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HOW CANADIANS ARE HELPING MOBILIZE CHANGE IN ADVANCE OF HOSTING THE WORLD'S LARGEST CONFERENCE ON GENDER EQUALITY

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When Canada was chosen to host the fifth triennial *Women Deliver Conference* in June 2019, an opportunity was born. Not only does it mean more than 6,000 people from around the globe will be arriving in Vancouver to participate in the world's largest conference on gender equality and the health, rights, and wellbeing of girls and women — it's also a chance to mobilize Canadians to be leaders in the movement.

By Hailey Eisen



Every three years, the *Women Deliver Conference* creates a global stage for discussions on gender equality and the health, rights, and wellbeing of girls and women. And in June 2019, for the first time, that stage is coming to Canada — along with an opportunity to seize the spotlight and momentum, and rally Canadians to drive progress at home and abroad.

“As soon as the Trudeau’s made the announcement, organizations from across the country began discussing the importance of leveraging this opportunity to move the needle on gender equality here in Canada,” explains Julie Savard-Shaw, Director of Strategic Partnerships, for *Women Deliver 2019 Mobilization Canada* — an entity that was created in order to ensure that real and lasting change comes out of the Women Deliver 2019 Conference in Canada.

The Mobilization Canada campaign aims to get Canadian players, including those not traditionally focused on women and girls — businesses, banks, not for profits, charities, municipalities, academic institutions, and more — involved in an active way. Julie Savard-Shaw was hired in February 2018 to lead the way. Coming from the Prime Minister’s Office, where she provided policy advice on international, gender and immigration matters, and prior to that the international development sector, Julie had no shortage of experience in the field.

As a young woman, she’s also experienced some of what the Mobilization is looking to shed light upon in terms of women’s advancement. “I can’t tell you how often in my career I’ve had to fight to be included or have my voice heard in meetings, and how often I’ve been called *sensitive*,” Julie says.

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In order to achieve real results, the Mobilization is focusing on three key “action areas” where progress is most needed: gender responsive health systems and services, gender-based violence, and women’s economic empowerment and equal opportunity.

Armed with a clear understanding of what needs to be done, Julie has set out to secure funding and sign-up organizations to the Mobilization. “Our mandate is to get participants to join the mobilization and commit to taking at least one action to advance the conversation on gender equality in the year leading up to the conference.”

On the Mobilization website, participants will find a tool kit outlining ideas for potential actions they may take. “These range from a brown bag lunch with an expert-led seminar on preventing and dealing with sexual harassment in the workplace, to furthering the gender equality conversation via social media, to hosting a large-scale panel discussion featuring high-level influencers,” Julie says. “The idea is that everyone has a role to play and everyone can do something, no matter how small.”

The goal of having 300 Mobilizers signed on by June seems to be more than attainable given that, as of January, more than 200 had already made the commitment. To achieve progress on gender equality, the Mobilization campaign promotes cross-issue dialogue and multi-sector collaboration. A quick scroll through the list of Mobilizers shows how diverse the participants are. “The international community will be looking to Canada for leadership, and this is where that leadership begins,” says Julie.

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“While the Canadian government is making great strides in this arena, including launching the first Feminist International Assistance Policy and legislating for equal pay, there is still much work to be done at home and abroad by Canada,” says Julie. “But, it’s not just the government that’s responsible for change, the non-governmental and private sectors must step up as well.”

And, she says, the timing is perfect. “This conference comes at a time when the global terrain for girls and women continues to shift, and as progress in health, gender-based violence and economic and political participation of women is urgently needed. We’ve seen a lot of pushback on women’s rights and there have been a number of very successful social media campaigns that have brought attention to these issues — but there hasn’t necessarily been a venue where decision makers can make concrete announcements. Women Deliver presents that opportunity, and that’s why the Mobilization is so important.”

A number of events leading up to and surrounding the conference will be led by the Mobilization, giving everyone an opportunity, even those not attending the conference, to experience the impact of this global movement. “Beyond the conference, we’re hoping the connections made will spearhead something larger and create an impact that will be felt long into the future.”

To learn more about how you can join the Mobilization and take action for gender equality, visit their website at www.WeDeliver2019.ca and join the conversation on *Twitter* with #WeDeliver2019.