

May 2020

# Are you with us?

COVID-19 confirms the need to transform  
Nova Scotia's social safety net

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**O**UR PROVINCE WENT into this pandemic with high rates of poverty and food insecurity, a significant portion of our workforce making very low wages, a scarcity of affordable housing and significant housing insecurity, health care in crisis, and lack of child care.

Now in a crisis we can clearly see that a majority of Nova Scotians do not have the job security, income, or the social supports necessary. The holes in our social safety net became strikingly obvious in the early days of the pandemic. The long-term economic and social impact will have a devastating effect for our province if we do not urgently address these gaps and keep the needed supports in place to safeguard us against future health, economic and social shocks.

It is not only the pandemic itself, but the fragility of our current systems to handle such a crisis that needs attention. This will require us to fundamentally shift our political and economic system to become sustainable, fair, and just. Are you with us?

In order for this kind of change to take hold, we need to demand that our governments take a lead and do things differently. The worst-case scenario would be for



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our provincial government in particular, to double-down on austerity, to keep their budgets balanced, and allow these gaps in our safety net to get even larger. More and more people will fall through the cracks, and we will pay a higher cost in the long run. As Guillaume Hebert describes it, “The world that we built in recent decades — uncertain, splintered, exhausting, stressful, disciplined, obsessive, xenophobic, ecocidal, alienating, ungrateful, cynical, distressing, competitive, energy-hungry and based on high productivity — is not one that we should want to return to.”<sup>1</sup> We have an opportunity with this economic shutdown to consider how to shift course to make the province a better place to live, work, and care for each other. We outline below what should guide us to develop those practical policy solutions that will put us on the right course.

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## **Intersectional, evidenced-based and green policy solutions**

The day the World Health Organization declared the coronavirus a pandemic, CCPA-NS and the Nova Scotia College of Social Workers released the social policy framework for the province.<sup>2</sup> Since then, we have created a workbook<sup>3</sup> to help Nova Scotians use the framework to develop solutions to problems including those related to COVID-19. The Social Policy Framework provides us with a roadmap as we navigate the continued emergency response, and the gradual re-opening of the province until a vaccine is available, as well as the recovery period (maybe 18 months to 5 years or so), and the transformation phase (5–10 year plan).

That the vast majority of COVID-19 deaths occurred in long term care homes tells us that we must do a complete rethink on how we care for older Nova Scotians. We absolutely must increase the quality of those homes, but we need to do much more. What if we develop solutions to make Nova Scotia age-friendly? As the World Health Organization defines it, “In an age-friendly community, policies, services and structures related to the physical and social environment are designed to support and enable older people to “age actively” — that is, to live in security, enjoy good health and continue to participate fully in society.”<sup>4</sup> To accomplish this goal requires us to do the work from day one because we know that earlier life experiences impact how people age. We also know that gender, race, culture, economic, social, and environmental factors also determine one’s health and well-being in later years. An age-friendly community would benefit everyone: barrier-free buildings and streets, affordable housing, well paid caregivers and support, accessible and flexible employment opportunities, and expanded public health care, are some of the improvements that would be needed.<sup>5</sup>

The lens used to create plans for our pandemic response through to recovery and our reconstruction must consider who we want to be as a society, and what role governments should play. We must take the opportunity to consider how we can build an even better society that leaves no one behind, that builds a green economy, that prioritizes climate justice (one of our key principles) and investments in taking care of each other, so we can all live in security, enjoy good health, and participate fully in society.

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## **Understanding the Pandemic’s Social and Economic Impact on individuals and families**

To counter the social and economic impact of the virus we must act quickly to fill in the gaps in our social safety net, and keep them plugged. While governments were attempting to ensure that people were supported to follow public health directives to stay home, to practice social distancing, and to wash hands, that was easier for some than others. On the positive side, some of those unemployed workers who would have fallen through the cracks left by our Employment Insurance program, were caught by the supports provided by the federal government under the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB).<sup>6</sup> Despite all the changes made to the CERB to improve its reach, there are many Canadians, however, who still do not qualify, including those who quit their job perhaps out of fear for their own health or that of a loved one. This is especially important to understand because only those workers who were employed by businesses ordered to close would be able to easily apply for the CERB.

Those workers who were not working in businesses that were ordered to close would be negotiating with employers who could decide whether to permanently lay-off or demand they work and how many hours. In Nova Scotia, the full closure list for private business was limited to: personal services, like hair and nail salons, and body art establishments, all drinking establishments, casinos, fitness establishments, golf courses, most non-regulated health professions. Dentists and veterinarians can only provide emergency service. Restaurants were ordered to offer take-out or delivery service only. Retail businesses were not ordered to close if they could follow both the 5-person rule and social distancing. Other businesses were exempt from the five-person maximum rule if they could maintain social distancing (like grocery stores, pharmacies, gas stations, convenience stores, construction sites, financial institutions, agri-food and fish plants, and registered farms). Some businesses were also exempt from both rules including food production plants and fishing vessels. Other public and private services that were considered essential were exempt from

both rules including of course hospitals and other essential health care agencies including long term care, but also homeless shelters, as well as road repair, jails, public transit, and taxis. While schools and licensed child care were closed, unlicensed child care facilities were allowed to remain open and exempt from social distancing allowing unlicensed childcare providers serving 6 children or less of any age and 8 children or less of school age, including their own children, to operate.<sup>7</sup>

It is unclear what impact this list of exemptions has had on those who provide or receive those services, especially with such weak worker protections, and outright disdain for unions from the provincial government.<sup>8</sup> Many parts of the Nova Scotia economy have been open and what the next phase must focus on is how to ensure that all workers are supported to work safely and with the supports they need, including personal protective equipment, but also paid sick leave, stronger labour standards and other mechanisms to refuse unsafe work. If workers are protected, so are those they serve, thus instilling confidence in those who are to purchase or use those services. Also, if some workers are able to continue to work from home, they also need proper equipment, training, and support at home, and some will need child care.

The provincial and federal governments were understandably first focused on what needed to be done to close to mitigate the spread and on figuring out who was infected, and how to provide them with health care support. Then came the income support from the federal government via the Canada Emergency Response Benefit. The initial focus was less on the broader front-line workers still working, whether within health care or beyond this sector. It wasn't until May 7<sup>th</sup> that the provincial government made an agreement with the federal government and announced that it would provide a pandemic premium to some essential workers (those in the health care sector only).<sup>9</sup>

The many individuals who were already falling through the gaps in the social safety net, were not caught. Those individuals who were outside of the workforce before March 15<sup>th</sup> and not eligible for EI, and those living in the deepest poverty on social assistance, were not given much extra support. The province provided a small pittance — an extra \$50 one-time payment — to those receiving Income Assistance. Some families will receive the extra top-up to the Canada Child Benefit (up to an extra \$300 based on 2018 income) in May, and other individuals and couples received an extra top-up (\$400–600) in the GST credit in April, and seniors will also receive up to an additional \$500.<sup>10</sup>

The Nova Scotia government has provided very little assistance to directly support individuals to follow the public health guidelines, aside from the \$1000 in bridge-funding for those who qualified for the CERB. Those who were without a home could bunk down on a gymnasium floor in one of the two pop-up shelters in the Halifax Regional Municipality, with some being provided with hotel rooms funded primari-

ly by the federal government. Other shelter providers stooped to renting port-a-potties to try to contain the virus spread.

All those individuals struggling with food insecurity, were further challenged to stock-up once a week. Some may have taken a crowded infrequent (though free) bus, to make do finding an open food bank that was provided with additional funding from the province. While we work to address poverty as the number one determinant of food insecurity, meal programs provided at schools have become important. Unfortunately, school closures have been more challenging for some families whose kids won't get access to the educational support they need, let alone the food that had been provided. There are about 32,000 school-aged children who are living in poverty in our province.<sup>11</sup> The province did initiate a pilot program during the pandemic to provide a meal program for eligible students at 12 schools in Cape Breton, which consisted of \$10 daily credit to order meals (1 meal per day, Monday to Friday) from participating restaurants.<sup>12</sup>

As for that educational support, home material was available for those up to grade 9 who couldn't do online learning, and some high schoolers were able to borrow laptops. The government also announced that it worked with a corporation to make 100 phones and data plans available.<sup>13</sup> All these stop gap measures do little to sufficiently address the equity gaps, including the digital divide, and point to the need to address them permanently, including by offering free wireless as a public service and "by addressing systemic oppression that further marginalizes vulnerable students, moving us to equal educational outcomes."<sup>14</sup>

In addition to understanding COVID-19's impact on the workforce, on income, and on essential workers, we must also consider how to ensure everyone can get access to what they need, whether it is food, or other necessities, and perhaps most importantly, shelter. It is extremely troubling that there has been very little provincial support for those unable to pay housing costs. There was a ban on evictions for those unable to pay rent because their employment income was affected by COVID-19. However, some urgent evictions were still allowed, and as Dalhousie Legal Aid has cautioned,<sup>15</sup> the ban had more to do with the lack of tenancy board hearings than a legal prohibition. This means that once hearings are allowed to resume (slated for some time in late June), landlords could proceed with eviction notices for unpaid rent, which will initiate the regular process for tenants to prove their drop-in income. While banning evictions was an important public health measure, there has been no support for renters to have rent frozen or indeed for any rent forgiveness. The resumption of regular tenancy board hearings could spell disaster for tenants across the province because even if they successfully prove they couldn't pay rent during the shut-down, they are at the behest of landlords when it comes to making the back payments. Ricardo Trajan's recent analysis of rental households reveals that the lar-

gest proportion of renters most at risk of not being able to pay their rent are in Atlantic Canada, where 69% of those on PEI and about 60% of those in the other Atlantic provinces have a month or less of savings.<sup>16</sup>

When it comes to our labour force: “If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it’s that a lot of the people we pay the least are the ones we need the most.” This statement by Sheila Block and Simran Dhunna sums up a critical reality for those workers providing us with essential goods during the pandemic and beyond.<sup>17</sup> Low waged workers including food processing workers, grocery store cashiers, warehouse workers, couriers, long haul truckers, home care and long-term care and others, have always worked hard and during the pandemic also put themselves at greater risk. David MacDonald also shows that lower-income workers are already substantially more likely to be taking leave that is unpaid — and are therefore far more likely to face the prospect of an unpaid quarantine. In 2019, only 14% of the leave taken by workers in the lowest income decile was paid, while those in the top decile had 74% of their leave covered by their employer.<sup>18</sup>

A full analysis of the gendered impact, in fact a full intersectional analysis, should be carried out and must inform the recovery and reconstruction phases. When considering the impact on the labour force of the shut-down, MacDonald concludes that “women were much more significantly impacted by the layoffs and loss of hours due to the closure of non-essential businesses”. His estimate is that 70% of job losses were suffered by women. This is critical analysis as we consider the recovery plans, which must target job creation and child care for women.<sup>19</sup> As for those low waged essential workers, Block and Dhunna also make the point that racialized workers are over-represented in these jobs, for example, they make up 30% of security guards and 29% of light duty cleaners.<sup>20</sup>

Katherine Scott of the CCPA also demonstrates that gender inequality will have a huge impact on the well-being of women during the pandemic, which must be considered during the continued emergency response as well as the recovery. In her blog, COVID-19 crisis response must address gender faultlines,<sup>21</sup> Scott writes that over half of all female workers (56%) are employed in occupations involving the “5 Cs”: caring, clerical, catering, cashiering and cleaning, further to these many of these women are women of colour. Up to 90% of the Personal Support Workers (PSWs) who do the lion’s share of work in long-term care homes and home care work in the community are women. Over two-thirds of people who clean and disinfect our hospitals, our schools, and our office buildings are women. Scott articulates that these same women will go home to start their second shift, providing care and support for their families, with the worry that they are bringing the virus with them. We also need to be concerned about women facing an increased risk of domestic violence during this time.

There is already evidence that plans to ‘re-open’ the economy are failing to employ a gender lens. Asking employees to start returning to work without a real plan for child care will invariably exacerbate gender disparities, with women facing higher barriers to re-entering the labour force.

There has been a clarion call from many different advocates across the province pointing to the gaps in supports and services that should be addressed. These calls include the need to:

- Fund and otherwise facilitate supported transitions to small options residence from large disability institutions.<sup>22</sup>
- Provide additional funding to the post-secondary education sector such that tuition fees are lowered, and there are no staff layoffs or program cuts.<sup>23</sup>
- Increase funding to long term care so that the resident to staff ratio is 4:1 hours of care per day and staff are well compensated for their work.<sup>24</sup>
- Reclaim and increase the capacity of public health care, including by bringing for-profit health care facilities under public control, address existing health inequities by removing barriers to access and scaling up services for marginalized communities, and ensure that all services are available free of charge and delivered publicly, including telehealth.<sup>25</sup>
- Ensure MSI (Nova Scotia public health care) coverage for all residents of NS, including all temporary foreign workers, international students, asylum seekers and undocumented residents.<sup>26</sup>
- Provide free retail Internet access services for ALL low-income Canadians and fixed-income seniors, during the “pandemic and recovery period” and that unlimited internet access and low-income internet and wireless plans be made available in the long term.<sup>27</sup>
- Ensure people will not lose their homes by instituting a rent freeze, and providing a guarantee that in addition to a moratorium on all evictions, no tenant will be evicted or forced to retroactively pay rent once the state of emergency is over due to the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>28</sup>
- Strengthen labour standards by amending labour laws to provide 7 paid sick days, with an additional 14 paid days for emergencies, in the short term extend existing health and benefit plans for workers who have been laid-off.<sup>29</sup>
- Home care must be deemed essential.<sup>30</sup>

- Protect civil liberties, ensure accountability measures around the enforcement of public health orders, including providing clarity on penalties for non-payment of fines and measures to ensure impoverished people are not criminalized or have life- and public-health sustaining funds garnished. We definitively reject the fining of people living in poverty as a disproportionate penalty.<sup>31</sup>
- People with disabilities must be included in an equitable manner in these plans as people with disabilities face a disproportionate rate of poverty. In addition, people with disabilities face additional costs related to their disabilities that people without disabilities do not incur.<sup>32</sup>
- Gather disaggregated racial data, and immediately create a proactive health plan for African Nova Scotian and Black communities. as part of an equitable health response to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>33</sup>
- Enact a swath of measures to support vulnerable Nova Scotians including to provide everyone with safe housing by issuing portable rental supplements and offering short-term motel stays to everyone on the priority access waiting list for public housing and ensure that Nova Scotia's homeless population has access to safe housing which grants them the ability to self-isolate, and by ensuring all Income Assistance recipients receive 100% of the Market Basket Measure (MBM) inclusive of other income supports, among other measures.<sup>34</sup>
- Invest in building a high quality, affordable, and flexible child care system.<sup>35</sup>

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## **Applying the Social Policy Framework to the Recovery and Reconstruction**

Considering the pandemic's impact to date, and the state of social policy and supports prior to the pandemic, the rest of this document outlines what the recovery and reconstruction plans must include by employing the other principles in the Social Policy Framework for Nova Scotia.

### **Interconnectedness**

Governments must work across silos and develop policies to improve social well-being and address multiple challenges at once. We must recognize essential services go beyond the invaluable frontline social and health care services, to the service jobs that are often low waged and precarious. The janitorial workers, grocery store clerks, servers at take-out restaurants, and child care providers, are all now proven

to be essential. During and after the pandemic, we must recognize that we are interconnected and that there are essential services that need the support of Nova Scotians and their governments to create greater well-being. Moving into the recovery we must recognize that child care can address multiple social challenges at once: child development; child welfare; demographic decline; rural revitalization; immigrant retention; gender equality; work/family balance, social inclusion; and precarity for early childhood educators. Following this framework would lead to the conclusion that child care is a proven economic development strategy. Comprehensive child care gives options to parents, such as flexible scheduling. It includes wrap around care that covers the full working day in a seamless system. It would establish that child care is one component of a broader package of necessary family policies that include improved income supports, maternity and parental leave. Child care is also about the early childhood educators as workers who deserve a living wage, having access to paid leave and other health and family benefits.

## **Decolonization**

It has been well documented that leading into the pandemic, Indigenous communities were at a high risk of community transmission of the COVID-19. Chronic underfunding of health and social services, crowded housing and high rates of poverty, lack of potable water, because of racism and colonialism, have jeopardized the ability of Indigenous communities to take care of the health and well-being of their community members. As of May 1<sup>st</sup> there were no people in First Nations communities in Atlantic Canada who tested positive for COVID-19,<sup>36</sup> though there are reports of positive cases in other Indigenous communities.<sup>37</sup> Since no race-based data has been released, it is difficult to know the impact on urban Indigenous and those who do not live in an Indigenous community.

It is crucial that we decolonize our policies in this emergency to ensure that Indigenous communities are empowered to deal with this ongoing pandemic and beyond. There is an urgent need to address the lack of community infrastructure to deal with an outbreak and ensure that Indigenous communities have the capacity to self-isolate. In order to self-isolate, Indigenous leaders have also called on the federal and provincial government to ensure that goods and services, especially food, can continue to flow in and out of our communities in the face of COVID-19 realities in the country.

Governments must immediately work in solidarity with Indigenous communities to develop a recovery plan, and take the opportunity to implement the Truth and Reconciliation recommendations. Indigenous communities have called on policies that should focus on creating greater equity of funding for health, education, and social services to all Indigenous peoples in Canada.<sup>38</sup> Indigenous communities need access-

ible mental health services that are culturally relevant in order to heal the harms of colonialism and address the generational trauma that was felt leading into the pandemic and that will be felt coming out of the pandemic. We need to build core infrastructure including housing, healthcare facilities, and clean water, ensure that Bill C-92 An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families is fully funded, and that the federal government complies with the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal orders to end discriminatory practices that have resulted in inequitable services to these children and families.<sup>39</sup>

### **Universality, Social Inclusion and Climate Justice**

Ensuring social policy solutions address the deeply-rooted systemic barriers in our policy, programs, and services must happen during the pandemic and continue through the recovery. Social inclusion must be guaranteed for the users of public services, as well as those who provide those services to us. It requires that we advance both equity and equality.

Immediate solution to stop the spread and treat those who have been affected must ensure these solutions work for our most vulnerable populations. Institutionalizing of people of disabilities, must swiftly end and folks must be provided with communities supports, so that they can self-isolate and continue to have the care that they need. Indeed, it is important to consider that “Containment measures, such as social distancing and self-isolation, may be impossible for those who rely on the support of others to eat, dress and bath,” as pointed out by the UN.<sup>40</sup> There is much concern about the homeless population and how quickly the virus could spread. Jurisdictions have recognized the need to provide quality housing in order to self-isolate and have started to move homeless population into hotels, but we need permanent solutions to end homelessness. Children who have been placed in care must continue to have access to their parents in order to maintain bonds during the pandemic. We must ensure that children and parents have access to internet so that virtual care can be facilitated. The Province must follow through with commitments to move as many incarcerated persons into safe community spaces as possible by granting conditional releases and temporary absences, community supports and housing.

Coming out of crisis and into recovery we must ensure that the most vulnerable are included in the decision making in our communities. The Province must expedite the implementation of public health measures to protect residents of provincially funded congregate care facilities for persons with disabilities. It must also fund what is necessary to provide people with disabilities with the supports they require to live as independently as they wish and in the communities of their choice. In addition, the Province should provide increased funding to non-profit agencies to provide care, service, and support to vulnerable populations during this crisis. Finan-

cial Assistance to low income Nova Scotians who cannot currently afford access to the internet so they can access up to date information will also build better inclusion.

During the pandemic and moving into the recovery we must prioritize universal programs and services designed to be accessible to all, regardless of income and paid for through general revenue from income taxes. In the first week of the pandemic in Nova Scotia the Premier announced that there is a moratorium on evictions for those whose income was impacted by the COVID-19. However, there was a housing crisis before the pandemic hit and people were facing re-evictions, a lack of housing options and increased rents. These policies should move to a universal policy that puts a moratorium on all evictions during this stressful time and brings forward rent increase controls. In addition, mental health services remain inaccessible for many Nova Scotians, we have created a two-tier system. We have an insurance program for those who are employed that leaves many uninsured and ineligible. Refugee claimants do not get access to the public benefits and services that others do and this is leaving them without additional support during this crisis.

The reconstruction phase that follows the pandemic must prioritize climate justice, which means that the costs do not fall onto marginalized communities, and ensures these communities benefit equitably. A just reconstruction must be seen as an opportunity to invest in green infrastructure related to energy, and also to invest in jobs that strengthen our collective well-being and are not environmentally destructive, e.g. caregivers, artists, educators.

### **Decent Work and Well-Being**

COVID-19 laid bare the disconnect between policies that support and connect paid work and unpaid caregiving, given how precarious work has become, and the need for caregiving of children, aging parents and/or partners, and anyone who is ill or has disabilities. The experience of being socially isolated is one that caregivers know well, with reported high rates of depression, and financial burden, which has fallen disproportionately onto women and affected their economic security and health. The shift to working and/or learning from home has made the reality of work/life balance all the more evident.

Messaging from governments should not assume that the nuclear family is the norm. For instance, when political leaders encourage families to send only one parent out to purchase essentials, they are taking for granted a two-parent family. They are failing to recognize that there are particular caregiving challenges for single parents not only during this crisis, but always.

Social policies must be strengthened coming out of the crisis to ensure that caregivers are properly supported with money, services, and time (including improved paid maternity and parental leaves and pension supports; investing in social infra-

structure, like child care, home care, and long-term care, and increasing leisure time allowing more time out of the labour market to spend with family and to engage in our communities, while ensuring economic security).

### **Public Provision**

We need to move away from the current approach to the provision of essential services, which relies heavily on the private sphere of the market, the family (especially women), or charity to meet our social needs. We see the limitations of this approach when goods and services are needed rapidly as during this crisis. It has never been more evident that the current market-based approach to long-term care is dangerous and unsustainable.

Public services are superior for at least 3 reasons

- quality of services
- equity — access for users and working conditions of providers
- accountability to citizens

When developing policy solutions, governments need to recognize that not all communities have the same relationship with public institutions. Thus, we must bear in mind decolonization and social inclusion, and work more toward citizen empowerment and not surveillance (e.g. ensuring everyone has the supports they need to self-isolate versus giving the police powers to fine people for not self-isolating).

### **Fiscal Fairness**

The Nova Scotia government has provided very little direct income support to those who are struggling to make ends meet during this crisis. The provincial government appears to continue to prioritize balanced budgets and low deficits. Instead of ensuring a fair, progressive tax base, it used the 2020 budget to provide corporate tax cuts. The additional \$50 to support income assistance recipients during this pandemic is a drop in the bucket considering how little people receive in the first place, and the additional costs associated with social distancing. Now is the time to make a significant investment to support the economic reconstruction and avoid worsening the immediate crisis. The government must use its fiscal ability to provide income supports (e.g. one time payments in the affordable living tax credit) and invest in our public services, including the health care system (in acute care as well as in home care, long term care), and in non-market affordable housing.

## **Shared Governance**

Our governments are struggling to ensure consistent messages about COVID-19 across jurisdictions and between different levels of governments within the same jurisdiction. The federal government must work with the provinces territories, municipalities, and First Nations in the funding and design of timely and responsive solutions. The Nova Scotia government should definitely expect the federal government to provide a significant amount of the supports needed to address the crisis, after all it has the broadest revenue base and the ability to use key policy levers quickly whether it be Employment Insurance or the Canada Child Benefit. The Nova Scotia government did accept to provide a pandemic premium to essential workers in the health care sector with joint (and majority of) funding from the federal government. However, the Nova Scotia government could do much more to complement the federal supports, such as increasing the NS Child Benefit, or providing direct supports to its population recognizing that a large portion do not have access to savings, paid leave or other financial supports. The provincial and federal governments could also do more to support struggling municipalities, many of whom deferred property tax payments, or/and are doing without fee payments, while also offering free transit in the case of Halifax.

## **Democratization**

Trust in our leaders and institutions is critical during a crisis; it is what ensures that citizens listen to government directives. The hoarding of toilet paper and other supplies does indicate that there was some miscommunication or lack of communication, as well as some mistrust that governments were handling things responsibly, for the greater good. The lack of health and safety protection for workers in those low-waged jobs that have always been critical to our community, however undervalued, tells us that our government has not been doing enough to support them and that these workers deserve more protections. These workers have seen the brunt of what has resulted from the rising influence of corporations and business organizations in politics, alongside the declining power of labour unions. As solutions are developed, our governments need to consider the potential social impact of each policy they introduce — particularly, the impact on the most vulnerable members of society. Communities need the capacity to engage and to shape these solutions, especially as these will influence our reconstruction efforts and long term economic, social and political rebuilding. In our economy, unions, worker control and ownership are essential for addressing inequality and should be supported as part of these plans. Much more transparency in decision-making is necessary including allowing all of our elected representatives opportunities to ask questions and be directly involved in supporting the development of plans to address the impact of this pandemic.

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## Conclusion

What has been revealed by COVID-19 is not news to those who have experienced the impact of an inadequate social safety net. The impact is also no surprise to researchers at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, their allies, and supporters, who have been advocating for changes that would see us strengthen this net. For the past 20 years the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Nova Scotia (CCPA-NS) has been writing about the effects neo-liberalism was having on our well-being and on our public services. In a pandemic or any crisis, public services are key, yet for more than four decades we have seen the capacity of public systems eroded by a debunked economic theory and political ideology. Professional care, public services, and democracy, have been undermined in favour of expanding corporate power and influence and driving wealth to be hoarded by an elite few. We must leave no one behind in the reconstruction phase as we build a green, sustainable, just and fair society.

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## Notes

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