

Ryan Meili

Poverty, Violence, and Homelessness

What concrete steps will you take to reduce the rate of intimate partner violence in Saskatchewan?

Saskatchewan has the highest rate of intimate partner violence in the country — a staggering 30% higher than the rates in the next highest province — and these statistics do not include emotional and psychological abuse, which remains largely undocumented and underreported. Women are more likely to face violence in the home, and Indigenous women, immigrant and refugee women, queer women, and women with disabilities face even more layers of discrimination and are at an even higher risk of violence.

It is crucial to increase awareness and educational efforts within our province to decrease the high rates of intimate partner violence facing Saskatchewan residents. We need to speak openly about violence in the home, how to recognize it, and how families can take steps to address it. We need to build on work being done by organizations across our province like the Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan (PATHS), by providing the resources they need to do the important work of supporting families who are experiencing intimate partner violence.

We need to build on the work of leaders within our party like MLA and interim leader Nicole Sarauer, who is a strong advocate for protections within the workplace for people experiencing intimate partner violence, which has led to the recent government decision to provide job security to survivors by allowing unpaid leave if a worker is experiencing intimate partner violence.

The Saskatchewan government can do more to ensure that people experiencing this form of violence are protected in their workplaces and have the support needed to leave dangerous housing situations without financial penalty or job losses. The province can listen to the demands of frontline workers and include intimate partner violence measures in an Occupational Health and Safety Act amendment that would mandate policy to support survivors in all workplaces and provide training on intervention and response to workers.

We need to provide alternative solutions and easily accessible routes to safety for those who experience intimate partner violence. By borrowing from examples across the country, we can reduce the rates of intimate partner violence by implementing legislation that encourages intervention and makes survivors and their children safer. Intimate Partner Violence Intervention legislation in New Brunswick is a perfect example of how the provincial government could provide support and remedies to the many barriers faced by survivors when they are leaving abusive situations. These remedies include immediate law enforcement protection, no-contact provisions that would ensure safety, a right to the occupation of a shared residence, immediate temporary custody of any children involved, and immediate temporary possession of personal property.

The Saskatchewan Poverty Reduction Strategy states that in the short term, the Government of Saskatchewan will “work with community agencies to expand opportunities for housing for those deemed hard-to-house.” What steps will you take to provide safe, appropriate, supportive housing options for women who are deemed hard to house?

There is great work being done at the grassroots level to support people who are labeled ‘hard to house.’ The reality is that there is a disproportionate burden of poverty borne by women in Saskatchewan. The lack of wage parity between men and women, as well as the persistence of gender-based violence in our society that disproportionately affects women living in poverty, demand our attention. Gender-based disparities remain a powerful barrier that shapes the options and opportunities of women and men alike from the moment of birth and throughout a lifetime. We’re not building a healthy society if fifty percent of us have our rights routinely violated, opportunities routinely denied, and lack equitable control over resources and decision making.

Women deemed hard-to-house are disproportionately impacted by health barriers that prohibit full participation in the work force, and represent a large percentage of minimum wage and entry level positions. By raising the minimum wage to \$15/hour and introducing full coverage of drug costs through our pharmacare policy, we can contribute to successful and sustainable housing opportunities for women and their families.

Programs that are funded by organizations such as the Canadian Women’s Foundation provide opportunities for women to engage in positive “asset-based” identification of strengths and skills that can improve the opportunities for women to find work and create sustainable housing situations for them and their families. To provide safe and appropriate housing options for women, the government must support the work of organizations that are doing the heavy lifting in our province.

The Housing First model identifies that it is very difficult for people dealing with mental health challenges, addictions or who face other barriers to overcome these challenges when not in stable housing. By providing housing and other supports, a Housing First approach helps people to stabilize their life circumstances and allowing them the space to work on other matters from an established home base. This model has already shown significant success in helping people and decreasing costs in Regina and Saskatoon and should be expanded in those centres and across the province.

Will you commit to applying a gender-based analysis of provincial assistance programs, and any future redesign of such programs, to ensure women and families receiving assistance are able to adequately cover the cost of living?

I would fully commit to applying a gender-based analysis of provincial assistance programs, and would go further in saying that all government programming needs to be informed by the use of a gender lens to identify opportunities to decrease existing inequities and avoid unintended exacerbation of inequities. There is no prescription to bring about immediate gender equity, but there is a process. That process begins with changing the conversation about gender, recognizing that everyone benefits when the status of women improves. Rather than *gender neutral* (which tends to mean *gender blind*), policy decisions need to be made with an explicit gender lens and a commitment to gender equity in mind, from idea to implementation to

evaluation. I am dedicated to an evidence-based approach to social and political challenges, and understand that a gender-based analysis would yield important results to inform decision making. We must ensure, through this analysis, that there is adequate coverage for women and families experiencing poverty and requiring assistance.

What will you do to support the inquiry into the missing and murdered Indigenous women and to respond to the disproportionate victimization of Aboriginal women and girls?

I fully commit to provincial support of the national inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls that would shed light and support the healing of families impacted by this disproportionate victimization. Organizations that support women and their families, such as Iskwewuk E-wichiwitochik based here in Saskatoon, should be included in these conversations, and their work should be highlighted provincially to maintain sustainable awareness and increase education about the violence and risks experienced by Indigenous women in Saskatchewan.

Social, legal, and educational initiatives can reduce and remedy racially biased gender-based violence. We can and should increase legal literacy initiatives in the community to strengthen social empowerment of women and marginalized groups, provide stable funding to agencies that assist individuals affected by violence, and provide mandatory and consistent anti-oppression training to criminal justice workers, including police, prosecutors, judges and government officials.

As a province, we should commit to implementing the recommendations that emerge from the national inquiry, and to resourcing further investigation of unanswered questions that pertain to Saskatchewan.

Women and Employment

What measures will you implement to improve the economic status of women in Saskatchewan?

Evidence has shown that improved status of women is inextricably linked to poverty reduction, economic growth and social development among society as a whole. The closer we are to gender equality, the better off we all are.

The reality is that women are still less likely to be working full time and are less likely to be eligible for unemployment benefits. In addition, women are employed in lower-paying occupations and experience more discrimination in the workplace.

To address the historical and ongoing inequity faced by women, we need to not only invite women's active participation at all levels of decision making, but we must also revisit our decision-making processes to ensure that our governance structures encourage an inclusive and collaborative approach that makes space for the voices of women.

The 2015 Advisory Group on Poverty Reduction produced a set of concrete and achievable actions for poverty reduction. Unfortunately, the current government chose not to implement these recommendations, and the result is worsening poverty instead of the investment needed to improve living conditions and decrease costs.

Lastly, we need to diversify our economy, so that there is a greater variety of employment and business opportunities, while also working toward greater equity in hiring and in leadership roles within existing industries.

Do you have plans to develop work-based training programs that increase opportunities for women to participate in the workforce?

Just as economic inequality saps the health of all people, rich and poor, gender inequality is toxic to everyone's well-being. Stereotypical gender concepts impose unhealthy roles and expectations on men and women alike, with unhealthy models of masculinity resulting in greater social exclusion, more exposure to violence and greater risk of suicide among men, as well as greater risk of violence against women.

We can address gender-based disparities in the workforce by introducing initiatives to ensure equal access to quality jobs and to enable households to share both paid and unpaid work. We should ensure that every budget or program is analyzed through a gender lens so that the interests of women and the principles of economic equality are reflected. The same sort of analysis should also be done with an eye to equity for other underrepresented groups, in particular First Nations and Métis people.

We can diversify the Saskatchewan economy, not only in terms of economic activity, but also in regards to those who benefit from that activity, through programs specifically designed to increase employment opportunities for women.

We can introduce pay equity legislation. Saskatchewan is one of only three provinces that lacks such legislation. A 2004 Canadian Department of Justice report gave recommendations for national proactive pay equity legislation that applies to all people. These recommendations have been ignored at the federal level, but could easily be enacted here in Saskatchewan.

We can top up paid maternity leave, similar to how Quebec does, to 70 percent for the first 18 weeks of maternity leave, 8 weeks of parental leave, and 5 weeks of paternity leave.

Programs specifically tailored to the promotion of equality, capacity building, and full participation of women and girls in civic life will make our institutions more inclusive, responsive, and collaborative.

How do you plan on recognizing and giving economic value to the unpaid work of women?

The work that women do in homes, communities, and organizations contributes greatly to those environments, but as we know, often does not result in financial remuneration. It is statistically proven that while many Saskatchewan residents do work for which they are not paid, women do a disproportionate amount of that unpaid work, which results in immediate and long-term impacts on their well-being and financial security.

Because of the gap in universally accepted ways to measure and value unpaid labour, our governments have used incomplete information to make fiscal and policy decisions that impact women significantly.

We know that our economy and society depend upon the invaluable contribution of unpaid work, yet our institutions continue to use budget processes that assign value to labour only in relation to the financial compensation that is received. This work should be viewed as the foundation upon which industry, education, and the economy is built.

Unpaid care provided to children aged 14 and under, time spent on domestic work and household maintenance, and care provided to seniors (65 and over), in addition to volunteer work for organizations, are all disproportionately shouldered by women in Saskatchewan.

This kind of work should be recognized for its contribution to our economy. For example, in Argentina, feminist economists and statisticians estimated an impact of approximately 7% of GDP in economically developed nations. If unpaid labour and care work were valued fiscally, it would hold up to the economic value of corporate and trade work. Identifying the value and increasing the visibility of this work would inform further conversations about how experience in unpaid work could be applied to entry into the paid workforce, obtaining financial credit, income security programs and other advantages available to people with paid employment.

Education - Early Years

How do you plan to fix the child care subsidies to ensure that all families have access to high quality early years programming for their children?

The first thousand days of a child's life have a tremendous impact on their long-term wellbeing. When we re-think the model of child care and invest in early childhood education and care, we will create a strong foundation for future development, health, and wellbeing. A \$1 investment results in a return of \$4 - \$9 in later savings through increased earning potential and a reduced need for health, justice, and social service spending. This multiplier is more than a financial return, however; it is a social return. Supporting families to give every child a good start is an opportunity we cannot afford to miss.

If elected, I would develop a made-in-Saskatchewan affordable early childhood education program and support this program by ensuring that all publicly funded childcare providers integrate age-appropriate content for children 2 years of age and up.

I would redesign the Child Care Subsidy to ensure that it covers costs and offers parents more opportunities to choose the best early childhood educator for their child.

To ensure quality options free from economic barriers, I would expand opportunities to upgrade early childhood education skills, such as expanding the number of licensed childcare spaces and supporting non-licensed providers with education in early child development, early childhood education and first aid, and provide support for parents working irregular hours.

I would also work with the federal government and First Nations to make sure that early years supports are available and fully funded on-reserve.

This kind of upstream investment is key to a healthy economy and to ensuring quality of life for generations to come.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Child Welfare

According to Statistics Canada, 85% of children in care in Saskatchewan are First Nations and Metis. How do you plan to reduce the number of First Nations and Metis children in care?

Indigenous children are overrepresented in out-of-home care in Saskatchewan, and they have a higher risk of becoming separated from their families, communities, and cultures. Combined with this fact is the consistency of gaps in access to essential services that would improve health and wellbeing of families and children, including healthcare, pharmacare, early childhood education, and social supports. To reduce the number of First Nations and Métis children in care, a number of considerations must be made.

Removing children from their home and family needs to be a measure of last resort, with financial and social resources made available to families to overcome unsafe situations.

As a province, we need to provide sufficient funding and support for extended family care provision within the community to ensure that Indigenous children that have been apprehended do not get removed from their communities, as health and wellbeing is intimately connected to community. We also need to ensure that assessments are unbiased and appropriately investigated before apprehension takes place and that an accessible appeal process is available to caregivers.

We need to invest in harm reduction measures and safety planning to create a clear road back home for children who have been apprehended, and we need to prioritize keeping families together; this can be achieved by ensuring that remote communities and reserves have adequate services and supports and that both educators and service providers have a clear understanding of the long-term impacts that residential schools have had on family safety in Indigenous communities. In order to achieve these changes, we need to work closely with First Nations and Métis leadership in the design and delivery of a child welfare system, working with the immediate safety of children as a top priority, while recognizing the long-term impact of separation from family of origin.

In 2015, a legislative review was completed titled Child Welfare Legislative Proposals. What is your response to these proposals and how do you intend to move these recommendations forward?

We need a substantial review of the child welfare system that prioritizes the long-term health of children with special attention paid to the needs of First Nations and Métis children. The Child Welfare Legislative Proposals address some important concerns, but they are no substitute for a full and public review and new strategy

The decision to repeal Persons of Sufficient Interest (PSI) legislation in exchange for a kinship care framework could provide autonomy to families seeking to secure care of children that have been apprehended, while maintaining a prioritization of the safety of the child in question through mechanisms that monitor the child's well-being, provide case management to the family, and consider the needs and wants of the child in the care process.

This is one promising aspect of the document in question, which could inform a more fulsome review of the child welfare system. I would assign a special legislative committee to work with the Child and Youth advocate to undertake that review.