employment among individuals with less than five years of experience is 30%.<sup>7</sup> This same study also shows that women comprise a disproportionately larger portion of precarious professionals (60%) than men (40%).<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, in western Canada, the unemployment rate for young people varies from 6.8% in British Columbia to 13% in Alberta.<sup>9</sup> Recent immigrant youth, Indigenous youth, youth with disabilities, and youth with less education face additional barriers when seeking employment. The challenges of finding and maintaining traditional employment comes at a time when the cost of living continues to become a bigger burden on people.

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<sup>6</sup> Statistics Canada. Labour Force Survey, September 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. *No Safe Harbour. Precarious Work and Economic Insecurity Among Skilled Professionals in Canada.* August 2018. Page 16-17.

<sup>8</sup> Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. *No Safe Harbour. Precarious Work and Economic Insecurity Among Skilled Professionals in Canada.* August 2018. Page 13.

<sup>9</sup> Statistics Canada. *Study: The transition from school to work – the NEET (not in employment, education or training) indicator for 25- to 29-year-old women and men in Canada, 2017/2018.* Page 2.



Investments to the Youth Employment Strategy announced in the 2018 Budget is a step in the right direction to addressing the challenges youth face in today's labour market. But further investments are critical to ensure that young people have access to developmentally-appropriate training in order to gain the skill and experience needed to succeed.

The YMCA supports young people by providing access to developmentally-appropriate skills training, education, and employment programs, which in turn, enables a successful transition from school to work. This includes programs such as internships, job readiness training, apprenticeships, literacy training, and summer employment programs. In 2017, approximately 7,800 young people accessed a YMCA employment program and 3,200 were employed by a YMCA in western Canada.

As a major employer and service provider to young people, we recommend that the Government:

- *Work with proven youth specialists, like the YMCA, to ensure that the revised federal Youth Employment Strategy meets the needs of both young people and employers.*
- *Continue to evolve programs and services to address young people's current needs and encourage a successful transition to employment.*

### **Improve availability of safe and secure housing**

Many people in Canada face difficulties securing and maintaining stable housing due, in part, to rising cost of housing. Homelessness can be found in every region, but Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, and Winnipeg experience some of the highest rates of homelessness in the country.<sup>10</sup> Canada loses an average of 20,000 social housing units annually. The loss of affordable and social housing units places further pressure on transitional housing and emergency shelters seeking to find long-term units for clients in stable situations.

Community partners and housing providers such as YMCA Member Associations across Canada recognize housing as a human right and key determinant of health. In addition to bricks and mortar housing units, targeted and developmentally-appropriate supports are required for specific populations such as youth, people with addictions and mental illness, people fleeing domestic violence, seniors, those with disabilities, asylum seekers, newcomers, refugees, young parents, Indigenous peoples, and LGBTQS+ people. Life skills development programs and post trauma support can also help individuals and families address barriers to accessing and maintaining long-term housing.

Research shows that access to safe and affordable housing and related supports positively impacts a person's physical and mental health, sense of belonging, school performance, and their ability to secure employment. The Government's National Housing Strategy demonstrates a strong focus on improving access to housing in Canada.

The YMCA has a long history of providing housing for over 100 years in Canada, and we recommend that the Government:

- *Explicitly recognize the right to housing as a defined international human rights law in the National Housing Strategy.*
- *Acknowledge that a Portable Housing Benefit must complement increased investments in program supports for individuals and families who face challenges in accessing and maintaining long-term housing.*

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<sup>10</sup> Homeless Hub. Which city in Canada has the most homeless people per capita and why? 2014. <http://homelesshub.ca/resource/which-city-canada-has-most-homeless-people-capita-and-why>



- *Take into account the unique needs of youth, including the need for developmentally-appropriate programs, in housing policy development, youth policy development, and the implementation of a National Housing Strategy.*

### ***How can governments, industry and western Canadians work together to grow the regional economy?***

Charitable and not-for-profit organizations are major contributors to economies and should be a part of the conversation with Government, industry, and other stakeholders. As discussed earlier in the submission, the charitable and not-for-profit sector is a large economic driver and provides employment opportunities and services to people across Canada.

The YMCA has a long and proud history in Canada, managing approximately \$2.6 billion physical assets located throughout the country, with \$1.2 billion of those assets located in western Canada. Furthermore, in 2017 the western Canadian YMCAs employed over 7,200 employees and contributed more than \$152.2 million to the economy through salaries and benefits.

Our sector understands what Canadians and new residents of all ages and abilities need in order to participate fully in the economy, and we have the experience and expertise required to develop high-quality programs and policies that translate into action. We believe that there are ample opportunities for charities and not-for-profits to partner with the Government of Canada and stakeholders on issues that impact western Canada, as well as collaborate on opportunities that can mend system gaps and meet the needs of western Canada in a sustainable way.

Given the role of the charitable and not-for-profit sector, we recommend that the Government:

- *Recognize the sizable role the charitable and not-for-profit sector plays in regional economies and communities, and include the voice and unique perspectives of this sector in ongoing work related to the Western Canada Growth Strategy.*

### **Summary**

- Open intake for federal funding to support the development of new social infrastructure, such as YMCA Centres of Community, in western Canada.
- Explore opportunities to foster innovation, productivity, and growth in the charitable and not-for-profit sector, given its size and importance to the economy.
- Commit multi-year funding that recognizes the true cost of program delivery and evaluation, acts in a manner that reflects a shared commitment to transparency, and values continuous improvement of administrative processes.
- Ensure that every family has access to high-quality, affordable child care.
- Work with proven youth specialists, like the YMCA, to ensure that the revised federal Youth Employment Strategy meets the needs of both young people and employers.





- Continue to evolve programs and services to address young people's current needs and encourage a successful transition to employment.
- Explicitly recognize the right to housing as a defined international human rights law in the National Housing Strategy.
- Acknowledge that a Portable Housing Benefit must complement increased investments in program supports for individuals and families who face challenges in accessing and maintaining long-term housing.
- Take into account the unique needs of youth, including the need for developmentally-appropriate programs, in housing policy development, youth policy development, and the implementation of a National Housing Strategy.
- Recognize the sizable role the charitable and not-for-profit sector plays in regional economies and communities, and include the voice and unique perspectives of this sector in ongoing work related to the Western Canada Growth Strategy.

## Contact

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