

Latest cuts: Another federal ministry announces program closure - the end of the Women's Health Contribution Program

One more women's program falls victim to federal government budget cuts; 16-year program provided essential evidence and information on women's health; group argues for need to consider how women are harmed by cuts to programs and services.

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Six federally-funded organizations devoted to research and communication in women's health learned this week that their funding will end March 31, 2013.

The Program was critical to funding innovative social policy research, building community partnerships and providing important mentorship opportunities for students in women's health. Within a year, the affected organizations will be forced to either close their doors permanently or attempt to find funding elsewhere.

The Women's Health Contribution Program (WHCP) has supported: Le Réseau québécois d'action pour la santé des femmes (RQASF), the Canadian Women's Health Network (CWHN), the Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women's Health (ACEWH), the British Columbia Centre of Excellence for Women's Health (BCCEWH), the Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence (PWHCE) and the National Network on Environments and Women's Health (NNEWH), located across the country from Vancouver to Halifax.

"The effect of this decision by Health Canada is yet another strong sign that the federal government is pulling away from its responsibility to gender equality. The work funded through the WHCP has been crucial to ensuring that Canadian women have had access to the best evidence and policy advice on women's health issues, through research that recognized that social and environmental determinants of health are key." said Chi Nguyen, Chair of the Board of the Canadian Women's Health Network.

The centres and networks funded by the WHCP have carried out research and provided policy input to federal government departments on a broad range of women's health issues, including:

- the women's health implications of the federal government's regulation of toxic chemicals (NNEWH);
- the hyper-sexualization of girls (RQASF);

- the inter-generational legacy of residential schools on Aboriginal women and their families (PWHCE);
- the need for trauma-informed counselling for women with addictions (BCCEWH);
- a working guide for conducting sex and gender-based analysis in health research (ACEWH)
- a critical analysis of funding for the HPV vaccine (CWHN)

Staff and directors managing the centres and networks add their voices to the growing body of Canadians who are shocked and outraged by the short-sightedness of the federal government cuts to programs, services and the federal civil service. These cuts are in direct contradiction to the pledges regarding gender equality that Canada has made both in international commitments and to Canadians. Women are being hit particularly hard with these cuts, and, because the research being eliminated generated proactive, preventative strategies for health promotion, these cuts will cost everyone in the long-term. The end of this work will be most strongly felt by the disadvantaged and the disempowered.

Dr. Liz Whynot, Chair of the Board of Directors of the BC Centre of Excellence for Women's Health expressed her concern that "This cut threatens the significant work on women's health that has been undertaken across the country, and represents an enormous loss of capacity to monitor and improve the health of women in Canada, particularly those who are marginalized."

The impact of these cuts across the country will be felt in ways not yet fully imagined and will create a further burden on our health and social support systems. The centres and networks are calling on ALL Canadians to contact their MPs to voice their concerns about cuts to the Women's Health Contribution Program, along with the Health Department of the Native Women's Association of Canada, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, the National Council of Welfare, and all those organizations devoted to promoting women's health and women's equality.

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