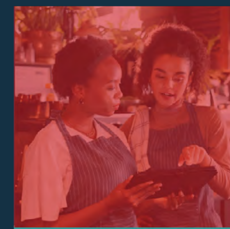
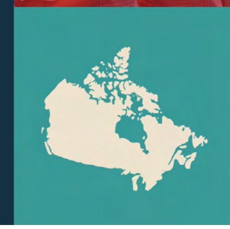
Closing the Capital Gap: Advancing Survivor Entrepreneurship in Canada



For Policy Decision Makers

CANADIAN CENTER FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT | CENTRE CANADIEN POUR L'AUTONOMISATION DES FEMMES



Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) drive nearly half of Canada's private-sector revenue and are central to the government's growth agenda. Yet women own only about 20% of Canadian businesses, a gap that studies estimate leaves up to $150 billion in economic potential untapped.

For many people with experiences of economic abuse, entrepreneurship offers a path to financial stability and autonomy. Owning a business can restore a sense of agency, purpose, and forward momentum.

But, people with experiences of economic abuse face structural and compounding barriers within Canada's financial and entrepreneurial systems.

What we found

- Traditional lending criteria such as credit history, income stability, business formalization exclude many who are still rebuilding financial autonomy after violence.
- Like women in general, survivors are more likely to rely on personal savings, credit cards, or loans from family and friends to start their businesses, adding further financial pressure.
- Intersecting discrimination based on gender, race, immigration status, and disability drives low trust in financial institutions and a common belief that capital isn't accessible to "people like me."
- Canada's microloan ecosystem is gradually shifting toward more inclusive, relationship-based financing but few programs account for the realities of economic abuse.
- No microloan program in Canada currently applies a trauma- and violence-informed lens specifically for survivor entrepreneurs.

Canada has an opportunity to lead in building a safer, more inclusive approach to survivor entrepreneurship and access to capital. People with experiences of economic abuse should not be excluded from financial opportunity as their credit history, income, or business pathway reflects coercion and systemic barriers, not individual failure. These are economic justice and financial inclusion issues.

Government can support survivor's entrepreneurship by

- Coordinating efforts across the departments of Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED) and Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) and regional development agencies to embed survivor entrepreneurship and microloans within existing economic development strategies as well as the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy (WES) and the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence.
- Increasing funding and easing funding restrictions for community-based women's enterprise organizations, peer lending models, and local community organizations supporting those with experiences of economic abuse and other underserved entrepreneurs.
- Expanding entrepreneurship policy beyond incorporated businesses to include self-employed women, who make up 86.4% of women entrepreneurs.
- Strengthening Statistics Canada's disaggregated data collection to better capture diverse business ownership and financing outcomes, with strong safeguards for safety, confidentiality, and informed consent when collecting data on survivors.
- Simplifying government grant and loan applications with more flexible timelines and lighter paperwork to reduce exclusion for survivors and other underserved entrepreneurs.

Safe capital should be part of Canada's broader policy agenda on women's entrepreneurship, gender-based violence prevention, financial inclusion, anti-fraud efforts, and inclusive economic growth. Investing in survivor entrepreneurs means investing not just in businesses, but in rebuilding lives, families, communities, and futures.

Read the **full report** for detailed policy recommendations on supporting survivor entrepreneurship and access to microloans.