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## **Action needed to close Alberta's gender income gap** Pay equity legislation a key part of essential policy changes

On the eve of International Women's Day, a new report released today by Parkland Institute finds that Alberta continues to have the largest gender income gap in Canada, and one of the largest gaps of any jurisdiction in the world.

Alberta women's average market incomes in 2016 will be less than half of men's, and even women working full-time, full-year in the province will earn \$31,100 less on average than their male counterparts. Even after accounting for redistribution from tax and transfer payments, women in the province will have after-tax incomes of just 60% of men's.

"It should be shocking that in 2016 Alberta men will have earned as much by Canada Day as it will take women in the province the entire year to make," says Kathleen Lahey, a Professor and Queen's National Scholar in the Faculty of Law at Queen's University, who authored the report. "What's more alarming is that the gap has actually been widening over the past 20 years, moving a province that was once a leader in gender equality to such a dire position in such a rich country."

Lahey warns in the report that because there are complex reasons for the gap – including the burden Alberta women face of a "double work week" due to an average of 35 hours of unpaid work per week, widespread pay disparities between women and men, and what is essentially a "second tax" on women's participation in paid work because of the high costs of childcare – there is no silver bullet to remedy the situation.

Still, Lahey says that it's clear from other jurisdictions that robust pay equity legislation that ensures women receive equal pay for work of equal worth – not simply equal pay for equal work – is a key element in a package of policy changes necessary to reduce gendered income inequalities in Alberta.

"Pay equity legislation can't address all the barriers women face, but without it there is simply no way to meaningfully start to narrow this troubling gap," Lahey says. "The good news, particularly during challenging economic times, is that pay equity laws would actually improve the government's balance sheet – by between \$769 million and \$1.2 billion in just one year with relatively modest increases to women's wages – because of increased tax revenue and decreased need for income support from governments."

Parkland Institute is a non-partisan public policy research institute in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Alberta. The report *Equal Worth: Designing Effective Pay Equity Laws For Alberta* is available for download on Parkland's website at [parklandinstitute.ca](http://parklandinstitute.ca).

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