



**Pre-Budget
Submission 2026**

Putting People First

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Pre-Budget Submission - 2026

MGEU's Priorities for the 2026 Provincial Budget

INTRODUCTION

On behalf of the 33,000 members of the Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union (MGEU), we are pleased to provide recommendations to support the development of the 2026 Provincial Budget.

MGEU members are proud to provide services in all areas of the public sector including government departments, crown corporations, health care, education, child welfare, social services, and arts and culture. We all rely on these critical public services day-to-day or when crisis hits our families, our communities, and our Province.

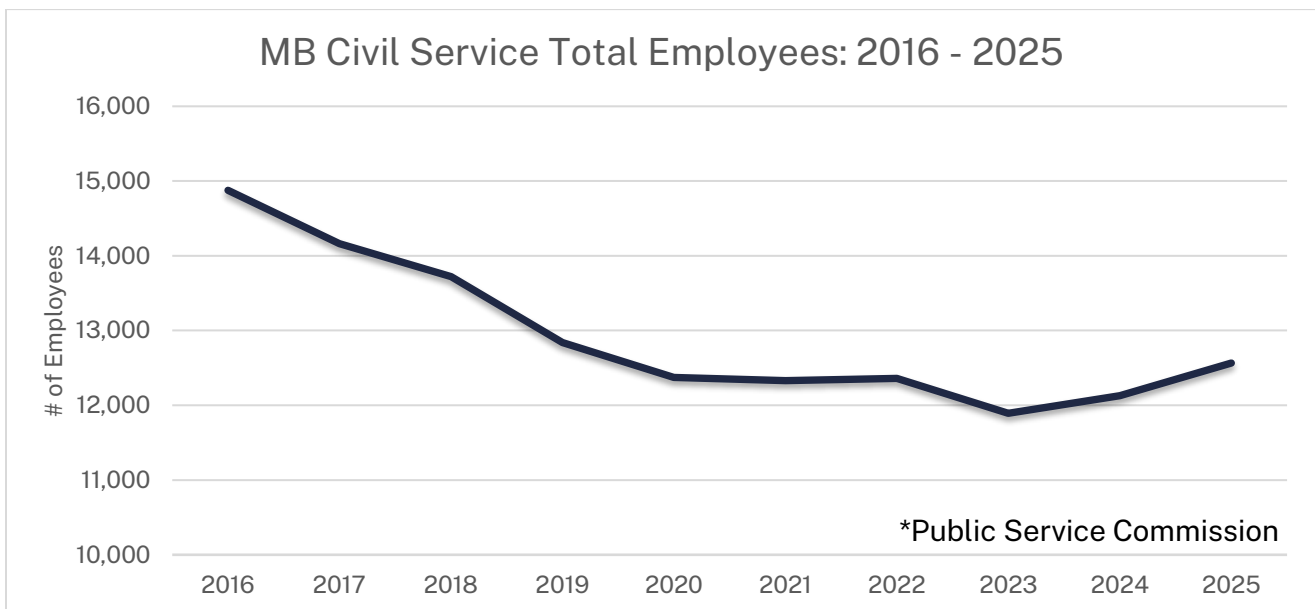
Manitobans have been through very challenging times in recent years - from a global pandemic, raging wildfires, winter storms, to drought and flooding, all amidst a trade war that is constraining economic growth and a barrage of threats to our sovereignty from external forces. Additionally, members' pay cheques are being eroded by the rapidly rising cost of living as families struggle to cover their bills.

The best way to secure and bolster our position in times of uncertainty is to prioritize public services and the people who provide them – education to build the resilient high performing economy of tomorrow, health services to care for us when we are sick, and safe reliable infrastructure that supports our economy.

As we continue to navigate these unsettling events, we urge the Manitoba Government to forge a budget focused on the people who make our Province great – a province where we place the highest value on caring for our fellow community members and building Manitoba together.

REBUILDING THE CIVIL SERVICE

Years of cuts and chaos left Manitoba's civil service understaffed and strained. Frequent restructuring, an emphasis on cost-cutting, and limited engagement with frontline employees weakened trust and morale, contributing to members retiring or finding another job and making recruitment more difficult. As experienced workers retired or moved on, the loss of institutional knowledge reduced capacity and service effectiveness. Increasing staffing levels, improving working conditions, and rebuilding the relationship with employees will take sustained effort over several years.



The current government has charted a different course through acknowledgment of the issues facing members in the civil service, negotiating contracts in good faith, and beginning the work of repairing depleted public services. However, these efforts have not gone far or fast enough to address the staffing crisis. Data tracking the number of staff in the Civil Service is a stark reminder of the work left to do. There are still 2,300 fewer people to provide services to Manitobans than there were in 2016. Some examples of service areas under strain include the Wildfire Service, the Department of Innovation and New Technology, Custody Corrections, snow plow operations, and traffic court.

Wildfire Service Under Pressure

MGEU hosted a debrief with members of the Wildfire Service following the exceedingly challenging 2025 fire season, which required a large-scale response from different orders of government from several jurisdictions, multiple organizations and many departments. Issues outlined by members centred around short staffing, under-resourcing, and the need for better training.

A member who participated in the debrief stated that, “Across all positions here, we’re short staffed... we just don’t have the capacity here in Manitoba.” Another noted, “you’re just hanging on by the skin of your teeth...”

CBC reported on the staffing issues in the Wildfire Service writing that, “When wildfires began rapidly spreading across Manitoba in May — the start of a fire season that forced 32,000 out of their homes — the province was short dozens (64) of fire rangers, and 25 per cent of its wildfire division positions were vacant...”

The consequence of short staffing is that there are not enough crews to attack and manage small fires before they become large fires that require exponentially more resources and threaten communities and vast natural areas. Members provided numerous other recommendations that can be found in the follow up report, [Burnt Out - A Workers' Perspective from Manitoba's 2025 Wildfire Season](#).



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Wildfire Service Member

Crisis in Corrections

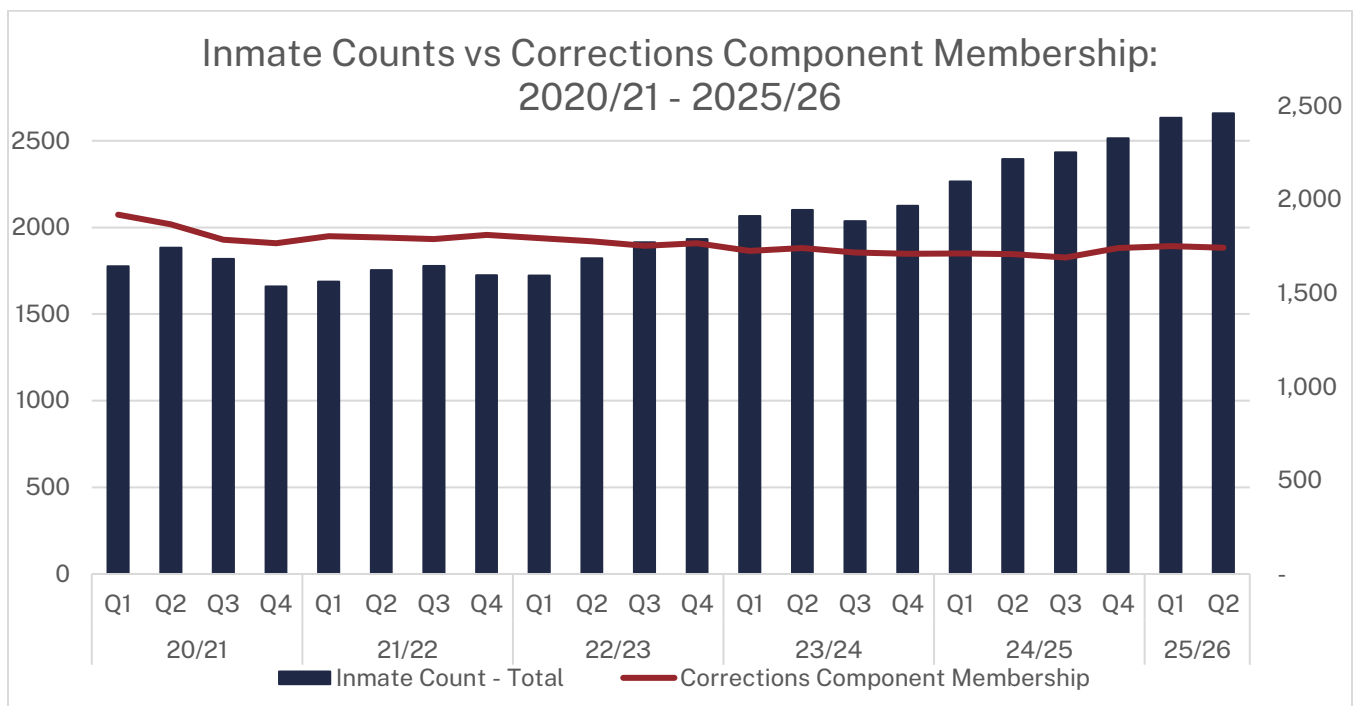
Short-sighted decision making has led to a brewing crisis in Manitoba Justice that could erupt into a full-scale emergency at any time. The ill-advised closures of the Dauphin and Aggasiz Correctional Centres coupled with aggressive measures to reform pre-trial release and bail conditions has predictably resulted in a spike in inmates. With less capacity and fewer staff, Corrections members ranked overcrowding and understaffing as the most pressing issues they currently face everyday at work. Of the 469 Corrections Component members who responded to a November 2025 survey, 77 percent say overcrowding has gotten “a lot worse” in the past two years (plus another 13 percent “a little worse”), and 89 percent say overcrowding contributes severely/significantly to unsafe situations. A further 67 percent say their facility is short-staffed every shift or several times a week, a situation characterized by one member as follows: “We are consistently in survival mode with reacting to incidents... we do not have time, spaces or staffing to apply programming or interventions... It feels like we are all just waiting for something terrible to happen before the funding and resources will be seen as a priority.”

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Corrections Component Member

From 2020-21 to 2025/26, the number of inmates has increased by 880 - a 50 percent increase. During the same period, the number of Corrections staff has decreased by 176 (9 percent).

Despite the warnings of corrections members and MGEU leadership, the response from decision makers has not met the urgency required to either manage inmate counts or increase capacity with additional staffing resources and infrastructure to safely and securely house the rising number of inmates.



Innovation and New Technology

The newly created Department of Innovation and New Technology is the Government of Manitoba's central agency responsible for IT and business transformation strategy, policy, and service delivery. It hosts a variety of service areas including Digital and Technology Solutions (DTS), which is tasked with maintaining and modernizing the government's information and communications technology. Given the derelict condition of Manitoba's legacy IT systems and the demand for more online tools to enhance public service delivery, it is highly concerning that the Department has a vacancy rate of 33 percent.

The gaping lack of resources has been systematically backfilled using costly external consultants working alongside public service workers. Dependency on consultants creates a variety of issues including poor communication, scope creep, lack of context, and general disorganization and frustration. There are encouraging signs that Departmental leaders are working to rebalance the ratio of external to internal IT professionals. However, it will require more competitive compensation, training opportunities, and a dynamic work environment that attracts new talent and retains the institutional knowledge of existing employees.

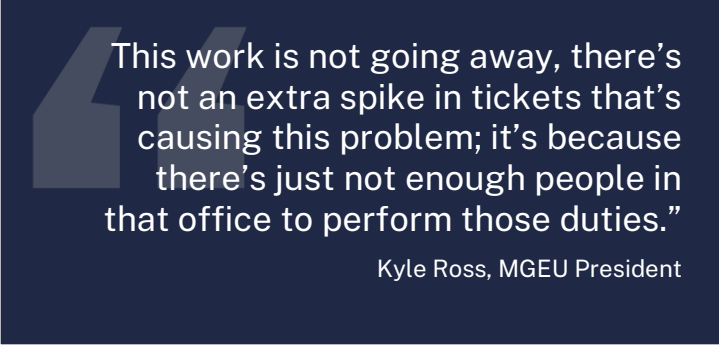
Snow Plow Operations

Manitoba winters are notorious for bringing heaps of snowfall and blustery conditions requiring frequent snow clearing services. A recent agreement to pilot a 24/7 plow crew on the Perimeter Highway is an approach that will have the best results if there are enough crew members and modern equipment to do the job. There are currently over 60 vacant Operator positions in the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure – members who head out in treacherous conditions to ensure safe travel for their fellow travellers. Members cite wage rates that haven't kept pace with private industry as a key issue in recruiting and retaining these skilled operators. Urgent action is needed to make sure the personnel are in place to ensure roads are clear and passable.

Traffic Court Hours Reduced

The widespread understaffing of the Civil Service is undermining service quality and eroding public trust in public services. In late November, the Winnipeg Free Press [reported](#) that the hours at the traffic court, where tickets can be paid or disputed, were being cut short three days a week because of staffing shortages. MGEU President Kyle Ross responded stating, "We're happy to see the government is taking notice of the workers struggling to keep up, but really, we'd like to see the government put some effort into hiring people to do this work. This work is not going away, there's not an extra spike in tickets that's causing this problem; it's because there's just not enough people in that office to perform those duties."

Considering the times when most working families are busy, cutting hours at a public facing service centre creates issues. It isn't difficult to imagine the frustration of someone taking the time to leave work early, delay picking up children from daycare, travelling downtown and showing up to the office only to find a CLOSED sign on the door. This is not quality service to the public, and continued failure to prioritize service quality threatens to further erode public confidence in their government.



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Kyle Ross, MGEU President

These are just a few examples of ongoing staffing issues and the impact on public services. The importance of acting quickly and decisively to retain the workers in Civil Service and attract the next generation of dedicated public servants must be emphasized again. In the next 10 years, just over 67% of Manitoba's current provincial public servants will be eligible to retire. While some hiring has taken place, redoubling the effort will ensure quality services are there for the future.

We recommend that the Minister responsible for the Public Service adopt a plan to staff up the Civil Service, with staffing targets, timelines, and dedicated resources. This must include an aggressive recruitment effort and the retention of existing workers to address urgent staffing issues.

A STRONGER HEALTH CARE TEAM

MGEU represents more than 8,000 workers across Manitoba's health care system. Too often, some members of the health care team, are overlooked. These include the support and technical/professional staff in personal care homes, hospitals, and community settings who help seniors and patients live with dignity and provide the care they need.

As Manitoba's population ages, health services must keep pace with rising health care needs. Instead, the system is facing severe workforce challenges for large portions of the health-care team. For example, the vacancy rate for MGEU represented Technical/Professional members in Prairie Mountain Health (PMH) has been steadily increasing from 14 percent in 2023 to 18 percent in 2024 and is now 22 percent. These are mental health workers, pharmacists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, dieticians and many other staff who are integral to a quality health care system.

Similarly, the vacancy rate for Health Care Aide and Home Care Attendant classifications in PMH is 25 percent, leaving the region short by more than 500 positions. When services are not fully staffed, the result is increased reliance on private, for-profit agency workers to fill gaps. This approach is costly and undermines continuity of care, as temporary workers lack site and client-specific knowledge that permanent staff provide.

This government has prioritized health care investments in past budgets and has begun restoring funding levels to correspond with the actual needs in the system. These commitments have led to cautious improvement in staffing levels as PMH vacancy rates have dropped 5 percent from a 30 percent high in 2024, but now is not the time to squeeze budgets and slow the progress that is finally being made.

MGEU paramedics and communication operators in the City of Winnipeg are dealing with acutely challenging situations everyday as they witness the devastating impacts of Winnipeg's opioid crisis. The number of opioid related calls has dramatically increased from 231 in 2016 to 2,927 in 2025 according to Global News [reporting](#) from late January, 2026. A recent survey of MGEU paramedics and communication operators found that 93 percent of respondents had been exposed to violence on the job and 78 percent agree or strongly agree that they feel emotionally drained or burned out due to stress at work. Filling the 47 vacant positions would allow more time off between difficult calls and faster emergency response to patients needing care.

We recommend the government fast-track a comprehensive public health-care recruitment and retention strategy for the entire health care team and phase out the use of costly private for-profit staffing agencies.

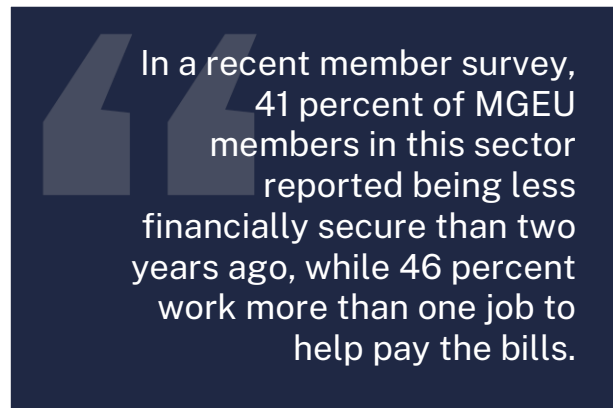
We recommend adequate funding targeted for emergency response to train and hire more ambulance and community-based paramedics.

COMMUNITY-BASED SOCIAL SERVICES

We are experiencing a cost-of-living crisis that is eroding incomes and causing real strain on Manitobans trying to stretch household budgets to cover the rising cost of groceries, housing, and clothing. [CBC news](#) recently reported that the waitlist for housing has reached over 7,500 people – up from 5,000 two years ago. During tough economic times, the need for more social housing, food security and more wrap-around programs and support are critical to the wellbeing of so many in our community.

Over 2,500 MGEU members provide services in the non-profit sector, provide a range of social services to support people living with disabilities, assist families with housing security, provide mental health and addictions services, and a wide range of programming to address day-to-day challenges Manitobans are facing. These community-based agencies are chronically underfunded and unable to make program and staffing plans into the future because of this uncertainty.

In a recent member survey, 41 percent of MGEU members in this sector reported being less financially secure than two years ago, while 46 percent work more than one job to help pay the bills. The work these members do is critical to the well-being of so many in our community and demands recognition for their commitment to providing critical public services.



We recommend a commitment to increase permanent, stable, and predictable provincial funding to stabilize the workforce and support recruitment and retention in the non-profit, community-based sector.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

Nearly 2,000 MGEU members work in Manitoba’s public schools, providing day-to-day support to students in classrooms and libraries, maintain technology, and ensure schools are clean and well-maintained. Years of stagnant funding have left school divisions under significant strain as class sizes grow and the needs of students increase.

Over 3,000 MGEU members are proud to play a vital role across Manitoba’s post-secondary institutions, supporting learning opportunities and skills training that bolster good jobs and a growing economy. Recent federal policy changes reducing caps on international student permits and misaligned updates to “in demand” occupation eligibility are putting programs at risk and straining institutional budgets. Now is the time to ramp up investment in education and training to ensure we have the workers to provide healthcare, to build major projects, and to support business development across the province.

We recommend the Provincial Government to reinvest in both K–12 and post-secondary education through stable, predictable funding that reflects the real cost of providing quality services and address recruitment and retention of staff and faculty across the education sector.

We recommend Manitoba lead a common front of Labour, business, and post-secondary leadership to pressure the federal government for targeted support to institutions facing impacts from their misguided international student policy changes.

ARTS AND CULTURE

Robust public support for arts and cultural organizations is vital to supporting and enriching the lives of Manitobans. These creative spaces help to define who we are, reflect on our shared history, and invite people from around the globe to learn about our values and traditions. MGEU members working at the Manitoba Museum, Winnipeg Art Gallery, Manitobans for the Arts, and other organizations contribute to Manitoba's rich culture by providing programming, curating exhibits, and showcasing Manitoba's talent. While some capital investments have been made, provincial operating funding has been stagnant for many years, resulting in cuts to programming and amenities. The provincial grant to the Manitoba Museum has been flat since 2007/08, a massive real cut to funding when inflationary costs are taken into consideration. Like the Manitobans for the Arts [campaign](#) says, Art Doesn't Just Happen - it's time to end the operating funding freeze for these important organizations.

We recommend that annual provincial operating grants for arts and cultural organizations keep up with the rate of inflation to ensure these institutions continue to thrive into the future.

CROWN CORPORATIONS

Manitoba's family of crown corporations are owned by the people of our Province and must be operated in their best interests. MGEU members at Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries (MBLL) and Manitoba Public Insurance know all too well when decisions are not made in public interest. The focus should be on meeting customer needs and delivering dependable service, not cuts or restructuring to meet arbitrary internal metrics.

Part of acting in the public interest is finding innovative ways to improve customer experience and deliver exemplary customer service. The balanced liquor sales and distribution model has served Manitobans well, contributing over 317 million dollars to general revenue last year. Services could be improved to meet public demand with an expansion and modernization of liquor stores, the introduction of specialty stores, and a modernized online ordering and delivery system.

Both MPI and MBLL have been heavily reliant on IT consultants in the past and must rebalance the internal resources to improve outcomes on major projects and systems maintenance. Failed decision making led to the complete mismanagement of Project Nova, with more than 160 million dollars spent without delivering even a fraction of the project's goals. Corporate leaders must learn from these mistakes and commit to a different way of operating where they consult with front line staff who have in-depth knowledge and institutional memory to advise and operationalize changes to IT systems.

We recommend MPI and MBLL hire more internal IT staff rather than rely on costly external consultants to provide more cost-effective IT professionals.

We recommend Crown corporations be guided by public service outcomes with customer experience as a core priority rather than cost cutting.

SUPPORTING QUALITY PUBLIC SERVICES

Manitobans are concerned because of the rising cost of living coupled with the uncertain context they are living in. These are precarious times where families are looking for stability and certainty in their lives, which comes in large part from stable public services. Where they don't have to worry that their child will get support when dropping them off at daycare or school. That health care is there when a loved one falls ill. Roads and bridges that are well maintained and clear in the winter easing the travel to work. Workers know that the government will support them if unfair tariffs impact on the sales or service they deliver.

Years of short-sighted decision making has caused a structural deficit. Managing current economic headwinds must not come at the expense of public services or financial supports for Manitobans, which are even more essential during an economic downturn. Unaffordable tax cuts have cut Manitoba's own source revenues so deeply in the past decade that we have little room to maneuver during this time of high uncertainty when we need investment more than ever. [Economists](#) at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives put a 1.6 billion dollar price tag on the cost of tax cuts since 2016. Implementing a high-income

tax bracket for higher income earners would help make that tax system fairer and restore some of the forgone revenue to support stronger public services.

We recommend a budget that prioritizes frontline services for Manitobans and secures the stable revenues needed to fund them, including delaying the timeline to balance the budget and increasing taxes on large profitable corporations and Manitobans with a household income of over \$200,000 per year.

CONCLUSION

During times of uncertainty, Manitobans rely on the government for stability and predictability. The reality is that political leaders have put themselves in a fiscal straitjacket through unaffordable tax cuts and unreasonable timelines to balance the budget, limiting the fiscal capacity to respond to external shocks because of short-sighted budgetary decisions over the past decade.

Now is the time to rebuild the foundation of our communities, reinvest in good family supporting jobs, and reinforce what it means to be the caring and compassionate Province we call home. Strong public services are the backbone of our Province, and it takes dedicated people to deliver them. It's time to put us back on a balanced and responsible fiscal path while hiring back workers and rebuilding our public services. Because in Manitoba we grow by putting people first.

