

# Philanthropic Investment vs. Social Need: How Canadian Funders Can Lead on Gender Justice

In early 2025, the Houssian Foundation teamed up with Catalyst Philanthropy to explore current trends in Canadian gender justice philanthropy, connecting with leaders in the field, as well as exploring opportunities for collaboration among funders.

Catalyst Philanthropy explored the work of 25 funders across the country. What we found was the **low prioritization of gender justice in Canadian philanthropy stands in stark contrast to the intense and rising needs of women and gender-diverse individuals**. As issues in gender justice continue to rise, there is a need for philanthropy to step up on this topic.

## Key Findings

### 1 There is a lack of urgency around issues impacting women and gender-diverse people in Canada.

- Women and gender-diverse individuals are not seen as a critical issue compared to other priority areas.
- There is a perception that, relative to other countries, Canada is a safe place to be for women and gender-diverse people—though the reality paints a more serious picture.

### 2 Those who fund gender justice are confident in the value and impact of this work.

- Dedicated funders are unwavering in their commitment to this issue, citing both the objective needs of women and gender-diverse people and the return on their investment.
- Those who fund in gender justice see the ripple effect this has on families, communities and economies.

**Women and gender-diverse people experience violence at unequal rates across communities.**

**26%**

**Indigenous Girls**

experience sexual assault before age 15.

**Women in rural & Northern communities**

**3.5x**

are more likely to report IPV than those in urban areas.

**Transgender and gender-diverse people**

**52%**

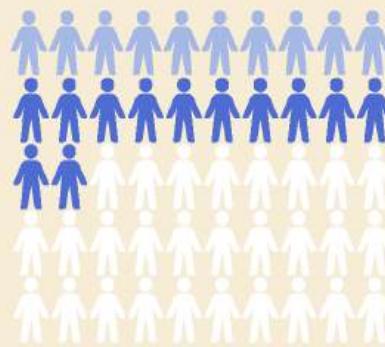
are more likely to have experienced violent victimization than cisgender people.

### 3 Most strategic funders only consider projects that address the unique needs of women as part of a broader general equity lens.

- These funders tend to see themselves as mission-driven on a specific issue area, with gender equity as part of a broader equity framework rather than a distinct priority.
- Similarly, hardly any funders named gender justice as their primary priority, which hinders philanthropy's ability to address the needs of women and gender-diverse people within a cohesive strategy.

### 4 Gender justice and equity work is garnering some interest from philanthropy, particularly from corporate foundations and individual philanthropists.

- The private sector has shown leadership in addressing issues related to safety and health through dedicated strategies and funding streams.
- Many female philanthropists are drawn to this area because of their own lived experiences or a desire to improve the lives of women and gender-diverse people.



**44% of Canadian women** have experienced some form of intimate partner violence (IPV). **Only 20% of them reported it to the police**, due to stigma or fear.

**Since 2014, rates of IPV have increased faster than other forms of violence and crime:**

sexual assault by  
**163%**

physical assault by  
**14%**

psychological or verbal by  
**38%**

### 5 Philanthropic leadership and role modelling are effective, and there is an opportunity to apply this to Canadian gender justice.

- Funders were familiar with large-scale feminist philanthropists like Mackenzie Scott and Melinda French, but had difficulty identifying counterparts working on similar priorities in Canada.
- There is potential to attract more funders to gender justice, just as climate leaders have mobilized diverse and high-profile funders around their cause.

#### About the authors

**The Houssian Foundation** leverages philanthropic giving and impact investing to advance gender equality.

**Catalyst Philanthropy** is a strategy and innovation consultancy maximizing the impact of philanthropy.