



PARO

BALANCING ACT:  
WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS  
AND MENTAL HEALTH



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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



**In 2023, PARO Centre for Women’s Enterprise** (PARO) received funding through the Government of Canada, Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE) program, which works to advance equality with respect to sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity or expression through the inclusion of people of all genders, including women, in Canada’s economic, social, and political life.<sup>1</sup>

PARO was approved to use the funding to research the impacts of mental health and wellness gaps and challenges faced by women entrepreneurs. Addressing mental health concerns among female entrepreneurs is essential for Ontario’s economic prosperity. Resources like mental health support, access to peer-networks and business mentorship, stress management techniques, and work-life balance advocacy can significantly help mitigate these challenges.

The goal of the research is to create recommendations to levels of government and organizations addressing the barriers faced by women entrepreneurs. PARO will also use the information collected to increase awareness effectively in future strategic plans and programming.

The PARO Mental Health Research project would not be possible without the support of the Government of Canada, WAGE program. More importantly, without the unwavering support of the several women who participated in interviews, roundtable discussions, and surveys, this project would not have been possible. Without the commitment and dedication of the women in Ontario, this project would not have been accomplished.





# INTRODUCTION

## OVERVIEW:

**PARO's primary mandate** is to assist women in achieving more economic independence through developing their own micro-enterprises. The Centre offers a series of programs designed for women who are at different stages in developing or implementing business ideas. PARO also offers financial leverage and mentorship through Peer Lending Circles, groups of four to seven women who support fellow Circle members in obtaining small loans for business purposes. The need for these kinds of services stems from the economic challenges facing northern Ontario: a high rate of unemployment amidst a struggling resource-based economy. In addition to these challenges, women face a double burden of limited access to better paying, traditionally 'male' jobs, while facing gender barriers in starting a business. It is these challenges that PARO is designed to address.

PARO Centre for Women's Enterprise is a business development organization that supports women who wish to start and scale businesses. Founded on a unique approach that prioritizes meeting women where they are in their entrepreneurial journey, PARO has developed and provides programs and services that support women in business from start-up to scale-up.

From business planning and marketing to international export strategies, PARO is guided by strengthening women-owned businesses that prioritize #womensupportingwomen as part of a cross-provincial peer network that has grown to become one of the largest peer lending networks in North America.

With 240+ Circles in Canada, PARO has become a beacon of inspiration for women who wish to advance themselves and their businesses. These advancements are made through education, skills training, and a consistent flow of natural empowerment created independently through each Circle.

To support women on their journey, PARO prioritizes wellness through a strength-based model that contributes to thriving successes. PARO works with each woman where they are, regardless of geography, socioeconomic status, or where they are on their business journey. As part of this commitment to #proudPAROwomen, PARO's intersectional approach to supporting all women appreciates and embraces the diversity that proudly exists in local and regional communities of women in business.

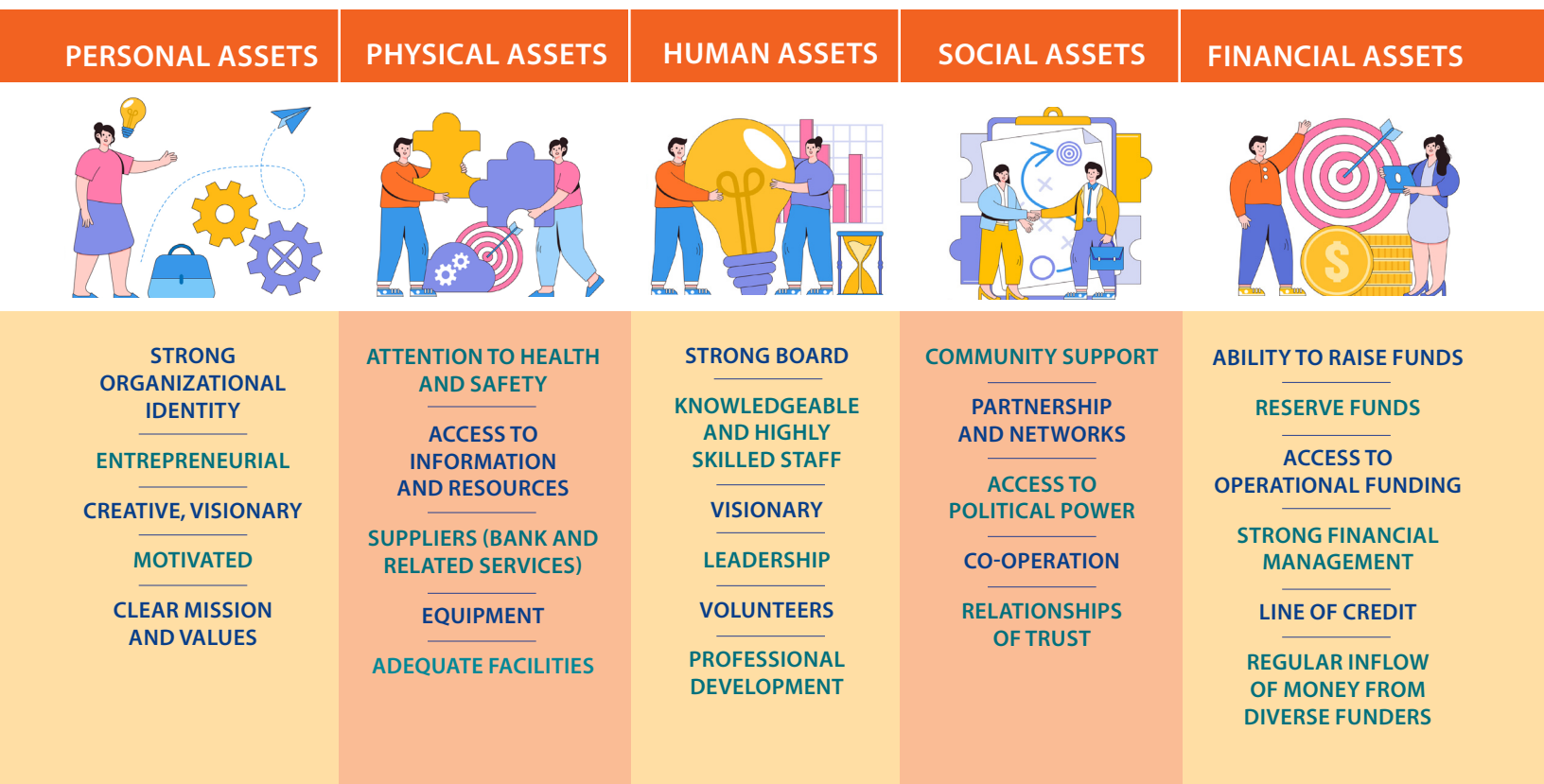
PARO's services are designed to highlight and promote this diversity through empowerment strategies that support women in building resiliency in their businesses and their lives. In addition to one-on-one counselling offered by our PARO team, PARO provides access to peer mentoring and support, financial supports, online learning, exciting regular events packages with information, tactical tools, and inspiring speakers, as well as tailored programs that support women in starting and scaling their businesses.



# THE SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS MODEL (SLM)

**The Sustainable Livelihoods Model (SLM)** is a theory of change that applies an asset-based approach to economic development and transitioning out of poverty. Since 1995, PARO has used the SLM to guide strategic planning processes. This framework is particularly useful as it provides an overview of the assets of an individual by exploring components from a strength-based perspective; it also incorporates the basic strengths that contribute to a woman’s potential for resiliency and therefore long-term success. The SLM is thorough in its application to individuals – the five asset areas used to map strengths also reveal existing gaps which later become goals achieved through developing and executing a comprehensive strategic plan.

Below are descriptions of the asset areas:



In relation to the PARO Mental Health Research project, the SLM emphasizes the interconnectedness between mental health and wellness and successful women entrepreneurs. It examines the various assets that affect a woman’s livelihood including personal, physical, human, social, and financial wellbeing. When considering these assets, the SLM recognizes mental health is not solely determined by the success of the individual business, it also includes areas which contribute to a positive entrepreneurial ecosystem. The SLM addresses ecosystems through a holistic, all-encompassing approach to the successes of a business. Based on this model, there are several areas all levels of government and organizations should consider when supporting women entrepreneurs to become active participants in Ontario’s economy.



# METHODOLOGY

**This research aims to investigate** the impacts of the various mental health and wellness gaps and challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, with a focus on mental health supports, access to peer-networks and business mentorships, access to supports and resources, and work-life balance advocacy. A mixed-methodology utilizing quantitative and qualitative data and information was used.

A structured survey was designed to gather quantitative data on the utilization and perceived effectiveness of mental health resources among women entrepreneurs. The survey included questions related to the frequency of accessing mental health support, participation and importance of peer-networking programs, and the impacts on their work-life balance.

Interviews and roundtable discussion groups provided qualitative insight into the lives of women entrepreneurs. Several open-ended questions were provided in a safe and respectful environment. Women unable to attend in person were provided an opportunity to participate online. The qualitative data gathered provided insight into the contextual factors that impact women entrepreneurs.

Participants selected for interviews and roundtable discussions were chosen across a diverse population in Ontario. The selected women entrepreneurs ranged from new and seasoned business owners, including Indigenous women and diverse groups.



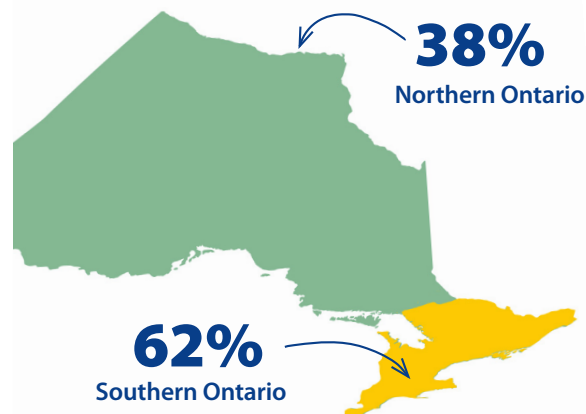
# OVERVIEW

According to the Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC), Canadians strongly agree that entrepreneurs are passionate individuals who create wealth and jobs for the community and contribute to economic development.<sup>2</sup> Further, several Canadians consider entrepreneurs as role models for the community, and a good proportion respect businesspeople that have suffered a setback.<sup>3</sup> Canadians understand entrepreneurial work involves personal sacrifices, overcoming numerous challenges, and huge financial risk. During a roundtable discussion, several women entrepreneurs shared that owning their own business creates significant time demands, putting them at risk for social isolation and causing strain in their personal relationships.<sup>4</sup> Together, these challenges negatively impact mental health and wellness.

This report, published in both English and French, summarizes the survey responses of 100 women entrepreneurs from across Ontario. The breakdown of the women who responded:

- Thirty-eight percent (38%)** live in northern Ontario (northwest Ontario, northeast Ontario).
- Sixty-two percent (62%)** live in southern Ontario (eastern corridor, western Ontario, central Ontario, and the greater Toronto area (GTA)).
- Fifty-four percent (54%)** responded from a census metropolitan area (total population of 100,000 with a downtown 'core' of 50,000 or more).
- Twenty-seven percent (27%)** responded from a small population centre (population between 1,000 and 30,000) and a census agglomeration (core population of at least 10,000 and within commuting distance of a metropolitan area).
- Nineteen percent (19%)** responded from rural, remote and Northern communities (population of less than 1,000), including Indigenous communities.

## RESPONDENTS FROM ONTARIO



## POPULATION PROPORTION



**54%**

Census  
Metropolitan  
Areas



**27%**

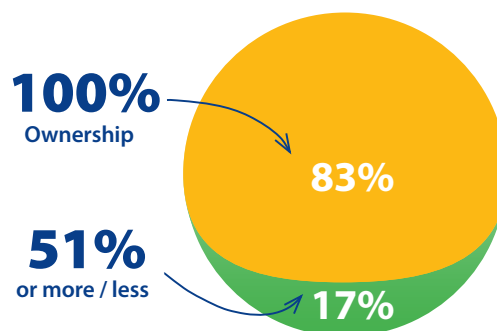
Small Population  
Centres + Census  
Agglomeration



**19%**

Rural, Remote +  
Northern Communities  
(including Indigenous  
communities)

## OWNERSHIP OF THE BUSINESS



**Eighty-three percent (83%)** of those surveyed identified owning one hundred percent (100%) of their business whereas seventeen percent (17%) combined owned fifty-one percent (51%) or more, or fifty-one percent (51%) or less of their business.



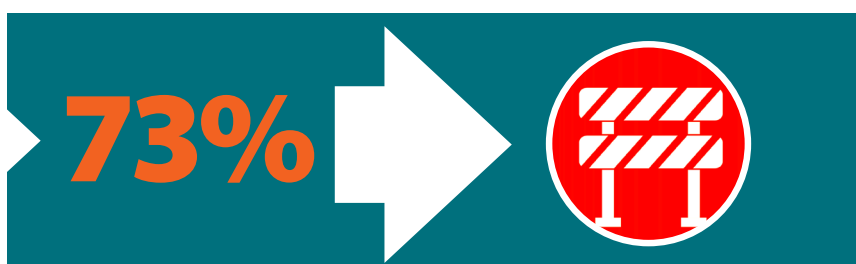
## KEY FINDINGS

Based on the results of the survey, when participants were asked how often during the past month (30 days) they felt satisfied with their overall mental health, forty-one percent (41%) said sometimes, ten percent (10%) said rarely, and eight percent (8%) said they always felt satisfied with their overall mental health.

Eighty-six percent (86%) of participants identified personal and business financial factors as their primary sources of stress and anxiety, with the second highest being individual factors such as physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional health.

Seventy-three percent (73%) participants said they have experienced a gap and/or barrier when accessing funding such as capital, grants, loans, etc.

### MENTAL HEALTH SATISFACTION (PAST 30 DAYS)



### CASE STUDY:

During a roundtable discussion, a seasoned business owner with 15 years of experience in her industry shared her struggles with mental health. Despite her success, she openly admits to struggling with mental health issues regularly. She frequently finds herself overwhelmed, feeling unable to cope with the demands of running her business. Her struggles with mental health manifest as moments where she feels incapable of continuing. She describes sitting in her office or home, feeling paralyzed by the weight of her responsibilities. Despite her years of experience, she acknowledges that the difficulties haven't diminished over time.



# AREAS OF IMPACT

## ACCESS TO FUNDING

**Among the challenges women entrepreneurs face** that impact their mental health and wellness, access to funding is at the top of the list. According to a study created by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, “Empowering Women in Business: Insights & Recommendations,” more than half of women business owners (51%) surveyed reported facing challenges when trying to access financing for their businesses. In addition, twenty-two percent (22%) of financing applications from women-only owned businesses were rejected outright, compared to the average of fifteen percent (15%) for all businesses. When it came to government support programs, more women said they had difficulty finding (45%) or applying and qualifying (38%) for these programs compared to men (34% and 30%, respectively).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, according to Statistics Canada, in the first quarter of 2023, businesses majority-owned by women (56.6%) and all private sector businesses (58.2%) reported similar expectations regarding rising inflation as an obstacle in the next three months. The added stress of access to funding and the impacts of rising inflation will further impact the mental health and wellness of women entrepreneurs.<sup>6</sup> These results were also echoed in our survey findings.

Compared to the findings of Statists Canada, our survey found that eighty-six percent (86%) of women entrepreneurs expressed that financial factors cause significant stress, mirrored by seventy-three percent (73%) of women who said they had experienced a gap and/or barrier when accessing funding (i.e., capital, grants, loans, etc.). When asked to provide further information, a participant said, “I lack the time to accomplish the things I need to do – both for family, house, career, and business. I hold a lot of balls up in the air.” Ultimately, women entrepreneurs are not only experiencing significant inconsistency with successfully applying and qualifying for funding, but they are also experiencing significant challenges finding the time to apply for these supports.

Notably, PARO has supported 30,952 women-owned businesses to date, with \$12,777,014 in grants to clients. However, women-owned businesses remain underrepresented in Ontario’s funding pool.<sup>7</sup>



“*I lack the time to accomplish the things I need to do – both for family, house, career, and business. I hold a lot of balls up in the air.*”

**Notably, PARO has supported 30,952 women-owned businesses to date, with \$12,777,014 in grants to clients.**

According to the Disruptors podcast, “Venturing Out: Closing the Funding Gap for Female Entrepreneurs,” Jennifer Marron says to create equal opportunities for women, we need to change not only who gets hired or funded, but who makes those decisions. As men dominate the world of venture capital, male-owned firms are four times more likely to report receiving venture capital funding than those owned by women, according to the Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub report. Marron further states that if we’re serious about growing our economy, we need to get serious about tearing down the barriers for women’s participation.<sup>8</sup>

**During a roundtable discussion**, one participant expressed the importance for women to improve their understanding of finances and have access to different funding options: **“This helps us avoid relying too much on credit, which can negatively affect our mental wellbeing.”**

“**Male-owned firms are four times more likely to report receiving venture capital funding than those owned by women, according to the Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub report. If we’re serious about growing our economy, we need to get serious about tearing down the barriers for women’s participation.**

– Jennifer Marron

## NETWORKING AND MENTORSHIP

**Entrepreneurship can be a hard** and, at times, an overwhelming road to navigate, especially when faced with uncertainty in the economic climate, impacts of inflation, and the aftermath of a pandemic. As a woman in the entrepreneurial space, these challenges come with an added layer of complexity which could include managing children and childcare, finding time for self-care, and facing the overwhelming task of being a caregiver to an elderly or aging family member.

During the Mental Health Roundtable Discussion in Thunder Bay, Ontario, among the twenty-six (26) women who participated in person and online, many expressed that mental health service providers are providing enough resources specific to their needs. They highlighted a need for a community of women coming together to support each other.

Based on the results of the survey, when asked what common barriers/challenges women entrepreneurs face, thirty-six percent (36%) of respondents said building support networks is an occasional barrier. One participant reflected: “...it would be wonderful to not be alone in what [I am] working on.” The need for empowerment and mentorship coaching can be expensive but is a vital need for entrepreneurial guidance. Women spoke about the need for an entrepreneurial buddy-system, and Entrepreneurial Wellness Systems Navigators who can help individual entrepreneurs navigate the overabundance of resources available.

### KEY POINTS FROM THE ROUNDTABLE

Roundtable participant suggestion: Imagine having an app where you could instantly connect with someone who is there to listen, face-to-face, right when you need it. Sometimes you just need to talk to someone immediately, without the hassle of making appointments or waiting for callbacks.

When you’re juggling multiple responsibilities like running a business and managing your personal life, there are moments when you need to pause and address your own emotions and fears. Having instant access to someone who understands and can provide support in those moments could make a world of difference.



PARO Prosper Peer Lending Circles offer women entrepreneurs a safe and inclusive space where groups of like-minded people meet regularly to share their personal experiences, offer advice, and expand on their networks.<sup>9</sup> It was noted during the roundtable discussion that women identified needing peer-network support groups related to specific challenges, such as being:

- a caregiver to aging parents
- an Indigenous business owner
- women who have experienced complex intergenerational traumas such as those impacted by murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls
- businessowners who do not have a significant other, families close by, or hired staff, thus facing an added layer of isolation.

When asked about gaps and barriers experienced by participants, thirty-seven percent (37%) of women responded that networking and mentorship (i.e., finding other like-minded women entrepreneurs, building support networks, etc.) was a challenge. As previously mentioned, being an entrepreneur is a taxing and, at times, lonely venture. When compounded with financial stress, unforeseeable family situations, the need for a safe, respectful, and supportive network is paramount for the emotional and mental wellbeing of women entrepreneurs.

### ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANT:

“*Mental health is not a 9 to 5. Our struggles and challenges come at any point. You wake up in the middle of the night and you need someone there immediately to support you. Women are supporting other people in their lives, but there needs to be someone to support them.*”

## WORK-LIFE BALANCE

**Based the roundtable discussion**, one of the larger challenges for women entrepreneurs is achieving a work-life balance. One participant stated that, “it is easier to do nothing than to do self-care.” It was discussed that women entrepreneurs often feel guilty when prioritizing their self-care over their business venture. This is due to the stigma of always needing to be working to be successful. Work-life balance continues to be a significant barrier for women entrepreneurs in Ontario because of the ongoing gender norms that place women in situations where they are the sole provider of caregiving and household duties. The survey indicates sixty-one percent (61%) of participants need better support with work-life balance.

The lack of support systems such as affordable childcare, in conjunction with accessing funding to grow their business, and meaningful networking opportunities, all hinder women’s ability to balance the demands of owning a business with family obligations. These factors negatively impact their mental health which leads to high levels of stress and, ultimately, burn out. Women entrepreneurs often believe there is no time to ‘breakdown,’ insinuating there is no time to balance their personal life with their business. As such, the need to address issues such as gender stereotypes, improving access to resources, such as childcare, and promoting a more inclusive and flexible entrepreneurial environment would be essential first steps toward ensuring women entrepreneurs have access to an adequate work-life balance.

## CASE STUDY:

**A single mom faces numerous challenges in managing stress while juggling the responsibilities of parenthood, co-parenting with her narcissistic ex-partner, and owning a business. She finds herself overwhelmed by the constant barrage of stressors, often feeling as though there is never enough time to address them all. She notes that she has to schedule her breakdowns for weekends when her son is away, highlighting the necessity of compartmentalizing her emotions amidst the chaos of her life.**



## LACK OF REPRESENTATION

**According to the Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub (WEKH),<sup>10</sup>** Indigenous women’s entrepreneurship is growing across the country – but the representation of Indigenous women in entrepreneurship still falls far behind that of Indigenous men. According to a joint report by the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business and Global Affairs Canada,<sup>11</sup> Indigenous entrepreneurs are underrepresented within Canada’s business population. While Indigenous peoples account for five percent (5%) of Canada’s population (and growing), only around one percent (1%) to one and a half percent (1.5%) of all small and mid-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Canada were majority-owned by Indigenous peoples in 2020.<sup>12</sup> The report further states, majority women-owned Indigenous businesses represent around thirty-nine percent (39.3%) of all Indigenous exporters, which is over double the percentage of women-owned exporters out of all Canadian SMEs (14.5%). Although a positive, there continues to be an overwhelming set of boundaries that Indigenous women entrepreneurs face.

The WEKH<sup>13</sup> explains, in addition to institutional barriers, such as access to capital, Indigenous women entrepreneurs experience social barriers that impact their business ventures. Social barriers include unbalanced gender role responsibilities in the home and access to childcare. Finally, according to the Royal Bank of Canada,<sup>14</sup> for women entrepreneurs, there is a distinct lack of networking and training programs designed for women, and few role models or mentors.

Based on our roundtable discussions, the importance for Indigenous women to be represented in the entrepreneurial space was emphasized. There is a need to bring Indigenous women who have shared lived experiences such as intergenerational traumas, barriers, and connections to cultural identity to create a sense of empowerment and eliminate continued isolation. When women entrepreneurs do not see themselves represented adequately in leadership roles, it can restrict their ability to envision and pursue their own entrepreneurial endeavours. The lack of diverse role models results in fewer opportunities of guidance and peer-support, creating additional barriers for women to navigate the complexities of the entrepreneurial space.

As such, promoting diversity, inclusivity, and the visibility of successful women entrepreneurs of all backgrounds would foster an environment where aspiring women entrepreneurs in Ontario feel empowered and supported in their pursuits.

### QUOTE FROM THE ROUNDTABLE:

*“Being an Indigenous woman entrepreneur, many of the events I go to, many of the trade missions, I’m the only Indigenous woman doing those.”*

### CASE STUDY:

During a roundtable discussion, one participant reflects on the crucial role women play in holding their families together. Despite the challenges she faces, including unexpected life changes like taking in her grandson full-time, she remains resilient in her commitment to her family’s wellbeing. She acknowledges the immense pressure placed on women to maintain the stability of their households. She describes how, without her presence and support, she feels as though her family’s foundation begins to crumble. The unexpected responsibility of raising her grandson full-time added another layer of complexity to her life, challenging her preconceived notions of her future as a dedicated entrepreneur and grandmother.

### QUOTE FROM THE ROUNDTABLE:

*“I know the elderly and being a caregiver is huge, but there’s more and more of us grandparents that’s raising up our grandkids today.”*



## ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS

**Women entrepreneurs face several gaps** and challenges when accessing applicable resources and supports for mental health. They often experience barriers when accessing traditional funding such as securing venture capital and loans. Women representation in corporate and commercial sectors remain disproportionate to those of men, impacting diversity, inclusivity, and the visibility of women in these spaces.

According to the data collected from the survey, only thirty-five percent (35%) of women said they have not experienced a barrier accessing resources and supports compared to the sixty-five percent (65%) who experienced a range of barriers.

Based on the roundtable discussions, it was identified that there is a need for an entrepreneurial buddy-system, where women can come together to support each other in specific areas; a buddy-system that would provide proven results through a smart-phone application that would produce instant access to resources and supports. An additional suggestion was Entrepreneurial Wellness Systems Navigators who can help individual entrepreneurs navigate the overabundance of resources available for women. These navigator services can be provided through government-funded agencies such as PARO.

Additionally, several participants expressed the overwhelming cost associated with accessing private or qualified mental health professionals. Several government-funded mental health programs are overrun with extended waitlists, resulting in many women entrepreneurs fending for themselves, and feeling defeated and uncared for during challenging times.

When participants were asked in the online survey which areas they have experienced a gap/barrier, thirty-five percent (35%) of women chose access to resources and supports, such as financial literacy, access to the internet, mental health supports, daycare, etc. One woman stated, "...I wish I could collaborate with other women who excel in different aspects of business. If there was a hub for women helping other women in business that would be amazing. I need help with marketing, so then I am matched up with another woman who specializes in supporting women-owned businesses in marketing. That kind of mentorship would be amazing." Another woman stated she would like, "proper affordable resources to learn more past the beginner stage." Based on the qualitative and quantitative data, women entrepreneurs are saying they need access to resources, professional support, peer networking and mentoring services which seemingly mesh together to provide a holistic structure.

When asked where you need better mental health support as a woman entrepreneur, one woman stated: "It took me months of searching to find a psychologist. My doctor suggested I talk to someone and then told me to Google it. Honestly, the doctors should have the ability to give me a list of other doctors that specialize in mental health." According to an additional forty-six percent (46%) of women, access to mental health services, such as one-to-one counselling and professional mental health workers, is amongst the greatest needs in the entrepreneurial space. Forty-nine percent (49%) of women experienced barriers in having access to these types of services.

### CASE STUDY:

During a roundtable discussion, a woman explained how her life took an unexpected turn. Originally planning to shoot documentaries in Australia and travel to Italy, she found herself faced with a new role as the primary caretaker for her mother, who had fallen. Despite

the sudden shift in her plans, she remained determined to honour her commitment to her family while simultaneously launching her business in Vancouver. Her life transformed overnight as she transitioned into the role of primary caretaker for her mother. Living out of a suitcase and

relying on borrowed resources, she struggled to balance her caregiving responsibilities with her professional endeavours. Despite her resourcefulness and resilience, Sarah found herself grappling with the overwhelming weight of her new responsibilities.

# CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS



**This section provides an analysis** of the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in Ontario and presents policy recommendations for addressing them. The recommendations are based on the results of the survey and aim to provide actionable solutions that can support the growth and success of women entrepreneurs in Ontario.

## 1. ACCESS TO FUNDING

**Enhancing financial inclusion for women entrepreneurs:** Acknowledge the critical role of female entrepreneurs in Ontario's economy with a goal of creating an enabling environment that empowers women to start and scale their businesses by ensuring **equitable access to funding opportunities**.

All levels of government must create equal access to opportunities and financial equity support for women entrepreneurs. As Laure-Anna Bomal, an economist with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) states, "Women entrepreneurs play a vital role in our economy, providing local jobs, boosting the GDP and supporting our communities."<sup>15</sup>

Based on a 2023 report sponsored by Scotiabank, "Empowering Women in Business: Insights and Recommendations," over half of women business owners (51%) surveyed reported facing challenges when trying to access financing for their businesses. In addition, twenty-two percent (22%) of financing applications from women-only owned businesses were rejected outright, compared to the average of fifteen percent (15%) for all businesses.<sup>16</sup>

Governments must support programs that cater to women entrepreneurs that are easily accessible, while eliminating complex criteria and applications. Furthermore, governments must evaluate current measures in place for qualifying applicants and ensure equal access to diverse populations.

## 2. NETWORKING AND MENTORSHIP

**Facilitating networking and mentorship opportunities for women entrepreneurs:** Acknowledging the pivotal role of networking and mentorship in fostering the growth and success of entrepreneurs, with a goal of creating a supportive environment for female entrepreneurs by enhancing access to networking opportunities and mentorship programs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

*Recommendations are based on the results of the survey and aim to provide actionable solutions that can support the growth and success of women entrepreneurs in Ontario.*





“**Women entrepreneurs play a vital role in our economy, providing local jobs, boosting the GDP and supporting our communities.**

– Laure-Anna Bomal

Networking and mentoring play a crucial role in any entrepreneur’s journey, offering irreplaceable guidance to women navigating the complexities of business ventures, regardless of where they are in their business plan. All levels of government must provide funding for applicable organizations to create opportunities for networking and mentoring where meaningful connections are formed.

Women entrepreneurs are requesting these opportunities with like-minded professionals, peers, and potential clients, who can provide insights, resources, and guidance. Women are seeking connections and collaborations, partnerships, and crucial business relationships. The collective

knowledge gained through networking and mentoring not only accelerates an entrepreneur’s learning curve but also fosters a sense of community and resilience, essential qualities for success in the dynamic and competitive business world. Ultimately, these interconnected relationships contribute to the improved mental health and wellness of women entrepreneurs, resulting in their growth and overall success as they navigate the intricacies of building and sustaining a thriving business in Ontario.

### 3. WORK-LIFE BALANCE

**Fostering work-life balance opportunities for women entrepreneurs:** Recognizing the significant impact of work-life balance on the mental health, wellbeing, and productivity of women entrepreneurs, with a goal that aims to create a supportive environment that enables women to successfully manage their businesses while maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

Work-life balance is not a new dilemma in Canada, in fact, the Ontario Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development implemented the right to disconnect from work which came into effect December 2, 2021. These requirements were



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added to the Employment Standards Act in 2000 (ESA).<sup>17</sup> This law gives workers in Ontario the right to disconnect from work once their working day is complete. This same consideration is not provided for entrepreneurs. The Ontario Government is aware of the profound impacts that burn-out has on workers, their families, and the overall economy, yet there seem to be limited resources or supports for women entrepreneurs who are attempting to balance their work and personal life.

#### 4. LACK OF REPRESENTATION

**Promoting increased representation for women entrepreneurs:** Recognizing the importance of gender and cultural diversity in entrepreneurship and the significant potential of female-led businesses, with a goal to foster an environment that encourages and supports increased representation for women entrepreneurs in Ontario.

While government programs at all levels have made significant progress toward women-centred supports, there is much to be done. The need to see women in leadership roles, making decisions, and enacting changes is a necessity for social progression and development. The Government of Canada, the provincial government and private businesses must create opportunities for women to take on these leadership and decision-maker positions to make essential and lasting change.

#### 5. ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS

**Enhancing access to resources and supports, including mental health professionals, for women entrepreneurs:** Recognizing the crucial role that mental health care supports plays in the success and wellbeing of women entrepreneurs, with the goal of creating an inclusive and supportive environment by increasing access to essential mental health resources, with a specific focus on timely access.

Access to proper wellness resources and support is fundamental to the success of women entrepreneurs. This could include a direct line to mental health professionals, 24-hour access to personal care such as a phone application, and access to an Entrepreneurial Wellness Systems Navigator. Women entrepreneurs are advocating for easy access to resources and support, especially during times of crisis and stressful situations. All levels of government must create access to a robust support system specific to women entrepreneurs who struggle with the overwhelming entrepreneurial challenges that vastly impact their mental health. Whether through funding or collaborative partnerships, the availability of these resources and support would contribute significantly to women entrepreneurs' resilience, growth, and overall success in the competitive business environment.







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