

New report shows that the gendered nature of work puts women at higher risk of exposure to COVID-19 in British Columbia

Over half of employed women in BC work in one of four industries with high face-to-face interactions

Wednesday, November 25 - Vancouver, British Columbia - Today, a new report published by the BC Women's Health Foundation in partnership with Pacific Blue Cross examines the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's health. This report, created in collaboration with economist Dr. Marina Adshade, shows that the gendered nature of work puts women at higher risk of exposure to, and infection from COVID-19 in BC. This is the result of over half of employed women in BC working in one of four industries with high face-to-face interactions including healthcare, retail, education, and accommodation and food services.

Genesa M. Greening, President and CEO of BC Women's Health Foundation, says: "The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted everyone, but not equally. Women have been disproportionately affected and this report series launching today starts to quantify this issue. Healthy women are critical for a more competitive future and if we improve the systemic inequities impacting women health, we could save over \$2 billion each year in lost work hours."

This socio-economic impact report, the first in a series called [*Unmasking Gender Inequity*](#), also reveals that:

- Women in BC were the first to be impacted by job losses, to a greater extent, and for longer. Women **lost 60% more jobs than men in March 2020** increasing the effective unemployment rate of women in the province to **26.5% in March and 28% in April**.
- Caregiving responsibilities are falling on women. **Working mothers in BC, aged 24 to 55, also lost 26% of their work hours in April, compared with 14% of work hours lost by working fathers.** Women attributed 6x more of these lost work hours each week to family responsibilities than men.
- Even within industries where the percentage of men and women in an industry sector are equal, **the specific roles that women tend to occupy have a higher risk of exposure to the virus.** The retail industry is a good example: a higher percentage of women occupy sales and cashier roles, whereas men occupy a higher percentage of sales manager roles.

Dr. Marina Adshade, the commissioned economist of the report, says: "This report is designed to start a conversation not just about the impact the COVID-19 pandemic is having on women's health today, but in the future too. The physical, mental, economic, and emotional consequences for women are, and will be,

staggering, yet these realities will affect us all; our future generations, our organizations, our healthcare system, and our wider economy.”

“Our partnership with BCWHF has helped us close gaps in health care for women in BC with a range of coverage options like on-demand doctors and online mental health support. Given BC has the most women-owned small businesses of any province with female entrepreneurs making up over 40% of all small business owners, Pacific Blue Cross now boosts physiotherapy and psychology benefits for new parents on our small business plans.” Says John Crawford, President and CEO Pacific Blue Cross. “During these challenging times, we encourage large and small employers in British Columbia to work with your advisor and health benefits provider to build a plan that supports strong healthy women.”

This report series is being launched alongside a social media campaign called #WeSeeYou that will #UnmaskGenderInequity by calling for women’s health to be truly ‘seen’ as essential for pandemic recovery plans. To participate, women and male allies are encouraged to take a photo of themselves in a mask and tag up to three women in their lives in recognition of their strength through the pandemic, using the #WeSeeYou hashtag.

To download the full report and learn more about the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women’s health, visit: unmaskgenderinequity.ca

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About the BC Women’s Health Foundation

BC Women’s Health Foundation is dedicated to advancing the full spectrum of women’s health in BC so that all women, across all life stages, have equitable access to the highest quality healthcare when, where and how they need it. To find out more about our bold and dynamic vision of *healthy women everywhere, capable of anything*, visit bcwomensfoundation.org.

About Pacific Blue Cross

Pacific Blue Cross is a Health Benefits Society and British Columbia's number one health benefits provider. Based in Burnaby, BC, the not-for-profit organization provides health, dental, life, disability and travel coverage for 1 in 3 British Columbians through group benefits and individual plans. As part of its mission to improve health and wellbeing in BC, Pacific Blue Cross proactively supports charitable organizations across the province working to improve health outcomes.

Contact:

For more information contact:

Alicia Collyear

BCWHF@yulupr.com



604-558-1656