

LA CHARTE
CANADIENNE
DES ENFANTS



CANADIAN
CHILDREN'S
CHARTER

The Canadian Children's Charter

A Call to Action to
Respect, Protect and Fulfil
the Rights of Canada's Children

Final Version

November 20, 2018



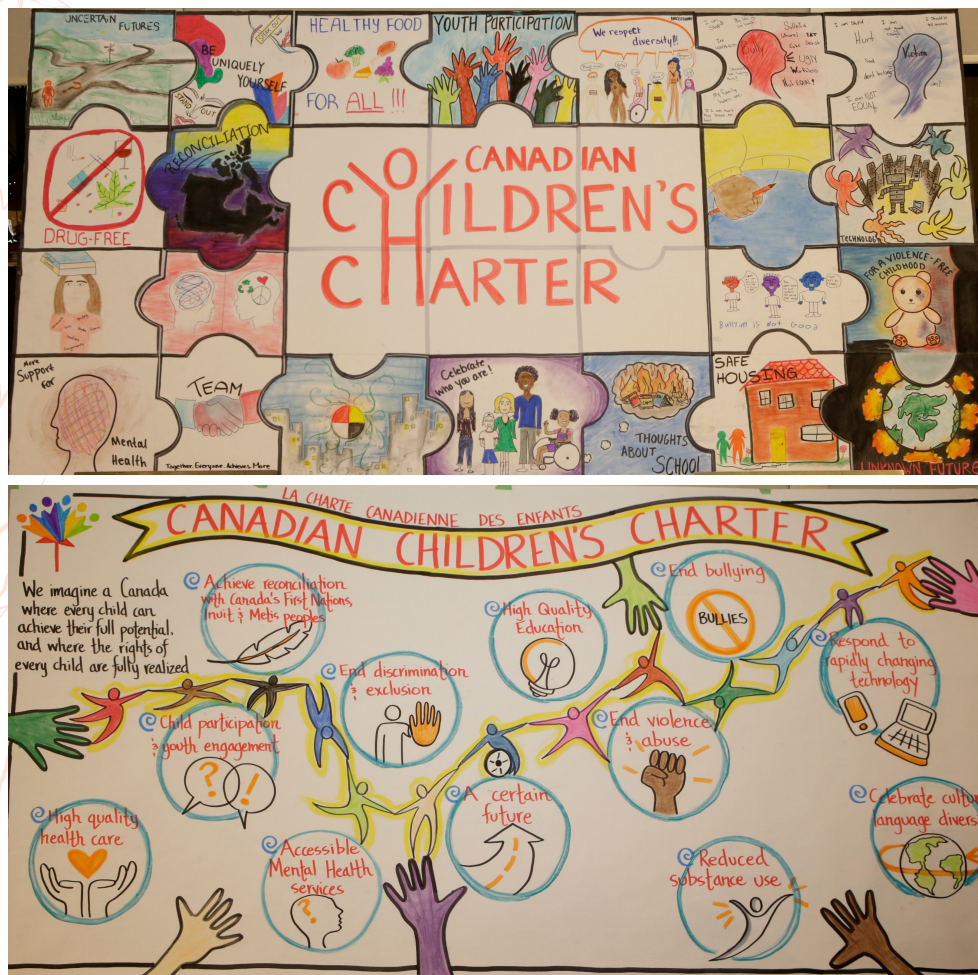
The Children's Charter: Created for Children, by Children

The Canadian Children's Charter was created with input from thousands of children and youth from coast to coast to coast. The process began in 2017, as young Canadians from all walks of life contributed their ideas through online forums, workshops and a survey.

The consultations culminated in a National Summit in Ottawa on National Child Day in November 2017, where children and youth worked together with adult allies from government, civil society and the private sector to create the first draft of the Canadian Children's Charter. The draft was released in a press conference at the National Media Gallery on Parliament Hill on November 22, 2017, and widely disseminated across the country.

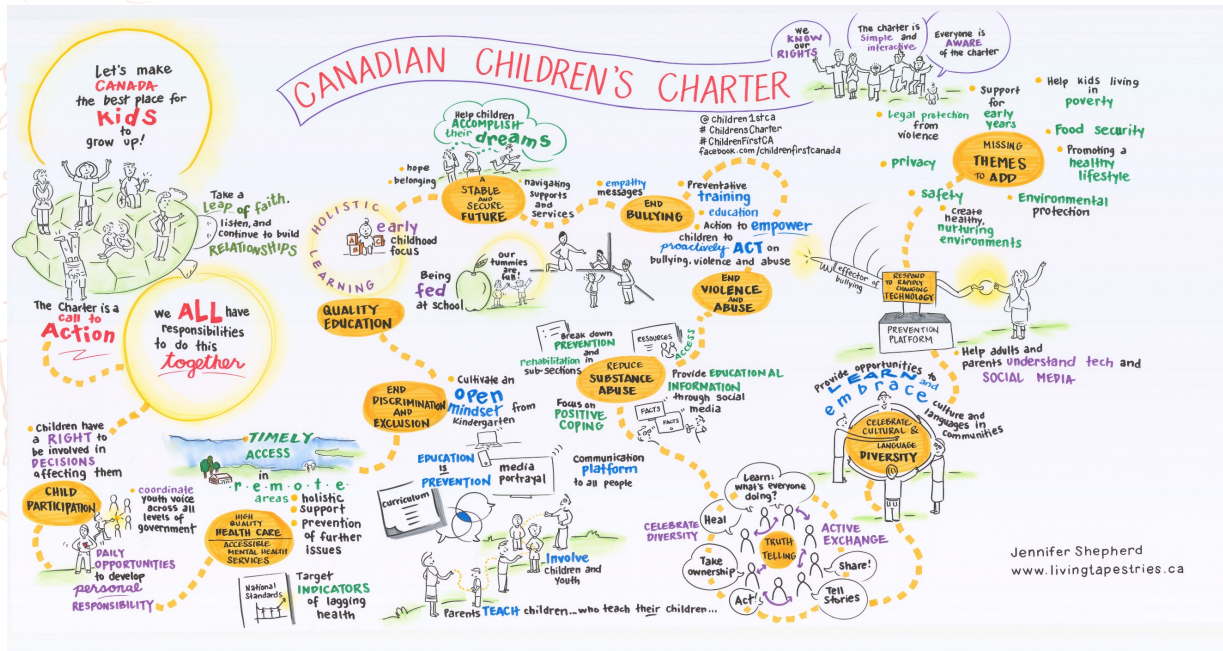
Further consultations took place in the months that followed, and children and youth gathered again at the Charter Forum in Ottawa in June 2018 to further revise the draft. A working group of children and youth then worked to finalize the document in its current format.

The Children's Charter has taken many forms, including as a written document, as well in creative forms that represent the themes and issues requiring urgent action, including pictures, drama and music.





After more than one year of consulting and engaging thousands of children and youth, this document now represents the final version of the Canadian Children's Charter. It is being released on National Child Day, November 20, 2018, and will be shared widely through ongoing education and engagement. The charter will also be shared with the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, as a part of Canada's periodic review regarding compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.



The Canadian Children's Charter will remain a living document that will be reviewed and revised in the years that follow, in order to continue to reflect the urgent priorities facing the children and youth it was created to serve.

To learn more about the Canadian Children's Charter and the role you can play in putting it into action, go to www.childrenfirstcanada.com



Who is a Child?

For the purpose of the Canadian Children's Charter, the term "child" refers to any person below the age of 18, as defined by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Vision of the Canadian Children's Charter

While many Canadians think of this as being one of the best places in the world to raise a child, that simply isn't true. Canada is ranked as the 8th most prosperous nation, yet we are ranked 25th out of 41 affluent nations for the wellbeing of our children, according to UNICEF.

New research by Children First Canada and the O'Brien Institute for Public Health, *Raising Canada*, revealed alarming trends regarding the health and wellbeing of Canada's children. There are nearly 8 million children and youth below the age of 18, representing nearly a quarter of Canada's population. While many kids are doing just fine, far too many young lives are in jeopardy:

- Canada's rate of infant mortality is among the highest of OECD countries, with the rates for Nunavut being three times higher than the national average.
- Accidents and preventable injuries continue to be the leading cause of death of children in Canada, and each year thousands of children are hospitalized due to preventable injuries.
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death for children and youth, and Canada is ranked in the top five countries for the highest child suicide rates globally.
- Hospitalizations and Emergency Department visits for mental health concerns have increased considerably over the past decade.
- Nutrition, physical activity and weight continue to need attention, with more than 25 per cent of children reportedly being obese or overweight.
- Food insecurity and inadequate housing plague far too many children: one in five children live in poverty, and one in 10 experiences moderate or severe food insecurity, with poverty rates being highest amongst indigenous children.
- Child abuse represents a public health crisis for Canada, with one in three Canadians reporting some form of child abuse before the age of 16.
- One quarter of Canada's children are vulnerable in one or more areas of development prior to entering the first grade.

Canada's future begins with children, and there is an economic and moral imperative that we act now. The Canadian Children's Charter lays out the vision and plan of action to make Canada



a world-leading country for children. It represents a shared vision for Canada's children, and an urgent call to action for government, the business community, the charitable sector, research institutes, civil society, and children themselves.

The aim of the Canadian Children's Charter is to raise public awareness and mobilize action on the part of all Canadians to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of children.

Together, we can make Canada the best place in the world for kids to grow up!

The Rights of Canada's Children

Every child has rights, and every Canadian has a role to play in fulfilling the rights of children.

In 1991, Canada ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), binding our country under international law to respect, protect and fulfill the rights of children to survival, development, protection and participation. Canada must report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2018 on the status of Canada's children, and the efforts taken to fulfill its obligations under the CRC. This moment in time presents all Canadians with the unique opportunity to reflect on progress made towards the fulfillment of children's rights, to identify the gaps that remain, and to create a plan of action to ensure every child in Canada can achieve their full potential.

In addition to the duties enshrined in the CRC, Canada has also committed to the following laws and policies to protect the rights of children:

- Optional Protocols 1 and 2 (Optional Protocol to the Convention of the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography)
- A Canada Fit for Children: a National Plan of Action
- Children: the Silenced Citizens – a Report by the Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights
- Jordan's Principle
- House of Commons All-Party Resolution to End Child Poverty by the Year 2000

Canada has also ratified or acceded to specific treaties that recognize the unique rights of specific peoples:

- Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Persons
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities



- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
- Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees

There is no shortage of promises and legally binding duties towards Canada's children. What we need now is concrete, urgent action to fulfill Canada's obligations to respect, protect and fulfill the rights of children.

It Takes a Nation

It may take a village to raise a child, but it takes a nation to raise a nation. Achieving the vision of the Canadian Children's Charter will require concerted effort on the part of all Canadians, at an individual and societal level, including: all levels of government; child and youth serving organizations such as charities, children's hospitals, and schools; the private sector; research institutes; parents and other caregivers; and children themselves.

Canadians strongly support action to improve the lives of all our children. The results of the Kids Are Not Alright national survey by Children First Canada and the Angus Reid Institute revealed that three-quarters of Canadians (73 per cent of adults and 77 per cent of children) say that young people in Canada need more support to safeguard their wellbeing and fulfill their potential. Not only do Canadians believe we have a moral imperative to act, they also believe it makes economic sense; nearly 9 in 10 Canadians say that investing in children will pay off and save the need for additional expenditures in the future.

Efforts to improve the lives of children must occur within a nation-to-nation framework, respecting the rights of indigenous peoples to self-determination and the enjoyment of their unique rights as enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Several First Nations have already taken steps to create their own Children's Charters and plans of action; these plans must be considered as a part of a wider effort across Canada to improve the lives of children.

Together, all Canadians must all rise to the collective challenge to invest in Canada's children, and take urgent action to close the gaps.



The Canadian Children's Charter: A Call to Action

We imagine a Canada where every child can achieve their full potential, and where the rights of every child are fully realized.

Canada is legally bound to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of every child as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The current reality is that the vast majority of Canadians have never learned about children's rights, and far too children do not enjoy the protection of their rights. There is a huge gap between the promises made to children, and the harsh realities that millions of children face each day due to poverty, abuse, discrimination, along with threats to the physical and emotional health.

These inequities experienced by Canada's children are not acceptable. We call upon all Canadians to rise to the collective challenge to invest in Canada's children and take urgent action to close the gaps.

We need to be able to realize our full rights and all Canadians need to support children in advocating for their rights. Every child can be an advocate. Every adult can be an ally.

We note the following issues that require urgent action so that every child in Canada can thrive.

1. Child Participation & Youth Engagement

We envision a Canada where children's voices are empowered and children are valued as equal citizens, decision makers and leaders in Canadian society.

We call for the following:

- Children have a clear voice and opportunity to lead in their schools, families, governments and communities;
- Governments at all levels have processes and structures in place to gather input from children of all ages, such as child and youth councils, community based consultations, and broad online polling;
- Communities share in the responsibility for equitable involvement of all children and youth.

2. High Quality Health Care

We envision a Canada where children are able to access high quality health care when and where they need it.

We call for the following:



- Health care that is provided free from stigma and discrimination, including sexual orientation and gender identity, socio-economic status, race, religious or cultural background, or any other status;
- Child health is promoted by supporting the development of healthy communities and families, free from poverty, discrimination and abuse;
- Preventative health measures that begin in the early years, ensuring broad access to resources which promote health (including vaccinations, clean water, nutrition, health and education);
- Children have access to the right health care providers where they live (in person or online) when they need them;
- Children have access to all recommended medical and mental health treatments and access to medications, regardless of cost and location;
- Health literacy, both physical and mental, is part of all school curricula, starting in pre-school;
- Children can access physical and mental health supports within the school system;
- Children have a voice in decisions affecting their health care;
- Federal standards for the physical and mental health of children in Canada must be established to ensure consistency across the country.

3. Reduced substance use

We envision a Canada where substance use and its stigma are reduced in order for children and families to comfortably seek professional help and care.

We call for the following:




- Programs that address the social determinants of substance use and misuse for both adults and children;
- Access to harm reduction services for adults, families, children and youth that are free from stigma;
- Evidence based programs that promote both prevention and rehabilitation;
- Youth-led programming such as peer support;
- A standard, nationwide school curricula on substance abuse and prevention;
- Education for adults, parents and all legal guardians on how they can teach children the effects of substance use and misuse;
- Children are provided with adequate information from a young age through credible sources.



4. End Discrimination, Exclusion, and Bullying

We envision a future where every child is valued, accepted and respected, and where every child is empowered to celebrate who they are.

We call for the following:

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- Empathy and respectful behavior is taught and encouraged from pre-school onwards to instill its value;
 - Education in schools, health care and other systems teach an inclusive view of history, our current society, and the value of diversity;
 - Schools teach about a variety of cultures, religions, physical, and mental conditions at every grade level, so that kids learn facts and not stereotypes;
 - Education for children on how to identify bullying and discrimination and what to do when it happens;
 - Robust and effective training for educators to address discrimination and bullying so that all schools can provide consistent approaches to these issues;
 - All people involved in incidents of bullying and discrimination receive support and education;
 - Schools, businesses, and other organizations where children or their influencers are present foster and live the values of inclusion through processes, systems, resource allocation, and infrastructure development, to make inclusion sustainable;
 - Governments should identify measurable outcomes for inclusion and diversity, and report on them;
 - Create inclusive community forums that enable diverse communities to have conversations that create action to address discrimination, bullying and exclusion.








5. Stable and Secure Future

We envision a Canada where every child is given the proper tools, resources and support towards a successful and sustainable future.

We call for the following:

Social Security

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- Address the social determinants of health and poverty that undermine the future of children in many current efforts;
 - Ensure children are supported by families and communities towards a successful future from an early age;
 - Provide children with access to trained guidance counsellors from the beginning of elementary school years;



- All children have equal access to programs and services which helps transition into adulthood.

Technology

- Broadband access for all children to benefit from education and employment opportunities;
- Children and parents are educated on how to use technology safely, positively and efficiently, including:
 - Avoiding potential online threats;
 - Optimizing parental blocking features for the protection of children;
 - Balancing daily activities and time with technology;
 - Providing a pre-screened selection of websites that are safe and secure as a resource;
 - Fostering technological competency in children from a young age;
- Responsive legal frameworks that protect young people online;
- Legal consequences and procedures to deal with those who take advantage of the privacy of children and youth.

Environment

- Safeguard the environment for future generations of children to enjoy nature;
- Highlight issues concerning climate change;
- Promote proper use and disposal of resources, composting and recycling;
- Children are given the opportunity to become leaders and advocates on projects that impact the environment.

6. End Violence and Abuse

We envision a country where children grow up protected from all forms of violence and abuse.

We call for the following:

- Legal protection from all forms of violence against children;
- All those that commit violence and abuse against children are brought to justice;
- All adults learn about their legal duty to report suspected child abuse, with emphasis on educating and training staff and volunteers who work with children;
- All Canadians have access to ongoing education on eliminating all forms of violence and abuse;
- Children and their caregivers have access to information and services to end the cycle of abuse, and access to evidence based services and supports to recover from the trauma of abuse;



- Adults receive education on the short- and long-term impacts of violence and abuse on physical and mental health;
- All levels of government fulfill their duty to protect children from all forms of harm and violence, including but not limited to systemic harm in the education, child welfare, and health care systems;
- All children and youth receive education about child abuse, how to protect themselves, and how to disclose abuse if it happens.
- Education and awareness raising for children and youth should combat stigma, and include:
 - Knowing how to find support;
 - Having the right to have their voice heard in decisions about their care;
 - Knowing how to help another child or youth suffering from violence and abuse;

7. High Quality Education

We envision an education system where schools are a truly safe space for all and offer quality education regardless of location.

We call for the following:



- Children have the opportunity to go to school in their home community and receive a high-quality education;
- Improved support for career and transition planning for young people;
- Adequate financial support to improve the accessibility of post-secondary education;
- Access to French or English education regardless of location;
- Support for First Nations, Inuit and Metis schools and communities to provide instruction in their own languages;
- Improved online access to educational services that are not available locally;
- Create more community-based learning environments;
- More inclusive educational approaches that support different learning styles;
- Increased investment in the early years of education;
- Improved focus on a broad range of skills, including:
 - Emotional intelligence
 - Fostering a fun learning environment
 - Developing social skills
 - Employing a community-based educational focus;
- Greater focus on ensuring the availability of proper nutrition for students in a school environment.



8. Celebrate Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

We envision a Canadian where everyone can express their culture and language in an accepting and inclusive environment.



We call for the following:

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- Provide experiential learning to help bridge between different cultures and communities;
 - Promoting volunteering in organizations working for diversity and inclusion;
 - Offering different language courses in schools;
 - Promote multiculturalism as a Canadian value;
 - Create a nation-wide celebration and event for diversity;
 - Preservation of First Nations, Inuit and Metis cultures and languages.

9. Reconciliation with First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples

We envision a Canada where everyone understands their role in truth and reconciliation and takes action accordingly.

We call for the following:

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- Federal, territorial, and provincial governments respect and uphold nation-to-nation relationships;
 - Schools, governments and all other parties identify the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action for which they are responsible and be accountable these actions;
 - Increased education in schools, communities and systems about First Nations, Inuit and Metis history, languages and cultures, along with education on treaties;
 - Recognition that First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples need equitable support and solutions as diverse as they are;
 - Inclusion of the equitable voice of First Nations, Inuit and Métis youth in all discussions that are relevant to their lives;
 - Appoint treaty commissioners in all provinces and territories.

