

Investing to Support Workers

2024



**WORKERS
TOGETHER**



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Introduction

This decade has been brutal for many working people. On top of the COVID-19 disaster and ensuing cost-of-living crisis, huge economic and workplace changes are a growing source of strain for workers: ageing workforces and chronic under-staffing; leading to stress and burnout; insecurity and disruption caused by climate change; and far-reaching technological changes in the world of work.

These aren't headlines in the newspaper — they're real pressures in the daily lives of working people.

It's critical that Canada's political institutions and economic decision-makers respond urgently and effectively to these pressures. Not just Canada's economic prosperity, social cohesion, and political stability hang in the balance, but individual workers' lives, their families' futures, and the fate of their communities. They expect action and leadership, and we must not let them down.

Canada's unions have a plan to respond.

Investing in Employment Insurance

The Employment Insurance program is Canada's most important protection against job loss and source-of-income support and employment services for the unemployed. It's also Ottawa's sole responsibility, although EI-funded labour-market programming is funded and delivered through transfer agreements with the provinces and territories.

Through a combination of program cuts in the 1990s and subsequent increases in precarious forms of employment, just 2 in 5 jobless workers today (and 1 in 5 in large cities like Toronto) can access EI benefits.

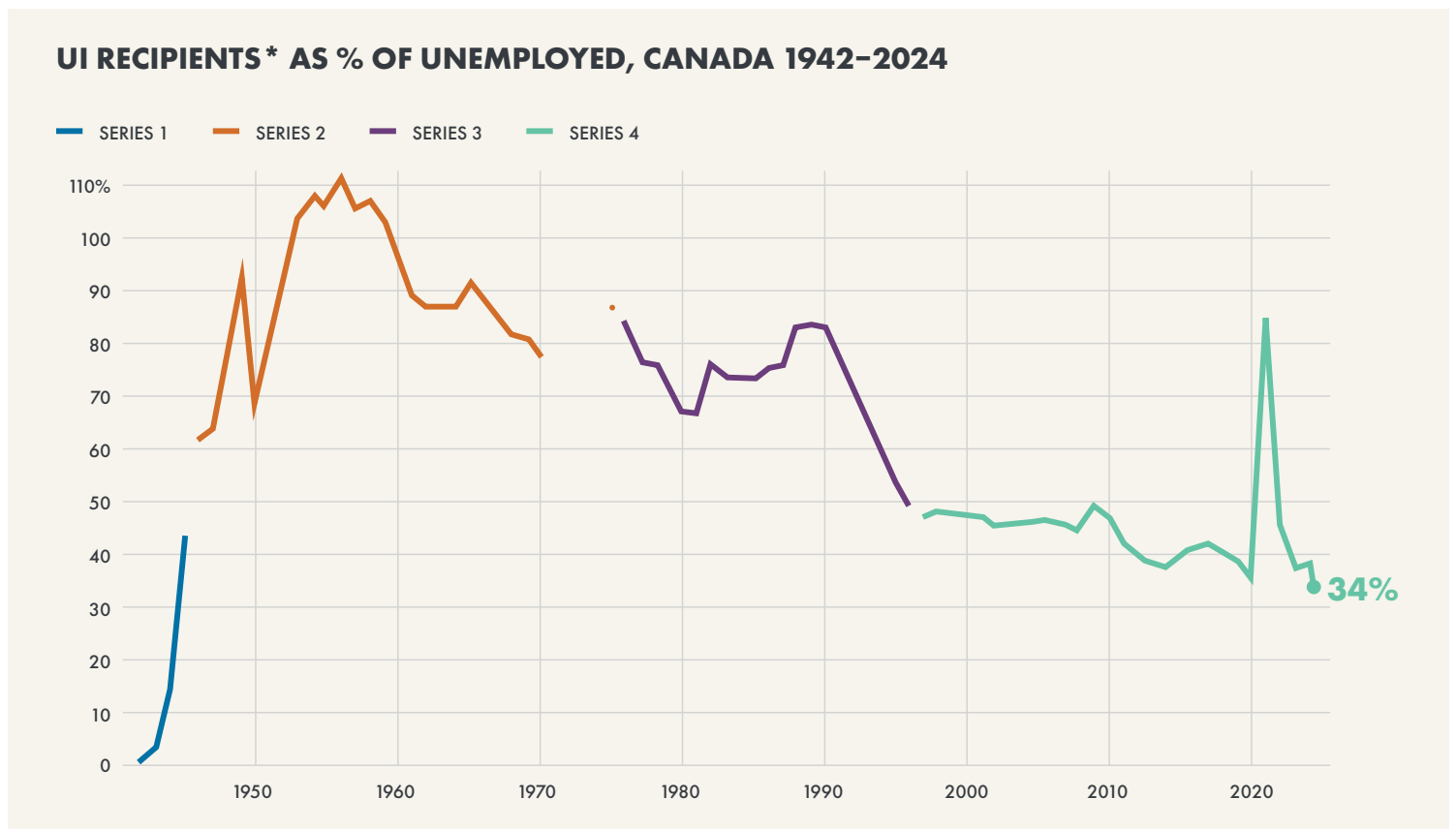
This means that many of the most vulnerable EI contributors, who need and would benefit most from EI benefits and services (especially women and other equity groups most likely to be low-paid workers in part-time, casual, and precarious work), cannot access the EI program.

In 2024, the most you'll receive from EI – assuming you qualify – is 55% of your average weekly earnings, up to a maximum of \$668 per week. That's less than what a full-time, minimum-wage worker in Ontario might earn.

For a low-wage part-time worker earning \$450 a week, you would be entitled to just \$247.50.

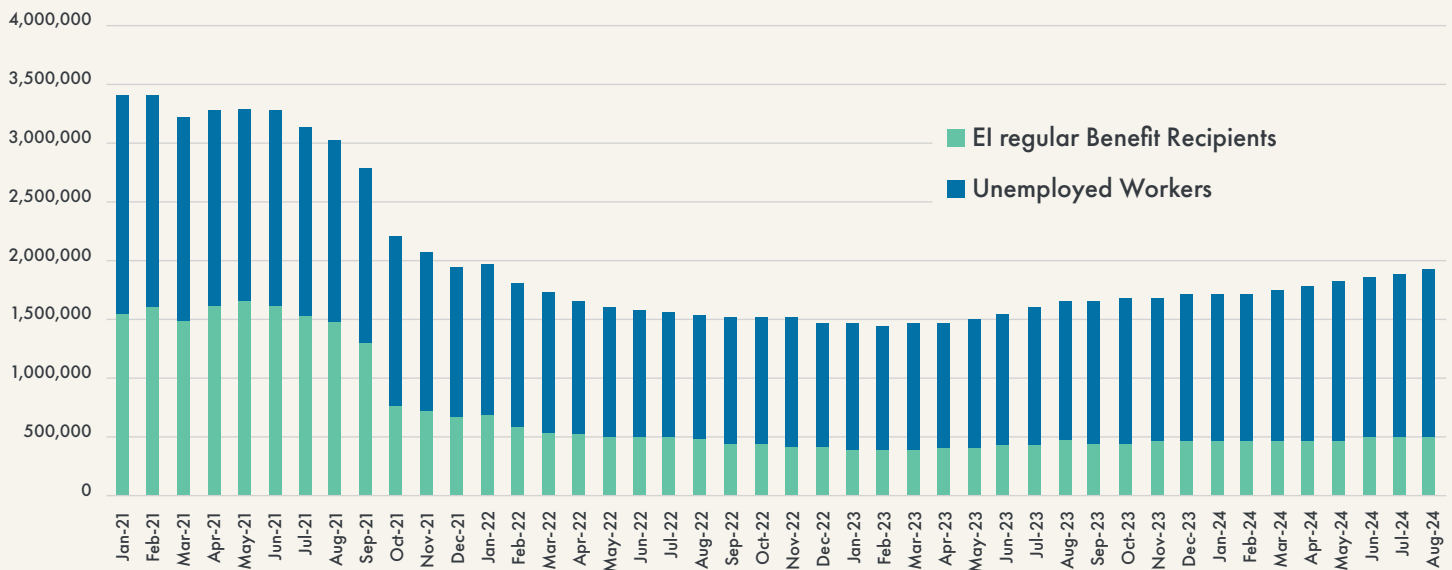
That's just not enough to live on in this economy.

As the federal government has recognized, significant reforms to the program are needed to ensure that EI is ready for the 21st century. The federal government's compassionate response to the 2020 unemployment crisis showed what expanded access to a more adequate EI system could mean for working people.



Source: Armine Yalnizyan, "[Out of work? You may be out of luck. Why getting EI is harder than it's ever been.](#)" Toronto Star 9 August 2024

UNEMPLOYMENT AND EI BENEFICIARIES (REGULAR BENEFITS), CANADA, 2021-24



Source: Statistics Canada CANSIM tables Table: 14-10-0380-01. Both series are seasonally-adjusted; unemployment is a three-month moving average.

The federal government should:

- immediately reinstate the 2021-22 EI “temporary measures” that expanded access to Employment Insurance benefits** (a universal 420-hour entrance requirement, along with an end to EI benefit claw-backs when vacation and severance pay are allocated, and only that last reason for separation be taken into account when establishing EI eligibility).
- restore direct government contributions to Employment Insurance at the level of 20% of the cost of benefits.** In 1990, the federal government ended its direct contribution to the EI Operating Account, leaving workers and employers solely responsible for funding EI benefits. Despite this, the government insists on monopolizing control of decision-making with respect to premium rates and benefit levels.
- release \$625 million in labour-market transfers (the LMDAs and Workforce Development Agreements) withheld in Budget 2024.** At a time when skills training and labour-market development investments are needed more than ever, and when Ottawa is planning to help employed workers access EI-funded training and employment services, the federal government’s funding reduction effectively returns skills training and employment benefits funding back to pre-2017 levels.
- immediately end the discriminatory 50-week cap on combined EI regular and maternity/parental benefits that disproportionately penalizes women.** EI rules limit the combination of special benefits (maternity, parental, sickness or caring for others) and unemployment benefits to a maximum of 50 weeks. Because women, with their disproportionate burden of caring work, claim the majority of special benefits, the 50-week limit on combined special and unemployment benefits negatively impacts women more than men. Women who lose their jobs before, during, or shortly after taking maternity/parental leave are just as unemployed as anyone else.
- pass Bill S-244 creating an advisory council of unions and industry within the EI Commission.** Now more than ever, Canada needs effective tripartite coordination and institutionalized social dialogue to promote skills training, vocational education and training, apprenticeships, and continuous learning. Business and labour are saying with one voice: we want to be active participants in social dialogue regarding skills development and labour market programming across Canada.
- quickly stand up for the Sustainable Jobs Partnership Council and support its role in ensuring good union jobs and high-quality training and apprenticeship opportunities are at the centre of our transition to a net-zero economy.** Enacted by [Bill C-50](#), the Council will bring together unions, industry, Indigenous peoples, and other stakeholders to advise on measures to foster sustainable job creation and to support workers, communities, and regions in the shift to a net-zero economy.

Investing in Care Workers

Care workers are indispensable for all other work. These workers care for the elderly, children, those who are sick, or people living with disabilities. They are crucial to the well-being of our families and communities.

They have provided this care despite the heavy strain of staffing shortages, mounting pressure, and workloads.

Nearly five years after the pandemic struck, care workers are still struggling, and people in need of care are still having a hard time finding the quality care they require.

In Canada, most care workers are women who are racialized, immigrant, and migrant. They often work precarious jobs, for low wages and in poor working conditions.

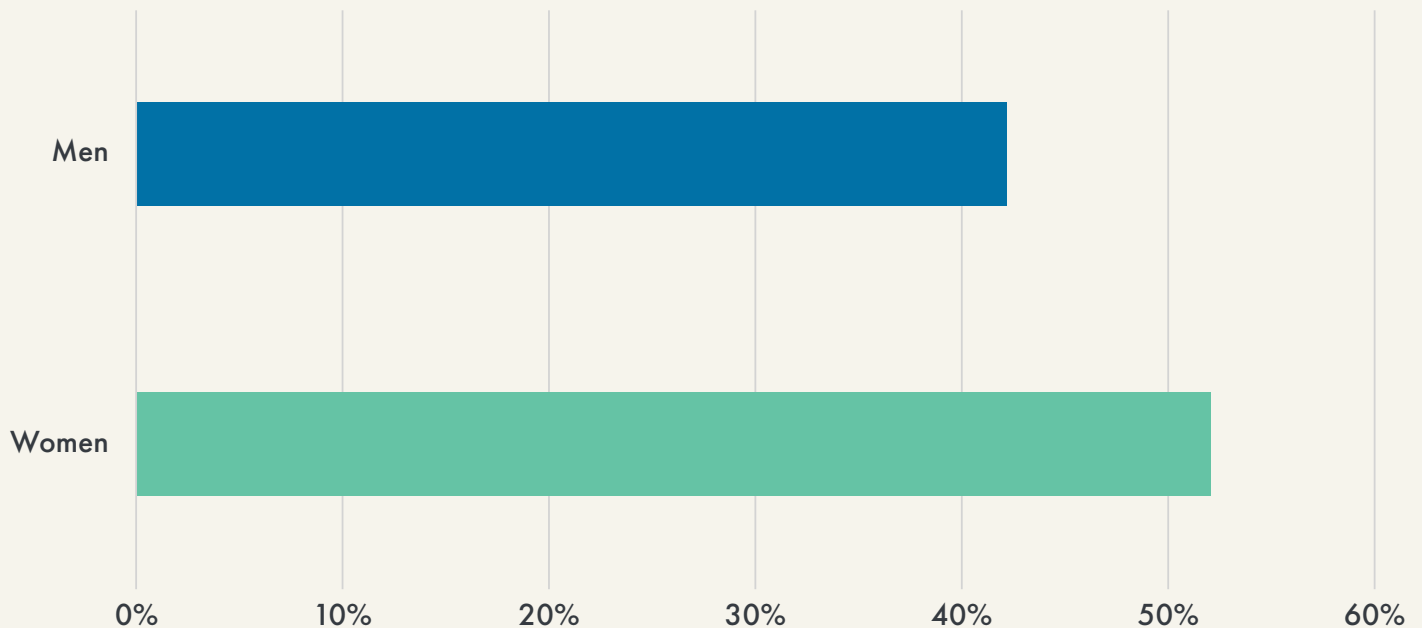
Many women also provide unpaid work, and too many have left the workforce entirely, or been forced to reduce their income, to address the gaps in the care services their families need.

Our economy should not depend so heavily on undervalued and unpaid labour.

We need urgent improvements in the quality and quantity of care work. We need a concrete strategy and real action to ensure everyone has the right to receive quality care. This includes the right to decent work for those providing care.

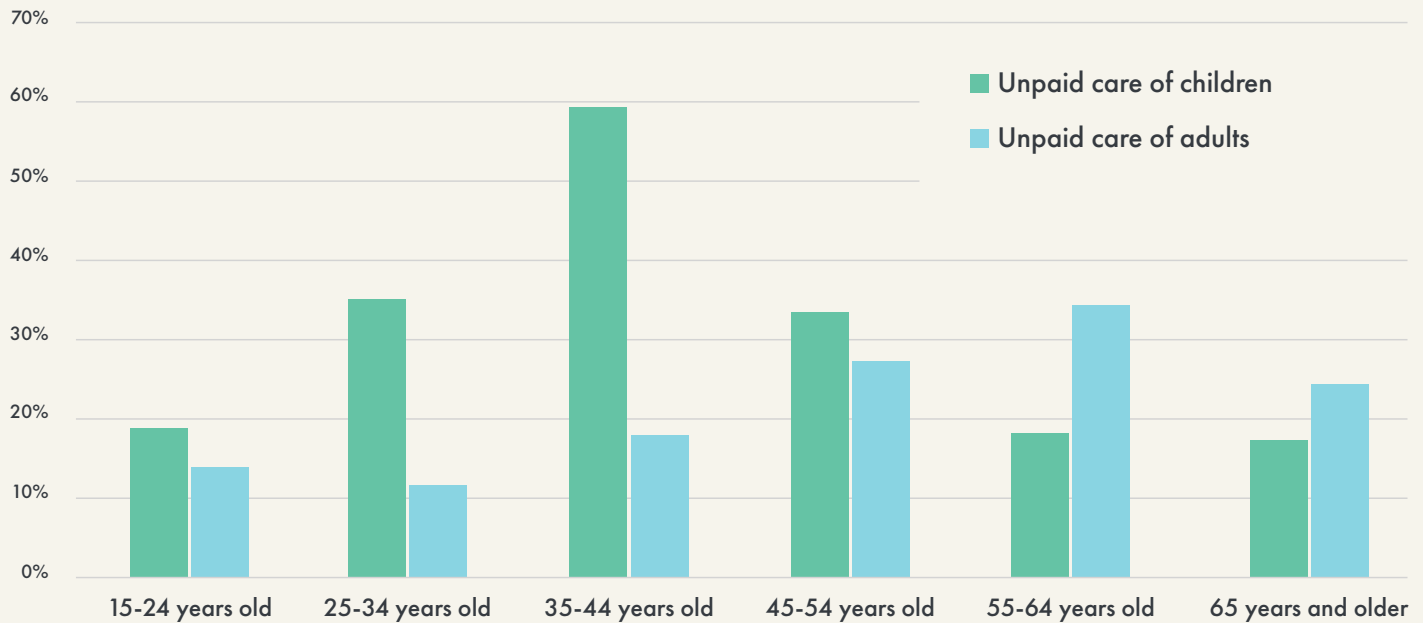
Statistics Canada estimated that in 2019, the value of unpaid household work (including unpaid care) was between \$517 and \$860 billion.

IN 2022, 52% OF WOMEN (NEARLY 8.4 MILLION WOMEN) PROVIDED PAID OR UNPAID CARE FOR CHILDREN AND/OR CARE-DEPENDENT ADULTS



Source: Statistics Canada

SHARE OF PEOPLE WHO PROVIDE UNPAID CARE TO CHILDREN AND ADULTS, 2022



Source: Statistics Canada, Providing Care in Canada, 2022

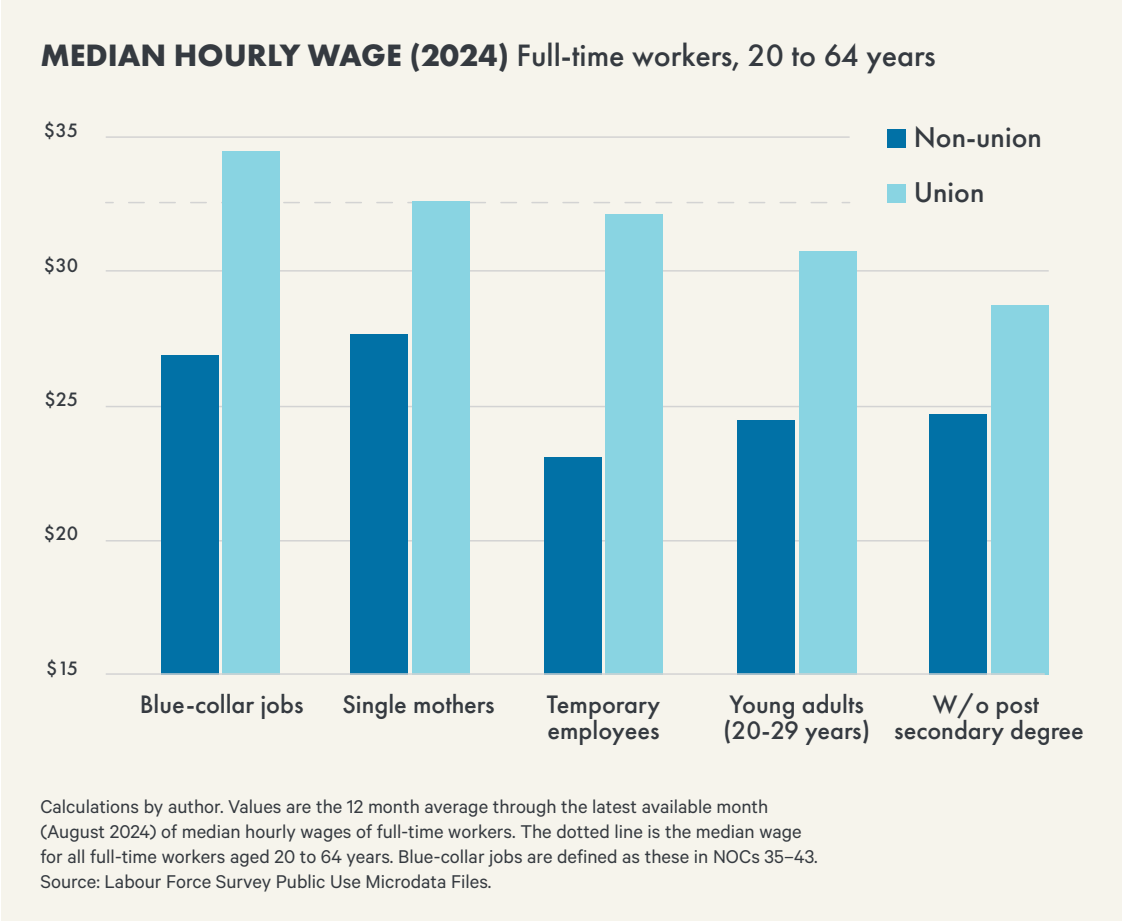
Ottawa should take the following steps:

- **Get the promised Sectoral Table on the Care Economy up and running and ensure that it has strong participation from care workers and their unions.** [Budget 2024](#) proposed creating a sector table that would consult and recommend concrete steps the federal government can take to better support the care economy. This needs to happen without further delay.
- **Make significant and ongoing investments in public social infrastructure and care work to ensure an equitable and sustainable economy.** This encompasses such ingredients as time and job flexibility to take part in upskilling, professional development, and continuous learning, flexible childcare, elder care, and work scheduling to facilitate effective access to training and break down occupational segregation; and mental health supports, career counselling, and adjustment assistance where needed.
- **Develop a pan-Canadian health human resources strategy to deal with staffing shortages.** There is an urgent need for integrated workforce planning and coordination among stakeholders, including health care unions, with a strong federal role. A health human resource strategy would need to be integrated with full funding of the public health care system, systematically opposing privatization and outsourcing of health care, and the proper regulation and management of virtual care. In Indigenous communities, recruitment and retention of Indigenous workers can also help to support the provision of culturally-appropriate care.
- **Implement high standards and expand investments to address shortfalls and inequitable levels of care for seniors and persons with disabilities, including in long-term care, home care, and palliative care.**
- **Develop a pan-Canadian child care workforce initiative to deal with the workforce crisis.** The success of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care agreements depends on the recruitment and retention of qualified professionals. Low pay, lack of benefits, and difficult working conditions are however drawing qualified child care workers away from the profession, leading to a staffing crisis in the sector. According to [Statistics Canada](#), nearly 9 in 10 child care centres reported difficulties in filling vacant positions in 2022. Any further child care funding to provinces and territories must therefore be conditional to increased compensation and improved working conditions, alongside continued support to the expansion of public, non-profit, and Indigenous-led spaces.
- **Ratify and implement the International Labour Organization's [Convention 189](#) (Domestic Workers Convention) to ensure decent work and protections for domestic workers.**
- **Establish pathways to permanent residency for migrant workers, many of whom deliver care, and ensure that migrant workers have comprehensive worker protections to prevent exploitation and abuse.**

Investing in Unionized Jobs and High Workplace Standards

Now as in the past, the route to economic security and economic well-being for many working people in Canada runs through a union.

Unions are crucial to advancing rights for women, workers of colour, people with disabilities, gig workers, migrant workers, and other historically disadvantaged workers who have been excluded from accessing these rights.



In recent polling, 65% of respondents believe there are major obstacles to joining or starting a union, a figure that increases to 82% among younger workers (i.e. workers under the age of 30). 70% of respondents believe government should remove barriers to joining a union.

Governments can take a variety of steps to remove barriers facing workers who want to unionize:

- promote unions as a social good, as the Biden [White House Task Force on Worker Organizing and Empowerment](#) has done
- introduce a framework for participatory sectoral standard-setting and collective bargaining in sectors and occupations historically plagued by low union coverage, low wages and benefits, instability, and precarious employment
- eliminate the payroll and tax advantages that provide an incentive for employers to misclassify employees as independent contractors
- clearly define employee to include dependent contractors, and hold employers jointly and severally liable with suppliers and temporary employment agencies for labour standards violations
- combat misclassification with a default presumption of employment and a statutory “ABC” test
- redouble efforts to ensure that workers in all provinces and territories enjoy a minimum of 10 paid sick days
- legislate protections against algorithmic management and artificial intelligence-facilitated monitoring and surveillance, speed up and work intensification, discrimination in pay and employment, human and labour rights violations, and invasion of privacy rights. Workers and unions want transparency, participation, and accountability in AI regulation
- extend successor rights and protections against contract flipping in unionized workplaces by passing Bill C-330.

