

# Putting people, equity and inclusion at the centre of climate action

Pembina Institute Thought Leaders' Forum

Summary Report

April 2023



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## Pembina Institute Thought Leaders' Forum: Summary Report

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The Pembina Institute is a national charity and non-partisan think tank that advocates for strong, effective policies to support Canada's clean energy transition. We employ multi-faceted and highly collaborative approaches to change. Producing credible, evidence-based research and analysis, we consult directly with organizations to design and implement clean energy solutions, and convene diverse sets of stakeholders to identify and move toward common solutions.

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The Pembina Institute acknowledges that the work we steward and those we serve spans across many Nations. We respectfully acknowledge the space our organization is headquartered in as the traditional and ancestral territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy, comprised of the bands Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai, the Îyârhe Nakoda Nations, including the bands of Goodstoney, Chiniki, and Bearspaw, and the Tsuut'ina Dené. These Lands are also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta – Region 3 whose Peoples have deep relationships with the Land.

These acknowledgements are some of the beginning steps on a journey of several generations. We share them in the spirit of truth, justice, reconciliation, and to contribute to a more equitable and inclusive future for all of society.

We would like to thank the participants of the Thought Leaders' Forum for their valued feedback and participation: Emma Ash, Alberta Regional Council of Carpenters; Julie Boyce, Student Energy; Mike Chick, Calgary Chamber of Commerce; Ruvimbo Chinake, Shell Canada; Maya Douglas, MLT Aikins; Alexandra Edie, ASWN; Alyssa Friesen, Natural Resources Canada; Sharleen Gatcha, Hestia Consulting; Gillian Hynes, Rise Consulting; Sheila Innes, Solar Alberta; Michelle James; Women's Centre of Calgary; Angeline Letourneau, PhD Candidate; Richard McLennan, Armour Equipment; Roslyn McMann, BluEarth Renewables; Maura Peppinck, YWCA Calgary; Rachael Pettigrew, Mount Royal University; Margaret Reid; Shell Canada; Marie Sereneo, Energy Futures Lab; Maha Silini, Calgary Chamber of Commerce; Katie Smith-Parent, Young Women in Energy; Kelley Thompson, Energy Futures Lab; Bonnie Veness, Suncor Energy Foundation.

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des genres Canada

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Participants at Putting people, equity and inclusion at the centre of climate action

## Executive summary

At the Pembina Institute, we acknowledge that the changes required to reach net-zero by 2050 can also be a powerful opportunity to address systemic exclusion of equity-seeking groups, such as women and gender-diverse people.

On March 22, 2023, the Pembina Institute hosted *Putting people, equity and inclusion at the centre of climate action*, the second Women in Energy Transition Thought Leaders' Forum in Calgary, Alberta. This full-day workshop built upon a [forum in September 2022](#), which focused on recommendations published in a recent [Pembina Institute report](#) to advance an equitable net-zero transition.

At this forum, participants were asked to dive more deeply into two recommendations:

1. Supporting intersectional gender-diverse leadership, including mentorship, sponsorship or funding opportunities that support that goal.
2. Creating flexible and safe workplaces that are both physically safe but also psychologically and culturally safe.

The Pembina Institute welcomed experts from the province's environmental, social and governance

sectors, including representatives from major oil and gas corporations, government, gender equity and clean energy advocates. The format for the day included speaker sessions combined with small group discussions to highlight emerging trends for equity and clean energy in Canada. This document provides a summary of the speaker sessions and discussions, including direct feedback from attendees and considerations for future development.

In this report, we have summarized the plenary sessions and annotated the direct feedback we received from our participants. We recognize Pembina Institute's position as one voice in a sea of many. We have utilized this event and the knowledge incurred from past engagements to summarize and identify specific opportunities for growth. We found that barriers to a thriving energy economy are linked to the inclusion of women at every stage of their career in the energy industry. Further, the effects of these barriers are often compounded and tend to discourage women and gender-diverse individuals from entering or staying in their existing positions — ultimately affecting the health and vitality of Alberta's economy.



# Introduction

## Context: Energy and gender

An energy transition is occurring—global oil demand will peak before 2030 and decline steadily afterwards.<sup>1</sup> Alberta and all of Canada need to prepare for a decrease in demand for oil and gas and an increase in cleaner energy sources. Achieving net-zero emissions by 2050 will increase labour market demands for workers with the skills required to support clean energy infrastructure. However, Canada’s energy sector is the largest driver of the national wage gap<sup>2</sup> and its workers and leaders include some of the lowest numbers of women and visible minorities in the country.

Canada’s energy sector has an opportunity to link climate action and socioeconomic development, by making the transition to cleaner sources of energy an equitable one. But the journey to an equitable net-zero is complex and winding. Steps to achieve a new, more equitable energy economy highlight the need to challenge current cultures and systemic inequities that are present in — but not limited to — Canada’s traditional energy sector.

Over 50% of Canada’s population identify as women, yet barriers to career longevity and inclusion continue to prevent women and gender-diverse people from participating equitably in the profitable and growing energy sector. Women represent as little as 20% to 30% of workers in some parts of the energy sector. Additionally, they are often heavily represented in roles with lower pay and less opportunities for advancement and growth.

The investments made in the 2023 Federal Budget show that Canada is ready to compete with the U.S. and Europe when it comes to the clean economy; however, without addressing the disproportionate barriers that equity-seeking groups currently face in the traditional oil and gas industry, there is a significant risk that those barriers will be replicated in the new energy economy and underrepresented groups will not be set up to take up the opportunity.

## Background to the day

The Pembina Institute has spent the past three years prioritizing dialogues about what is required for an equitable energy transition through focus groups, conferences and forums:

- Thought Leaders Forum: [Centering gender equity in Alberta’s energy transition](#) (Sept. 15, 2022)
- [Women in Energy Transformation](#), a series of four online and in-person events held with GLOBE Series
- Women Leading Energy, [COP27 Roundtable](#) (Nov. 14, 2022)
- Alberta Election, Gender equity discussion group (Jan. 19, 2023)

Additionally, the Pembina Institute has published two reports:

- [Equitable Net-Zero: Recommendations for advancing gender equity in Alberta’s shift to net-zero](#)
- [Women in Alberta’s Energy Transition: A review of barriers to participation and leadership](#)

We’re proud that in the last year the Pembina Institute reorganized to add a new group called Equitable Transition. This group is concerned with ensuring that climate policies also advance co-benefits including equity in the energy workplace and good jobs in clean energy.



Thirty participants represented a variety of fields

## Event participation

We would like to thank the participants for their meaningful participation in the Thought Leaders' Forum. We welcomed 30 participants, representing government, industry, non-profit and academia.

## Event goals

- To connect with others working in environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues in the energy sector
- To discuss how government, industry and workers can build a diverse and innovative Alberta workforce.
- To contribute to the Pembina Institute's ongoing work to advance equity within a diversifying energy sector.

We hope that the following pages give you a sense of what was discussed at the event. If you have questions or concerns, please write to [kendalla@pembina.org](mailto:kendalla@pembina.org).

## Session 1

# Diversifying power as we diversify power sources

## Why now is the time to integrate DEI into energy and climate policy

Speaker: Binnu Jeyakumar, interviewed by Kendall Anderson

*Binnu Jeyakumar is the Director of Electricity at the Pembina Institute. Her portfolio includes policy around managing the phase-out of coal power, integrating renewables, and modernizing the grid. She has expertise in fossil fuel and renewable generation technologies, community energy, sustainability and strategy development. Before joining the Pembina Institute, Jeyakumar worked as a plant and performance engineer at TransAlta generating facilities in Alberta, Ontario, and Mexico. She currently serves on the board of Blue Green Canada.*

The energy sector is undergoing a fundamental shift towards the favourable economics of clean energy technologies. The desire for climate action is a global phenomenon, not one unique for Canada. Many major energy companies that lead Alberta's oil and gas sector have set targets to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 or earlier. The investment and reimagination of the energy industry does not mean the immediate

elimination of the oil and gas sector — technology to reduce GHG emissions is beneficial to Canada's environment and position in international energy markets. Diversification can address the unstable boom-and-bust cycles created by a monopolized economy.

Although Alberta has been known for Canadian oil and gas production and export, it is now the renewables capital in Canada. Recently, there have been multiple instances where solar has out-performed coal in energy production by six hours per day.<sup>3</sup> Alberta has the resources to become a leader in clean energy, but increasing tension from conflicting perceptions needs to be addressed before the window of opportunity closes. Many Alberta communities that are dependent on traditional energy production have concerns about transitioning away from those industries, which drive their municipal revenue and economic security. At the same time, renewable energy developers have concerns

about being able to fulfill the labour needed to advance a clean economy that is competitive in global markets. Jeyakumar spoke to the importance of a community-focused perspective when addressing the impacts of the transition.

Hesitancy to innovate the way that Canada, and especially Alberta, approaches energy production has impacts on the environment, labour market and economy. There is a lack of representation and retention of women and diverse identities in the sector as a whole. Barriers, such as the highest gender wage gap, prevent women and other diverse identities from wanting to participate in Alberta's energy workforce. Canada needs to tap into the talent potential of women (who make up over 50% of our population), newcomers (nearly 100% of Canada's labour force growth<sup>4</sup>) and other diverse identities who have the skills we need for a new energy economy.

Jeyakumar's experience in the energy sector started as a young engineer working in coal power facilities. Throughout her years of experience and career progression, she has never had a woman engineering boss. After transitioning out of a technical career and moving into energy policy, Jeyakumar continues to see a lack of diversity at the decision-making level: "This is where big ideas are shared and attempts are made to design policy solutions that affect millions of lives... and women are consistently under-represented at these tables. That cannot continue to be the case if we want to ensure that these policies result in an equitable

economy," she said.

Change cannot be made without a unified partnership between government, industry and community members. Policy design needs to include ambitious outcomes for DEI compliance in industry, and allocation of capital for projects that advance gender equity. Some examples of significant policy include the Interim Sustainable Jobs Plan, commitments in the 2023 federal budget and the Clean Energy Regulation. Additional investments into social policy will aid in creating a new energy sector that is attractive and sustainable. A diversified and decarbonized economy is possible with measures, policies and programs that are designed to actualize real change.



Kendall Anderson and Binnu Jeyakumar

## Session 2

# Supporting intersectional gender-diverse leadership

## How diversity on boards and at the leadership level sets the tone

Speaker: Dr. Rachael Pettigrew

*Dr. Rachael Pettigrew is an Associate Professor at the Bissett School of Business at Mount Royal University in Calgary. Her research agenda focuses on gender in the workplace, organizational culture, and policy. Her current Social Sciences and Humanities Research of Canada*

*(SSHRC)-funded research focuses on gender-diverse boards, and individuals' experiences, aspirations, and barriers faced on the path to board work.*

The underrepresentation of women and gender-diverse

people is an issue at every stage of employment in the energy sector, but especially at the senior/executive and board level. Although this issue is not isolated to the energy sector, structural change must occur at the highest level for reformation to occur. Current data finds that 20% of boards in Canada do not have any women or gender-diverse members and only 4% to 10% of boards have representation of racial/ethnic diversities. Board diversification can be a solution to address deep-rooted, systemic issues in organizations — such as wage gaps, workplace violence, difficulties with retention and effective decision-making.

Pettigrew’s research, conducted in partnership with Chantel Cabaj of DirectHer Network and funded by Social Sciences and Humanities Research of Canada, observed trends and barriers experienced by women and gender-diverse board members. The study sample included 358 individuals with a majority working in the private sector, having household incomes above \$200,000 and employment in mid- to top-level management. Even for women and gender-diverse individuals with successful careers and accomplishments, Pettigrew noted, “entry into board work is almost always in not-for-profits.” She explained “there are fewer real and perceived barriers to board work in not-for-profit”. Women and gender-diverse individuals have disproportionately less access to for-profit board membership due to a lack of sponsorship, past board experience, career stage, training, gender bias and confidence in their ability to be included.

Challenges to understanding what meaningful diversity is and what it looks like is complex. For example, vertical occupational segregation is a constant reality for women and gender-diverse professionals seeking board experience. Opportunities for career progression and advancement are limited because of gender identity. Gender diversity is often seen as a less desirable trait for higher levels of leadership and governance.

However, compliance quotas for representation are not necessarily a complete solution. Saturation



Dr. Rachael Pettigrew

perception is a common assumption for women and gender-diverse individuals. Pettigrew explained that this occurs when diversity is believed to represent a set number of ‘otherness’. This prevents women and other marginalized identities from seeking positions on boards where there is already some diverse representation, because they feel that their “spot” is already taken.

Systems and cultures that marginalize women from participating in the energy sector must be addressed at the executive and board level for tangible change to occur. Groupthink occurs when there is not enough cognitive diversity and has the potential to impede effective board decision-making and consensus oversight. Change is necessary for Canada to advance a net-zero industry and economy — that time is now. It is not difficult to recognize the social and governance benefits of leadership and employee diversification. Industry has the opportunity to address their organizational issues and integrate equitable changes from the top down. Developing industry-specific skills matrices that prioritize cognitive diversity and transparent succession pathways is a practical solution for many boards in Alberta’s energy sector. There is urgency to attract and retain the necessary skilled workers, leaders and board members (many of whom are women) needed to grow and thrive in Canada’s new energy economy.



## What we heard

# Advancing diverse leadership

Following the session with Pettigrew, participants were asked to provide their feedback on what needs to be done to advance diverse leadership in Alberta's energy sector. These were the themes that arose from participant's responses:

### Allyship matters; headcount does not equal inclusion

- Discriminatory perceptions on leadership capabilities is often based on identity, career performance and progression similar to the current leader. Diverse and equitable leadership should be modelled at the highest level of seniority.
- Need a more diverse approach for what "leaders" should look like — and what they should prioritize and reward.
- Efforts to overcome the harmful effects of prejudice and bias need to start with leaders and decision-makers.
- Leaders should engage their employees on what implicit or explicit discrimination looks like at their workplace. (e.g. Do employees with disabilities have access to flexibility and appropriate workplace accommodation?)
- Employees should be allowed a balance between their personal and professional life without forcing a choice to prioritize one and risk losing the other.
- Diversity and inclusion are more than just a number. Opportunities to advance should be offered to diverse talent pools with intersectional skills matrices.

### Women experience unique barriers to career advancement and lack intersectional accommodation by their employers

- Toxic workplace culture and glass ceilings deter women from entering and staying in Canada's energy sector.

- This is true for women even before they enter the workforce and affects their decisions about educational pathways.
- Underrepresentation, gendered wage gaps and workplace violence are systemic issues that require the direction of leadership to change.
- Women have greater unpaid caregiving responsibilities due to societal and cultural expectations. These expectations are often not accommodated by workplaces, and are penalized.
- If organizations do not consider intersectional accommodation, women will continue to avoid careers in energy. With increasing need for clean energy workers, Canada cannot afford to ignore half of the population.

### Government can advance equitable, intersectional policy to hold the energy sector accountable

- Government should utilize investments and commitments to net-zero to analyze the effectiveness of current labour laws and policies.
- Identity-based wage gaps and talent pool deficits should be prioritized.
- Social policy (e.g. affordable and accessible childcare, intersectional labour laws, benefit-agreements for impacted communities, etc.) needs to be a part of Canada's net-zero pathway.
- Equitable policies should be developed at the workplace, community and social level.



## Session 3

# Creating flexible and safe workplaces

Workplaces must be physically, psychologically and culturally safe

Speaker: Emma Ash

*Emma Ash works for the Carpenters Regional Council – Alberta as the Education Coordinator, Apprenticeship Liaison and SME Coordinator. She is a Journeyman Scaffolder by trade, third-generation union member and from a family of skilled trade workers, including her mother who began working as a labourer in the early 1980s. Ash sits on her Local’s Executive Board and is Chair of the Sisters in the Brotherhood Committee for Alberta. She currently works on programing to help support recruitment and retention into the skilled trades, including workplace culture to help support equity, diversity and inclusion.*

Representation in Alberta’s energy sector is often viewed from a corporate perspective: who is sitting at a desk or found at watercooler conversations. However, the impacts of inequity are often compounded for underrepresented identities working in field, labour and shiftwork positions. These roles are often fulfilled by those in the trades.

Skilled tradespeople such as welders, pipefitters, electricians, millwrights and scaffolders are critical to the energy sectors – both conventional and renewable. Yet, many women and gender-diverse individuals, like Ash, find themselves to be the only ones on jobsites who look like them. Only 8.6% of employed tradespersons in Alberta are women<sup>5</sup> even though women make up 40.2% of Alberta’s labour force.<sup>6</sup> When Ash began her career as a scaffolder, underrepresentation made her feel like she had to work harder than her male co-workers to gain respect, but even with her effort she often felt like she did not belong.

The global shift to net-zero energy production and carbon neutralization relies on the availability of trained tradespeople able to develop and maintain clean technology and infrastructure. Current barriers and exclusionary practices are impeding the recruitment and retention of women into highly valued positions in the skilled trades. Ash noted how many hurdles she experienced on a daily basis. These disadvantages

included improper fitting PPE provided by her employers, increased risk of layoffs, harassment and a feeling like she could not address these barriers without fear of consequence. The cumulation of these daily afflictions creates an environment without psychological safety for women and many other individuals on trades worksites.



Emma Ash

Improved recruitment, retention, employee engagement, enhanced productivity and profit levels are outcomes of workplaces who prioritize psychological safety.<sup>7</sup> Systems to improve psychological safety can include unbiased procedures for reporting and investigations, education and training, change management, supportive resources, sponsorship by leaders and implementation governance. Ash found she could mentor apprentices on jobs to create change. She discovered that building a culture of psychological safety and inclusion resulted in higher productivity and general happiness on worksites. She remarked, “equity, diversity and inclusion are for everyone... it can begin small, like eye contact or even well fitted gloves that would otherwise be disregarded.”

Ash currently oversees programs such as Women’s Employment Readiness Program, Apprenticeship Service Program, Be More than a Bystander and

JEDI, which are working in collaboration with trades programs and employers to increase the number of women in trades and secure work for them. She additionally sits on the technical committee that has partnered with Canadian Standards Association to form a baseline for EDI training and develop a model that can be adopted by the construction industry.

Addressing the growing need for a solidified Canadian labour force can be done through the combined efforts of psychologically safe workplaces and improved representation of diverse individuals in the energy sector. Government and industry leaders can pave a new path for a clean energy future that utilizes the array of talent available in women and other equity-seeking communities.

## What we heard

### Safety as a precursor to inclusion

Participants were asked to provide feedback on the concept of improving psychological safety in Alberta's energy sector. Their responses identified current and future opportunities for industry and government that are unique to Alberta's context. The following statements display the cross-section of recurrent themes expressed by our participants:

#### The 'old boys club' of Alberta's energy sector is not safe for anyone

- Alberta's energy sector lacks diversity and inclusion for individuals who fall outside of the identity status quo.
- Discrimination experienced by those with gender, race, class or culture diversity is often dismissed and leads to further exclusion.
- Systems built on fear of reprisal, inferiority and patriarchy do not benefit any individual, even men.
- A lack of psychological safety prevents the energy sector from moving beyond stigmas and stereotypes which affect Alberta's access to needed talent.

#### We need benchmarks for determining psychological safety

- Explicit measures are needed to hold workplaces accountable to occupational health, safety and wellness.
- Governments and regulatory bodies should work towards developing frameworks of testing the validity of workplace procedures.
- Recommendations to the provincial government

include the reintegration of GBA+ and embedding psychological safety training into OHS requirements.

- Grants and incentives should be used as preliminary tools to motivate changes in organizational structures and workplace psychological safety.

#### Growing a base for Alberta workers

- Alberta's economic landscape is full of opportunities for a diverse and sustainable energy industry. If Alberta focuses too much on its oil and gas sector, there is a risk it could miss out on significant opportunities to grow and diversify its economy by investing in renewables.
- There is growing concern about the demographics of Alberta's labour force, which is aging and losing young workers. For example, even though Calgary has one of the fastest growing populations, there is a rapid decline of 20 to 24-year-olds.<sup>8</sup> More needs to be done to draw young people to Alberta.
- Young Canadians will be deeply impacted by climate action. Belief in the government to respond effectively to climate change is a pertinent factor for where the next generation of Canadian workers will choose to live.

# Considerations and next steps

Over the last three years, Pembina Institute staff have researched, published and engaged at the intersection of clean energy and equity. Through this work, we have heard a consistent desire — from representatives of government, industry and community — for an energy transition that is equitable. And we have been encouraged to see the ways that the Pembina Institute’s work in clean energy intersects with many other areas of social and economic policy.



Participants at table discussion

The benefits of a diverse workforce in a growing, diversified energy sector are within reach, but there is more work to be done — and true leadership is needed.

Climate plans that are made by government and industry must not merely work to solve the technical challenge of climate. They must also actively include workers and communities, current and future, in the decision-making. They must ensure a diverse range of Canadians are positioned and supported to take up the opportunities of a clean energy transition.

We want to see government tax dollars and private capital — along with private and public policies — ensure that climate investments go hand-in-hand with increasing diversity in the workplace and offering clean energy solutions at commercial and residential levels in equitable ways.

We encourage key voices in gender equity, diversity, equity and inclusion and others — many of whom were represented in focus groups, interviews and thought leaders’ forums — to continue advancing climate leadership while advancing their issue areas.

The Pembina Institute believes that our country has what it needs to innovate a sustainable and clean future. There is a responsibility on every Canadian to ensure that we meet our commitments to net-zero emissions and put people, equity and inclusion at the centre of climate action.

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## Additional considerations

The full extent of feedback and knowledge shared at this Thought Leaders’ Forum could not be annotated in this report. Some of the other areas identified for further research and reform were:

- Labour laws and access to fair occupational accommodations.
- Qualification translations and credential recognition for newcomers to Canada.
- Regulating lending practices to energy corporations by financial institutions and private capital groups.
- Accessibility and increased funding for family-centred social programs in remote areas, such as childcare and flexible work schedules for caregivers.
- Legislation to protect and support individuals who have experienced gender-based violence or harassment at the workplace.
- Qualitative and quantitative means testing and ethical data collection for measuring industry-specific initiatives.
- Standardized measures related to DEI education, training, competencies and demographics.

# Endnotes

- 1 Pembina Institute, *The Future of Oil in the Energy Transition* (2023). <https://www.pembina.org/pub/future-oil-energy-transition>
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- 4 Calgary Chamber of Commerce, *Unlocking our Talent Potential: Part 1: Refining our immigration policies to grow our talent pool* (2022). <https://www.calgarychamber.com/unlocking-our-talent-potential>
- 5 Statistics Canada, "Proportion of women and men employed in occupations, annual, inactive" January 6, 2023. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410033502>
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- 7 Standards Council of Canada, *Psychological Safety and Health in the Workplace* (2013). <https://www.csagroup.org/article/canca-z1003-13-bnq-9700-803-2013-r2018/>
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