



Mitigating the Impacts of COVID-19  
on Children and Youth in Canada

# POLICIES & PROGRAMS



**CHILDREN  
FIRST**  
CANADA

**LES ENFANTS  
D'ABORD**  
CANADA

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## Executive Summary

This document builds on the success of the web-based interactive tool created by Children First Canada and Statistics Canada in March 2021. The content of this resource is a compilation of suggested and implemented policies and programs designed to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on

children and youth in Canada. The information included in this document was identified through focused research directed towards children and youth during the pandemic and grouped into the 11 categories from the interactive tool. Research for this document concluded in April 2021.

## Acknowledgments

This document was developed by Sara Bruce, Field Portfolio Analyst at Statistics Canada, while on secondment with Children First Canada. Special thanks to Statistics Canada for their commitment to harnessing data to mitigate the impact of school closures on children, and for allowing Sara to join the Children First Canada team to develop a policy document that builds on the success of the web-based interactive tool developed through our partnership. Thank you also to Sarelle Obar-Sheldon, who supported Sara as she gathered and analyzed relevant information.

COVID-19 has impacted all of us. Children have suffered in immeasurable ways as a result of school closures, and they will feel the burden for the rest of their lives. We want to thank children and youth for the incredible sacrifices they have made to keep their families and communities safe, and for the many ways they have demonstrated leadership, courage and compassion. Thank you to all of the dedicated parents, professionals and community members who are referenced in this document. You are champions for all 8 million children in this country. Together, we can make Canada the best place in the world for kids to grow up!®

## About Children First Canada

Children First Canada (CFC) is a national charitable organization that serves as a strong, effective, and independent voice for all children in Canada. CFC harnesses the strength of many organizations and individuals that are committed to improving the lives of children

in Canada, including children's charities and hospitals, research centres, government, corporations, community leaders, and children themselves. Visit [childrenfirstcanada.org](https://childrenfirstcanada.org) for more information.

# BACKGROUND

In December 2020, Statistics Canada and Children First Canada collaborated in the form of a hackathon to better understand the impacts of COVID-19 on children and families. More than 60 multi-disciplinary private sector stakeholders and public servants came together to address the following:

***How to develop a data-driven, predictive analytics tool that would allow decision-makers to better understand the potential impact of various interventions regarding school operations (from full-time, in-person education to full school closures) on: (1) the spread of COVID-19; and (2) children's well-being (e.g., mental health, learning, physical activity)?***

This hackathon resulted in 12 projects related to the impacts of school closures on children in Canada. Those projects were reviewed by Children First Canada's Youth Advisory Council (comprised of individuals aged 13-18). The council members provided feedback on the project ideas on how they would address their lived experiences of COVID-19 and school. Children First Canada and Statistics Canada took this feedback and implemented a web-based interactive tool that compiles available data highlighting the impacts of school closures on children and youth in Canada.

[School Closures and COVID-19: Interactive Tool](#)

The 11 categories reviewed in this document are drawn directly from this interactive tool.

In tandem with the tool, a virtual event entitled "Lifting the Burden on Kids" was held in February 2021 to explore the findings and recommendations of the hackathon with industry leaders and policy-makers. This event included:

- Discussions about the impact of school closures on children and youth
- An introduction to the interactive data tool
- Innovative policy solutions designed with leading experts and youth
- Examples of policy interventions that were piloted during the crisis to mitigate the unintended consequences of school closures on children, including a wraparound family program at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, as well as innovative solutions to address the need for school food programs when schools were shut down
- Breakout sessions for focused discussion and shared learnings

Building on the success of the interactive tool, this document compiles suggested and implemented policies and programs that mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and youth in Canada.

# INTRODUCTION

As with the broader world, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to be experienced by people living in what is now known as Canada.<sup>1</sup> Of significant concern is the impact (both direct and indirect) this global event has had, and will potentially continue to have, on children into the future. As a stressful and potentially traumatic event experienced by children and youth, the COVID-19 pandemic will likely be categorized as an adverse childhood experience (ACE). With this descriptor, the negative lifelong implications to the health and well-being of today's children must be acknowledged. However, mitigation of the negative life course outcomes from the pandemic is possible through successful policy and programs implemented to support and build the resilience of today's children and youth. This will, in turn, result in a future reduction in substance use, chronic disease and improve overall health in the population.<sup>2</sup>

At this time, the Government of Canada has implemented a variety of social protection responses to the pandemic. As categorized by UNICEF<sup>3</sup>, this includes family income support (by direct payments and tax credits), family allowances (Canada Child Benefit),

unemployment benefits, and social services funding for Indigenous communities (which includes measures to address food insecurity, educational and other support for children). Federal Budget 2021<sup>4</sup> (released April 19, 2021) included proposed investments to support establishing a Canada-wide early learning and child care system, funding to support youth access to skills and job opportunities, and support for projects for innovative mental health interventions for youth.

As this document was being written, the provinces and territories continued to make decisions to mitigate the spread of the disease. This included moving from in-person school to virtual school, full or partial closure of non-essential businesses, and even implementing stay-at-home orders. In tandem, other areas of the country maintained a paced trajectory to opening up the economy, a return to normative lifestyle activities, and a general adapted path forward.

Underneath the serious implications of COVID-19, the impact of school closures is possibly one of the most significant catalysts of negative consequences to children. Of note, this

1 We use the language “what is now known as Canada” to acknowledge that Canada is situated on the Traditional land of Turtle Island, and to acknowledge the oppressive impacts that settler colonialism continues to have on the land and many diverse First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples. For the purposes of this document, we will use the term Canada going forward, though we recognize that this land will always be Turtle Island.

2 (n.d.). Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) - Public Health Ontario. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/a/2020/adverse-childhood-experiences-report.pdf?la=en>

3 (2020, December 31). Supporting Families and Children Beyond ... - UNICEF Innocenti. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/Supporting%20Families%20and%20Children%20Beyond%20COVID-19%20Social%20protection%20in%20high-income%20countries.pdf>

4 (2021, April 19). Budget 2021 - Canada.ca. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.budget.gc.ca/2021/home-accueil-en.html>

particular response to COVID-19 of widespread intermittent, or lengthy, school closures and transitions to virtual learning has not historically been documented in Canada. As such, there is a lack of research to make direct projections and evaluate the long-term implications on children and youth.

Schools can provide a safe, healthy environment for children to grow and develop into healthy contributing members of Canadian society. The Canadian education system provides

children socialization with peers, food/meal programs, physical activity, creative outlets and a broader education of health, both physical and mental (community nursing, public health program access, including vaccinations of preventable illnesses). There is also access to before- and after-school child care, community engagement and connections to trusted adults. Without these resources, children who are already marginalized will be disproportionately impacted.

# LEARNING AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS

**Learn about the impacts of school closures on children’s learning and academic success from the School Closures and COVID-19: Interactive Tool.**

*Raising Canada 2020* also discusses this within its top threats. Learn more [here](#).

The disruption to the education of children and youth by the COVID-19 pandemic – resulting from widespread school closures and virtual or distance learning – will be significant.<sup>56</sup> Although early research has indicated that “community-based interventions to reduce COVID-19 case counts should take precedence” before closing schools,<sup>7</sup> schools across Canada continue to close and transition to a virtual/remote format throughout the academic year. Research has shown that interruptions to learning are detrimental to both academic success and student perseverance (school dropout).<sup>8</sup>

In Canada, it is suggested that upward of 200,000 children and youth may not be participating in any form of schooling

(virtual or in-person) as a result of the academic transitions for public health measures.<sup>9</sup> Adding to the concerns of academic success, UNICEF Canada reports 1 in 3 youth did not have basic reading and math skills pre-pandemic. At the time, Canada ranked 13th out of 38 similarly affluent countries on measures of academic success.<sup>10</sup> The compounding nature of these issues means that the disproportionate impacts of this crisis will affect disadvantaged children and youth. These children and youth typically are already at risk of disengagement from school and have higher dropout rates than their peers.<sup>5</sup> This, in turn, affects future educational (high school completion rates) and employment opportunities.<sup>10</sup>

## Policy Suggestions:

1. Use crisis-recovery strategies as the basis for long-term improvements in the following areas: assessment, pedagogy, technology, financing.<sup>5</sup>

5 (2020, May 7). The COVID-19 Pandemic : Shocks to .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/33696>

6 (2021, January 11). Negative impacts of community-based public health measures on .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/he/2021/01/rapid-review-neg-impacts-children-youth-families.pdf?la=en>

7 (2021, March 31). Simulation-Based Estimation of SARS-CoV-2 Infections Associated .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2777976>

8 (n.d.). Pandemic School Closures May Increase Inequality ... - UTP Journals. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.utpjournals.press/doi/full/10.3138/cpp.2020-055>

9 (n.d.). Worldwide Commission to Educate All Kids (Post-Pandemic) | 21st .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.i21cq.com/publications/worldwide-commission-to-educate-all-kids-post-pandemic/>

10 (n.d.). Worlds Apart: - One Youth Canada - UNICEF Canada. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from [https://oneyouth.unicef.ca/sites/default/files/2020-09/UNICEF%20RC16%20Canadian%20Companion%20EN\\_Web.pdf](https://oneyouth.unicef.ca/sites/default/files/2020-09/UNICEF%20RC16%20Canadian%20Companion%20EN_Web.pdf)

- a. Reverse learning losses by including improved classroom assessment, focused pedagogies and curriculum, blended use of teaching and technology.
  - b. Focus on practical training for administrators and teachers.
  - c. Protect education budgets.
2. Develop and implement a Youth Guarantee for Canada (similar to the European Union<sup>11</sup>,<sup>12</sup>) by ensuring all youth receive a quality offer of education, employment or training within four months of leaving a program or a job.<sup>13</sup>
  3. Progressively strengthen the content and availability of technical and vocational training, alternative basic education opportunities, and lifelong learning opportunities.<sup>14</sup>
  4. Recommend that funding to educational budgets follow international standards, allocating at least 15% to 20% of total national budget, or 4% to 6% of Gross Domestic Product, to education.<sup>14</sup>
  5. Encourage national, provincial and municipal authorities, including school boards and schools, to comprehensively survey and audit all cases of children (elementary and secondary levels) ousted from school.<sup>9</sup>
  6. Urge national, provincial and municipal authorities to develop and implement

strategies to reintegrate ousted children into formal schooling.<sup>9</sup>

7. When children return to schools after periods of lockdown, ensure schools assess students' level of learning in each subject, and assign them to small cohorts of students at a similar level where teaching can most appropriately respond to their current level - including through free extra tutoring, where necessary.<sup>3</sup>

## Policy Solutions:

1. RESTORE Model used by the Department of Education in Nunavut.<sup>15</sup> Although all the themes from the word RESTORE are connected and complement each other, the letters of that acronym can fall into two areas of needs:
  - The recent past and our experience of it:
    - » The first four letters (R, E, S and T), relating to Recognize, Empathize, Safety and Trauma, are connected to what happened and how it has impacted us.
  - The future on how we want to be as a result of that experience:
    - » The last three letters (O, R and E), relating to Opportunity, Relationships, and Engagement, are key to how we are going to move forward.

11 (n.d.). The reinforced Youth Guarantee - European Commission. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://ec.europa.eu/social/youthguarantee>

12 (2020, September 2). Delivering the Youth Guarantee - gov.scot. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.gov.scot/news/delivering-the-youth-guarantee/>

13 (2020, October 23). Young Canadians and the long "tail" of the COVID crisis. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/october-2020/young-canadians-and-the-long-tail-of-the-covid-crisis/>

14 (2021, March 2). Submission on the Rights of the Indigenous Child | Human Rights .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/02/submission-rights-indigenous-child>

15 (n.d.). 2020-21 Educator Toolkit for Nunavut Schools. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from [https://gov.nu.ca/sites/default/files/educator\\_toolkit\\_en.pdf](https://gov.nu.ca/sites/default/files/educator_toolkit_en.pdf)



2. Literacy program in Alberta focusing on reading deficits among early learners, Kindergarten to Grade 3.<sup>16</sup>
3. Prince Edward Island (PEI) announced the creation of the PEI Children and Youth Table to promote and protect the rights of children and youth during COVID-19 while the province awaits the formal appointment of the independent Child and Youth Advocate and enacting the Child and Youth Advocate Act.<sup>17</sup>
4. Keep Learning B.C.'s Everyday Learning Activity suggestions.<sup>18</sup>
5. Provincial (B.C.) investment in public libraries – Libraries can use this new funding to provide enhanced digital and connectivity services by expanding Wi-Fi capabilities, offering community digital literacy training, and enhancing online library programs.<sup>19</sup>
6. B.C. Budget 2020 committed to one-time educational COVID-19 relief funding, which is allocated through operating and capital funding.<sup>20</sup>

## ACCESS TO THE INTERNET AND AN APPROPRIATE DEVICE

During the COVID-19 pandemic, children and youth have been expected to learn from home in an online format. The rapid shift to virtual delivery of education (across Canada) “has been underpinned by normative assumptions of families’ social locations, privileges, access to technology and internet services.”<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the difficulties around remote online learning are exacerbating the gaps in children’s education.

“Although the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) declared the internet a basic service in 2016, reliable, affordable, sufficiently fast connectivity – and the devices and literacy needed to use it – is still often plagued by disparities that often map onto other socioeconomic inequalities.”<sup>22</sup>

Many families struggle to participate in online learning. The high cost of internet in Canada is among the barriers (in a survey of Toronto households that do not have access to the internet at home, the monthly cost of internet service is the most mentioned reason – 49%).<sup>22</sup> Additional reasons include the limited access

16 (2021, March 12). Literacy Program to Address COVID-19 Learning Loss. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=7770987312573-A3D6-9C8C-1537318FF44D4BCF>

17 (2020, May 12). Provincial Table to Protect Rights of Children and Youth. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/news/provincial-table-to-protect-rights-of-children-and-youth>

18 (n.d.). Open School BC: Keep Learning. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.openschool.bc.ca/keeplearning/>

19 (2020, April 8). Families throughout B.C. to benefit from enhanced digital library .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2020EDUC0019-000652>

20 (n.d.). Increased funding supports students, keeps schools ... - BC Gov News. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2020EDUC0074-002124>

21 “COVID-19 restrictions: experiences of immigrant ... - AIMS Press.” <https://www.aimspress.com/article/doi/10.3934/publichealth.2021013>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

22 “Mapping Toronto’s Digital Divide – Brookfield Institute for Innovation ....” 20 Jan. 2021, <https://brookfieldinstitute.ca/mapping-torontos-digital-divide/>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

to high-speed internet in rural communities,<sup>23</sup> device sharing between multiple school-aged children (fewer devices per person among lower-income households)<sup>22</sup> or bandwidth availability for multiple simultaneous classes or meetings.<sup>21</sup>

## Policy Suggestions:

1. Reduce the cost of internet and/or increase network access to reliable high-speed internet,<sup>14</sup> as was started in New Brunswick.<sup>24</sup>
2. Cities to strengthen alternative points of digital access over which they do have direct influence.<sup>25</sup>
3. Provide direct access to internet-enabled devices (iPads, Chromebooks and laptops) via loan programs to families and students.<sup>26, 27, 28, 29</sup>

4. A learning model where students use personal tech devices (with purchasing subsidies available<sup>30</sup>) to shift to a tech-based learning model from the outset of the school year.<sup>31</sup>
5. Develop broadcast programming to be disseminated by public and/or private television or radio.<sup>32</sup>

## Policy Solutions:

1. CRTC's 2021 goal is for 90% of Canadian homes and businesses to have access to maximum subscription speeds of at least 50 Mbps for downloads and 10 Mbps for uploads.<sup>33</sup>
2. City of Toronto and Toronto Public Library's "Wi-Fi on Wheels" park hotspot pilot program and the City of Toronto's Digital Canopy project providing free Wi-Fi to 25

23 "When it mattered most | The Monitor." 27 Feb. 2021, <https://monitormag.ca/articles/when-it-mattered-most>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

24 (2020, November 13). Further broadband upgrades coming to rural New Brunswick. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from [https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/news/news\\_release.2020.11.0597.html](https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/news/news_release.2020.11.0597.html)

25 "Digital Access - who is underserved and why ... - City of Toronto." <http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2021/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-159932.pdf>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

26 (n.d.). Technology Access - Province of British Columbia. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/covid-19-safe-schools/good-news/tech-access>

27 (2020, April 30). Tablets donated to help children in care with online learning - The .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://generalauthority.ca/2020/04/tablets-donated-to-help-children-in-care-with-online-learning/>

28 (2020, July 6). Provincial Government Announces \$20 Million for Technology to .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.gov.nl.ca/releases/2020/eecd/0706n02/>

29 (2020, November 23). New Computers, Technology for Students - Government of Nova .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://novascotia.ca/news/release/?id=20201123001>

30 (n.d.). Laptop Subsidy Program - Government of New Brunswick. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from [https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/services/services\\_renderer.201514.Laptop\\_Subsidy\\_Program.html](https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/services/services_renderer.201514.Laptop_Subsidy_Program.html)

31 (2020, July 22). High school students to use their own electronic devices; program to .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from [https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/news/news\\_release.2020.07.0414.html](https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/news/news_release.2020.07.0414.html)

32 (n.d.). Educational Television & COVID-19 - World Bank Document. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/659411587145759242/pdf/Rapid-Response-Guidance-Note-Educational-Television-COVID-19.pdf>

33 "What you should know about Internet speeds | CRTC." 20 Jan. 2021, <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/internet/performance.htm>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

large residential apartment buildings in low-income neighbourhoods.<sup>34, 35</sup>

3. Using data analytics, the Neighbourhood Equity Index mapped the City of Ottawa using various indicators to identify the most appropriate Wi-Fi hub locations by recognizing the vulnerable neighbourhoods where residents are in a greater need of affordable access to the internet.<sup>36</sup>
4. The Canada Healthy Communities Initiative (CHCI) is providing funding to support communities as they deploy new ways to adapt spaces and services to respond to immediate and ongoing needs arising from COVID-19 over the next two years, including the theme “Digital solutions” – innovative digital projects that address changing community needs through the use of data and connected technologies.<sup>38</sup>
5. The Prince Edward Island Broadband Fund<sup>39</sup> added two new funding streams to help residents access improved internet service:
  - a. Accelerated Internet Service Provider Pilot – funding for Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to upgrade or expand their networks to reach more PEI residents.

- b. Residential Pilot – funding for PEI residents to purchase equipment that will provide connections to wireless broadband services.

## PREPAREDNESS OF TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS

There is a clear distinction between effective online learning (an instructional model that is carefully planned and designed to be delivered in an online environment) and emergency remote/virtual learning. The latter being a method of educational instruction that has transitioned from standard teaching methods to an alternate delivery (remote/virtual/online) due to a critical circumstance, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>5</sup> But this crisis also provides the opportunity for innovation in educational pedagogy.<sup>40</sup> Key to the transition to an online education model is the strength of teachers’, parents’ and students’ digital literacy. Digital literacy is formally defined as “the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills.”<sup>41</sup>

34 (2020, August 4). Wi-Fi on Wheels Pilot Project - City of Toronto. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.toronto.ca/311/knowledgebase/kb/docs/articles/special-purpose-bodies-and-external-organizations/toronto-public-library/wi-fi-on-wheels-pilot-project.html>

35 (2020, September 10). COVID-19: Free Wi-Fi Pilot Project – City of Toronto. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-financial-social-support-for-people/covid-19-seniors-vulnerable-people/covid-19-free-wi-fi-pilot-project/>

36 (n.d.). Digital Equity Ottawa – Ottawa Neighbourhood Equity Index. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://neighbourhoodequity.ca/digital-equity-ottawa/>

37 “NWT Education Bulletin: Back to School - Government of Northwest ....” [https://www.gov.nt.ca/covid-19/sites/covid/files/resources/education\\_bulletin\\_final\\_eng.pdf](https://www.gov.nt.ca/covid-19/sites/covid/files/resources/education_bulletin_final_eng.pdf). Accessed 5 May. 2021.

38 “Canada Healthy Communities Initiative (CHCI) - Infrastructure Canada.” 10 Mar. 2021, <https://www.infrastructure.gc.ca/chci-iccs/index-eng.html>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

39 (2020, August 25). New changes to PEI Broadband Fund | Government of Prince .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/news/new-changes-pei-broadband-fund>

40 “Inventive pedagogies and social solidarity: The work of community ....” 5 Mar. 2021, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11159-021-09882-1>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

41 “Digital Literacy – Welcome to ALA’s Literacy Clearinghouse.” <https://literacy.ala.org/digital-literacy/>. Accessed 10 May. 2021.

Concerns also surround the safe return to schools for in-person education – including ventilation requirements and physical distancing measures.<sup>42</sup> “Finding creative ways to provide quality education, where we can be physically distant, is more crucial than ever during the COVID-19 pandemic.”<sup>37</sup>

“Of the Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit principles, Qanuqtuurunnarniq is the principle of coming up with resourceful solutions within the community. It will require the actions of everyone to come up with relevant and practical ways to tackle how to return to safe, caring, and healthy schools. Our actions have a ripple effect.”<sup>43</sup>

## Policy Suggestions:

1. Develop and provide digital literacy training programs and in-service training in digital literacy to teachers.<sup>14</sup>
2. Incorporate digital literacy into curricula for students.<sup>14</sup>
3. Increase staffing resources of support staff, teachers, teaching assistants and administrators.<sup>44</sup>

4. Identify what is required to provide equitable access to quality education for all students. This should include providing additional support to principals of small schools and teachers in multi-grade classrooms.<sup>45, 46</sup>
5. Transition or extend in-classroom programming to the outdoor environment to maintain public health recommendations (accessible open space physical distancing).<sup>47</sup>

## Policy/Program Solutions:

1. Provincial funding of licences for easy-to-use video conferencing and collaboration platform application to maintain communication with students and parents.<sup>48</sup>
2. In-person reading program transition to a virtual platform to maintain and strengthen literacy skills over the summer.<sup>49</sup>
3. Digital Citizenship Curriculum developed by Common Sense helps bridge the gap between home and school, offering information and tools that empower school communities to address challenges and prepare students for the future.<sup>50</sup>

42 “COVID-19: Risk mitigation tool for child and youth settings operations...” <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/guidance-documents/covid-19-risk-mitigation-tool-child-youth-settings-operating-during-pandemic.html>. Accessed 5 May. 2021

43 “2020-21 RESTORE School Toolkit for Nunavut Schools.” [https://gov.nu.ca/sites/default/files/restore\\_school\\_toolkit\\_en.pdf](https://gov.nu.ca/sites/default/files/restore_school_toolkit_en.pdf). Accessed 5 May. 2021.

44 (n.d.). Additional Teaching and Staffing Resources Provided to Support the .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.gov.nl.ca/releases/2020/education/O826n02/>

45 (2020, December). Action Plan to Improve JK-12 Student Outcomes in the NWT” Retrieved May 3, 2021 from [https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/sites/ece/files/resources/action\\_plan\\_to\\_improve\\_student\\_outcomes\\_eng.pdf](https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/sites/ece/files/resources/action_plan_to_improve_student_outcomes_eng.pdf)

46 [https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/sites/ece/files/resources/action\\_plan\\_to\\_improve\\_student\\_outcomes\\_eng.pdf](https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/sites/ece/files/resources/action_plan_to_improve_student_outcomes_eng.pdf)

47 “Virtual Classrooms, The Evergreen Way | Evergreen.” 26 Feb. 2021, <https://www.evergreen.ca/blog/entry/virtual-classrooms-the-evergreen-way/>. Accessed 10 May. 2021.

48 (2020, April 1). Zoom collaboration tool now available for K-12 continuous learning .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2020EDUC0027-000608>

49 (2020, June 14). BC Summer Reading Club goes virtual: let’s explore ... - BC Gov News. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2020EDUC0041-001052>

50 (n.d.). Digital Citizenship | Common Sense .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.commonsense.org/education/digital-citizenship>

4. Provide distance learning opportunities in all Northwest Territories small schools through Northern Distance Learning (NDL).<sup>45</sup>
5. Four considerations for teachers to implement to achieve success within the virtual classroom: nurturing a community of learners, keeping learners safe online, making learning flexible, and using the spectrum of play.<sup>51</sup>
6. Highlighting different forms of distance learning.<sup>52</sup>
7. Manitoba released guidelines for teachers and students that encourage instruction outdoors when possible and using as many outdoor activities as possible.<sup>52</sup>
8. A Teacher's Guidebook for bringing learning outside.<sup>53</sup>
9. Evergreen Brick Works (Toronto) launched Virtually Outdoors, a suite of live, curriculum-connected (teacher-led) virtual field trips to facilitate students' engagement outdoors in the schoolyard.<sup>47</sup>
10. Learning on the Land / Land-based instruction:
  - a. While schools are always encouraged to provide land-based and hands-on learning for N.W.T students, there are now even more benefits to using these approaches. Land-based learning opportunities, which also include the school playground area, can provide

alternative possibilities for expanding a classroom environment. Students may have the opportunity to experience new cultural activities, participate in independent learning projects, or expand their learning through play.<sup>37</sup>

- b. Land-based instruction focuses on exploring Inuit culture with the aim of promoting Inuit values, giving students the opportunity to better understand their tradition, engage with their environment, and learn about Inuit history and values. Land-based activities can be taught both inside and outside the classroom. When in-class learning is limited, increased land-based activities can be implemented to make use of outdoor space. This allows important learning to continue without the physical limitations associated with being in a traditional classroom, as required for health and safety reasons. Land-based instruction will not only allow for increased learning when students are not in classrooms, but it will also support the ongoing well-being of students.<sup>15</sup>

## PARENTAL EDUCATION AND CONCERNS ABOUT LEARNING FROM HOME

For many families with young children, the burden of ensuring the success of any online virtual education falls to the adults, most

51 "A guide to playful distance learning - The LEGO Foundation." [https://www.legofoundation.com/media/3063/distance\\_learning\\_guide.pdf](https://www.legofoundation.com/media/3063/distance_learning_guide.pdf). Accessed 5 May. 2021.

52 "COVID-19 Response in K-12 Schools and Early Learning and Child ...." 31 Aug. 2020, [https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/covid\\_response\\_k-12\\_schools.pdf](https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/covid_response_k-12_schools.pdf). Accessed 5 May. 2021.

53 (n.d.). A Teacher's Guidebook for Bringing Learning ... - Outdoor Play Canada. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from [https://www.outdoorplaycanada.ca/portfolio\\_page/teachers-guidebook-for-bringing-learning-outside/](https://www.outdoorplaycanada.ca/portfolio_page/teachers-guidebook-for-bringing-learning-outside/)

often women,<sup>54</sup> who may or may not have the skills, knowledge or time to provide significant assistance.<sup>21</sup> Mothers are also reporting higher rates of depression and anxiety than they were pre-pandemic<sup>55</sup> (see also Mental Health and Well-Being below), especially those who have reported job losses/family income, difficulty accessing child care and individuals who are attempting to balance remote-learning with remote work.<sup>56, 57</sup> “It is difficult for many people to figure out a work-life balance during this time. Many individuals have been catapulted into simultaneous duties associated with being a parent, a teacher, and an employee.”<sup>58</sup> In contrast, some parents viewed having their children at home all the time as an opportunity to become closer and spend quality time with them.<sup>21</sup>

## Policy Suggestion:

1. Invest in universal supports for child care and out-of-school care, and focus on providing flexible leave policies that allow both parents to adequately care for and home-school their children.<sup>56, 57</sup>

## Policy/Program Solutions:

1. A comprehensive online resource that will be continually updated for Manitoba families and caregivers as they support students who are carrying on with their school year and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>59, 60</sup>
2. An online safety campaign launched by the Canadian Centre for Child Protection (C3P) and supported with provincial funding is urging families to talk with their tweens and teens about the risks of online activities, such as live streaming, online gaming and live chatting.<sup>61, 62</sup>

54 “SocArXiv Papers | The New “Good Samaritans”: Digital ... - OSF.” 29 Mar. 2021, <https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/kw2f5/>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

55 “COVID-19 and telemental health: Benefits ... - APA PsycNET.” <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2020-80476-001>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

56 “COVID-19 stress toll is a family affair: 4 ways to support mothers ....” 30 Mar. 2021, <https://ucalgary.ca/news/covid-19-stress-toll-family-affair-4-ways-support-mothers-mental-health>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

57 “Health risks and outcomes that disproportionately affect women ....” <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0277953620305839>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

58 “Anxiety and depression in Canada during the ... - APA PsycNET.” <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2020-63541-001>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

59 (n.d.). New web portal supports home learning for caregivers – The .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://generalauthority.ca/2020/04/new-web-portal-supports-home-learning-for-caregivers/>

60 (n.d.). My Learning at Home | Manitoba Education. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/mylearning/learningathome/index.html>

61 (2020, September 1). New online safety program launched for youth and parents – The .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://generalauthority.ca/2020/09/new-online-safety-program-launched-for-youth-and-parents/>

62 (n.d.). ProtectKidsOnline.ca. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://protectkidsonline.ca/>

# CHILDREN LIVING WITH DISABILITIES

Learn about the impacts of school closures on children living with disabilities from the [School Closures and COVID-19: Interactive Tool](#).

*Raising Canada 2020* also discusses this within its top threats. Learn more [here](#).

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the lives of children who live with disabilities through decreases in or the absence of support.<sup>63</sup>

In B.C., 73% of women report negative health outcomes from increased care responsibilities for disabled family members.<sup>64</sup>

## Policy Suggestions:

1. Reduce or drop assessment requirements to temporarily admit children and youth for various programs until assessors become available.<sup>65</sup>
2. Emergency relief funds to support families with children living with special needs.<sup>66</sup>
3. N.W.T.'s education system employs a tiered system of support, which means that the majority of students require provisions that all students can benefit from, but

increasingly small numbers of students require additional support.<sup>45</sup>

- a. The first tier in this model includes universal support that can include school-wide behaviour plans, instructional strategies employed by teachers and programming that is available for all students.
  - b. The second tier is for those students who require targeted assistance in order to succeed.
  - c. The third tier requires individualized intensive supports and often referrals to specialists or support from outside agencies.
4. Adoption of two innovative strategies for tele-intervention for children and youth with disabilities and their families. Specifically, using remote or virtual support, we propose: (1) to apply the Routines-Based Model (RBM) beyond the early years of development, and (2) to adopt My Abilities First in health care encounters. These strategies promote collaborative, empathic, family-centered tele-intervention for children with disabilities during and post the COVID-19 lockdown.<sup>67</sup>

63 "Mental health effects of school closures ...." 14 Apr. 2020, [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/article/PIIS2352-4642\(20\)30109-7/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/article/PIIS2352-4642(20)30109-7/fulltext). Accessed 5 May. 2021.

64 "Reciprocal Consulting - Home | Facebook." <https://x.facebook.com/ReciprocalConsulting/>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

65 (2020, September 21). At Home Program - Province of British Columbia. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/covid-19-information/child-youth-with-support-needs-response-to-covid-19/at-home-program>

66 (2020, April 8). Province provides emergency fund for children with special needs .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2020CFD0043-000650>

67 (2021 February 11). Crisis Brings Innovative Strategies: Collaborative Empathetic..... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33670163/>

## Policy/Program Solutions:

1. Educational Assistants are connecting with students with diverse needs and abilities through online group chats, social-emotional check-ins and supporting students' learning by reading to students over the phone.<sup>68</sup>
2. Online tips for home learning for families and children living with disabilities.<sup>69</sup>
3. Distance Learning for Special Education.<sup>70</sup>
4. Speech-Language & Audiology Canada recommends the use of transparent face masks to facilitate communication by overcoming some of the communication barriers associated with masks and face coverings.<sup>71</sup> An example of the recommendation implemented can be found in the Eastern Ontario Health Unit.<sup>72</sup>
5. The Community Services Department of Nova Scotia used \$700,000 to purchase phones for Disability Support Program participants living independently to reduce isolation and enhance communications with the program. Also, \$1.7 million was used for COVID-19-related respite support for participants of the Disability Support Program who live at home with family and whose needs increased due to the pandemic. Autism Nova Scotia also received \$150,000 for COVID-19-related respite care for families not currently eligible for respite through the Department of Community Services.<sup>73</sup>
6. The Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) Department in Northwest Territories provided all education bodies with a master list of counsellors in the N.W.T in order to ensure services can be accessed quickly by JK-Grade 12 students when necessary.<sup>74</sup>
7. The Government of British Columbia has implemented a Flexible Use of Direct Funded or At Home Program Respite. Until March 31, 2022, families who receive Direct Funded or At Home Program respite can use the standard amount of \$3,080 per year in a flexible manner. Flexible options include meal prep/grocery shopping assistance, homemaker support, caregiver relief support for siblings, online programs for children who are children and youth support needs eligible, counselling services, and other options that support family well-being and alleviate stress.<sup>75</sup>

68 (2020, April 20). Education assistants find new ways to help students | BC Gov News. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2020EDUCO031-000723>

69 (n.d.). Five Moore Minutes - YouTube. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCU-GCW3-EwNxcbJEFKkaABw>

70 (n.d.). Distance Learning for Special Education - Google Sites. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://sites.google.com/view/distance-learning-specialed/home>

71 (n.d.). Official Statement on the Use of Transparent Masks - Speech .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.sac-oac.ca/sites/default/files/Official-Statement-on-Transparent-Masks-EN-Nov-10.pdf>

72 (2021, February 18). Frequently Asked Questions: School During COVID-19 | EOHU .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://eohu.ca/en/covid/frequently-asked-questions-returning-to-school-during-covid-19>

73 (2021, April 12). Support for Vulnerable Nova Scotians. Retrieved May 3, 2021 from <https://novascotia.ca/news/release/?id=20210412002>

74 (2020, May 6). Minister and Education Leaders discuss continued support for .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.gov.nt.ca/en/newsroom/minister-and-education-leaders-discuss-continued-support-students-complex-needs-during>

75 (2021, March 16). Respite Support - Province of British Columbia. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/covid-19-information/child-youth-with-support-needs-response-to-covid-19/emergency-relief-funding>



# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND PLAY

**Learn about the impacts of school closures on children’s physical activity and fitness from the School Closures and COVID-19: Interactive Tool.**

*Raising Canada 2020* also discusses this within its top threats. [Learn more here.](#)

The lack of in-person education, paired with public health measures designed to reduce COVID-19 spread between family units, has resulted in a reduction of physical activity, movement and play for children and youth.<sup>76</sup> The right to play is “often given lower priority than the provision of food, shelter and medicines, despite the fact that play is known to be crucial to children’s well-being, development, health and survival in these circumstances.”<sup>77</sup>

Early in the pandemic, Canadian community playgrounds, fields and play structures were closed for use with the uncertainty around the spread of COVID-19. The Lawson Foundation<sup>78</sup> has noted that “the use of the outdoors is underestimated and overlooked as a significant COVID-19 mitigation strategy.” The documented sedentary behaviours (including increased leisure screen time) from the public health

measures was highlighted in a survey of Canadian parents of children and youth that found only 4.8% of children and 0.6% of youth were meeting movement guidelines. This has “immediate collateral consequences” on the development and mental health of children and youth.<sup>77</sup> When children play, it affords them a sense of control over their lives, thereby reducing stress and anxiety. They are then able to start to process and recover from distress or trauma that may be brought on by the pandemic<sup>79</sup> (see also [Mental Health and Well-Being](#)).

## Policy Suggestions:

1. Public health officials support parents by implementing safe physical distancing measures that provide extra space for everyone to walk, cycle and wheel. This could include temporary reallocation of roadway space and keeping expansive green spaces open.<sup>77</sup>
2. Attention to recess during school reopening is essential, as it provides space for children’s physical, social and emotional development, which are essential for well-being and learning.<sup>80</sup>

76 “Impact of the COVID-19 virus outbreak on movement and play ....” 6 Jul. 2020, <https://ijbnpa.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12966-020-00987-8>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

77 “Access to Play for Children in Situations of Crisis - International Play ....” <http://ipaworld.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/IPA-A4-ACCESS-TO-PLAY-IN-SITUATIONS-OF-CRISIS-TOOLKIT-LR.pdf>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

78 “Increasing Outdoor Play in Early Learning and Child Care in the ....” 19 Jul. 2020, <https://lawson.ca/op-elcc-covid19.pdf>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

79 (n.d.). Children’s Mental Health Must Be a Priority As We Fight This .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.righttoplay.ca/en-ca/news/childrens-mental-health-must-be-a-priority/>

80 (2020, July 14). Statement on Recess · Global Recess Alliance. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://globalrecessalliance.org/recess-statement/>

3. Develop and adopt a play policy that states the value the organization places on children’s play, setting out how the organization will support children’s play opportunities.<sup>78</sup>
4. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child calls for cross-departmental collaboration in national and municipal government. Children First Canada would also recommend this include provincial and territorial governments. Through General comment No. 17, the committee asserts: “Planning for play, recreation and cultural and artistic activities requires a broad and comprehensive approach involving cross-departmental collaboration and accountability between national, regional and municipal authorities. Relevant departments include not only those dealing directly with children, such as health, education, social services, child protection, culture, recreation and sports, but also those concerned with water and sanitation, housing, parks, transport, environment and city planning, all of which impact significantly on the creation of environments in which children can realize their rights under article 31.” (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2013: para.58c)<sup>81</sup>

traffic on weekends. The purpose of the project was to provide more outdoor space for residents to exercise while practising safe physical distancing.<sup>82, 83</sup>

2. The Canada Healthy Communities Initiative (CHCI) is providing up to \$31 million in existing federal funding to support communities as they deploy new ways to adapt spaces and services to respond to immediate and ongoing needs arising from COVID-19 over the next two years.<sup>38</sup>
  - » Creating safe and vibrant public spaces: Projects that create or adapt existing public places, such as parks, main streets, and indoor spaces that encourage safe cultural or physical activities, and local commerce.
  - » Improving mobility options: Projects that permit physical distancing through permanent or temporary changes that make it easier for people to get around in their communities, whether walking, biking, accessing public and private transit, or other modes of transportation.
3. Community Nature Adventure Playground (Calgary) is using a modified program to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission and increase outdoor play and participating in two ways:
  - » The manufactured loose parts in the program were removed, and they retained the “sticks, stones and stumps” for family groups to play with. This

## Policy/Program Solutions:

1. The National Capital Commission (Ottawa) partially closed both the Sir John A. Macdonald Parkway and the Sir George-Étienne Cartier Parkway to motor vehicle

81 “Convention on the Rights of the Child - OHCHR.” 29 May. 2013, [https://www2.ohchr.org/English/bodies/crc/docs/GC/CRC\\_C\\_GC\\_14\\_ENG.pdf](https://www2.ohchr.org/English/bodies/crc/docs/GC/CRC_C_GC_14_ENG.pdf). Accessed 5 May. 2021.

82 (2020, May 14). New Pilot Project Provides Increased Space for Outdoor Well-Being .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://ncc-ccn.gc.ca/news/new-pilot-project-provides-increased-space-for-outdoor-well-being>

83 (2020, May 21). Providing Broader Public Use of NCC Assets - National Capital .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://ncc-ccn.gc.ca/news/providing-broader-public-use-of-ncc-assets>

continues their mandate to encourage creative, imaginative and self-directed play outdoors.

- » Previously, the program rotated through large parks in the community, which allowed for increased participation rate. The program has now transitioned to smaller, local community parks, which has a noted benefit of an increased use of the program by a more diverse range of family groups.<sup>84</sup>

4. As part of the B.C. Government's Active Transportation Strategy: Move. Commute. Connect., cycling education is an example of government working within communities to expand active transportation networks and create more options for walking and cycling. HUB Cycling launched the Everyone Rides Grade 4-5 program for kids to help increase safety and improve health. Students were reached through a combination of online, in-class and on-bike lessons.<sup>85</sup>

5. The Government of British Columbia, in partnership with B.C. Healthy Communities Society, has selected 11 schools to participate in a pilot project designed to increase the number of students using active transportation between home and school.<sup>86</sup>

6. In collaboration with local health officials, schools could consider the following recommendations regarding recess when children are in-person at school<sup>87</sup>:

- » Schedule at least two sustained periods of recess every day for every child, and hold it outdoors, whenever possible.
- » Avoid strict rules like “no running” and “no ball throwing” that can undermine the benefits of play and physical activity.
- » Don't withhold recess as punishment for missed schoolwork, poor classroom behaviour or any other reason. Instead, ensure that all children have access, feel safe and included, and are able to experience meaningful and playful engagement.

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84 (n.d.). Community Nature Adventure Playground - The City of Calgary. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.calgary.ca/csps/parks/locations/community-nature-adventure-playground.html>

85 (2021, April 10). Bike classes for kids help increase safety, improve ... - BC Gov News. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021TRAN0024-000682>

86 (2021, February 11). New program to help students get moving | BC Gov News. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021TRAN0014-000243>

87 (2020, May 31). Kids will need recess more than ever when returning to school post .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://theconversation.com/kids-will-need-recess-more-than-ever-when-returning-to-school-post-coronavirus-139165>

# MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

**Learn about the impacts of school closures on children’s mental health and well-being from the School Closures and COVID-19: Interactive Tool.**

*Raising Canada 2020* also discusses this within its top threats. [Learn more here.](#)

For children and youth with mental health needs, school closures can mean a lack of access to the critical delivery of mental health services.<sup>88</sup> The anchoring of consistent school routines provides an important coping mechanism.<sup>64</sup> U-Report Canada shows 30% of youth in Canada have been feeling stressed and anxious during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>89</sup>

An unintended consequence of the public health measures is that previously healthy children who experience social isolation are at a higher risk of developing post-traumatic stress

disorder (PTSD) and anxiety-related symptoms. Suicidality, substance use and disordered eating are all closely linked to mental health and are exacerbated by the pandemic public health measures.<sup>90, 91, 92</sup> For eating disorders alone, in April 2021, the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto saw more than three times the patient volume,<sup>93</sup> which will have the downstream effect of requiring an increased access to virtual care or tele-medicine as a result of the pandemic and public health measures.<sup>94</sup>

Research has also identified a variety of factors associated with parental stress and burnout leading to mental health concerns, including parental unemployment, financial insecurity, low levels of social support, and a lack of leisure time.<sup>95, 96</sup> Adverse childhood experiences, including family violence, trauma and mental

- 88 “Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and Mental ... - JAMA Network.” 14 Apr. 2020, <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2764730>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.
- 89 (n.d.). U-Report Results - One Youth Canada - UNICEF Canada. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://oneyouth.unicef.ca/en/u-report-results>
- 90 “Teen shares how eating disorder unfolded as doctors grapple with ....” 23 Feb. 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/whitecoat/teen-shares-how-eating-disorder-unfolded-as-doctors-grapple-with-surge-in-cases-during-pandemic-1.5915791>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.
- 91 “The COVID-19 pandemic and eating disorders in children ....” 16 Apr. 2021, <https://jeatdisord.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s40337-021-00394-9>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.
- 92 “The other side of COVID-19: Mental health challenges prevalent in ....” 15 Mar. 2021, <https://www.hamiltonhealthsciences.ca/share/youth-mental-health-during-covid-19/>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.
- 93 (2021, April 27). Ontario hospitals are closing pediatric wards, forcing sick children to .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://nationalpost.com/health/scores-of-child-patients-moved-to-toronto-as-covid-strained-hospitals-close-pediatric-wards>
- 94 (2021, January 12). Lay Summary PDF - Executive Lay Summary Report. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from [https://covid19mentalhealthresearch.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/COOUTURIER\\_CMH-KS-Executive-Lay-Summary-Report-2020-11-23.pdf](https://covid19mentalhealthresearch.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/COOUTURIER_CMH-KS-Executive-Lay-Summary-Report-2020-11-23.pdf)
- 95 “Parental Burnout and Child Maltreatment During the ... - SpringerLink.” 23 Jun. 2020, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10896-020-00172-2>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.
- 96 “Relationship between parenting stress and school closures due to ....” <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pcn.13088>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

illness are of major concern.<sup>97</sup> Specifically, concerns around maternal mental health were a national concern before the pandemic. Now, research is showing almost a double increase in depressive and anxiety symptoms in women with children under the age of 12.<sup>56</sup>

The well-being of children and youth also encompasses their safety within their own homes. Many are exposed to violence and are particularly vulnerable with school closures.<sup>98</sup> “The education systems are an important resource for intervention against maltreatment and its impacts. Teachers can serve as protectors beyond reporting allegations. As part of a team of caring adults in a child’s life, teachers can provide trauma-informed education for their students.”<sup>99</sup> In regards to the reporting allegations of abuse, overall, the number of allegations of abuse has tended to decrease during the pandemic.<sup>100</sup> This raises the concern that children who are being abused and neglected and do need help are not being identified.<sup>100</sup>

Other children and youth face online harassment and bullying. Over 30% of Canadian students are bullied by their peers on an occasional basis and from 7% to 10% are bullied daily. This is magnified in a purely virtual education setting during the pandemic.<sup>101</sup> The disproportionate effect of this online harassment is directed toward girls and young women.<sup>102</sup>

## Policy Suggestions:

1. Policy-makers need to start using youth-friendly platforms to share resources and supports to young people.<sup>103</sup>
2. Develop pandemic recovery plans that include support and provision of mental health and social support resources. Increase the availability and accessibility of social supports and mental health services.<sup>56</sup>
3. Preventative mental health support is more cost-effective and successful long term. Providing free resources and psychoeducation to parents and teachers to help identify early warning signs of mental health deterioration in children will also help mitigate negative outcomes of the pandemic.<sup>56, 104</sup>

97 “Addressing the indirect effects of COVID-19 on the health of ... - CMAJ.” <https://www.cmaj.ca/content/192/32/E921>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

98 (2020, March 31). Inequality amplified by COVID-19 crisis. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/en/resources/inequality-amplified-covid-19-crisis>

99 “IBE — Science of learning portal — Educating the whole child: the ....” 12 Feb. 2021, <https://solportal.ibe-unesco.org/educating-the-whole-child-the-pandemic-child-maltreatment-and-socioemotional-development-in-the-classroom/>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

100 “COVID-19 and violence against children: A review of early studies ....” 14 Apr. 2021, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0145213421001265>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

101 “Building Healthy Relationships and an Inclusive, Caring ... - HWDSB.” <https://www.hwdsb.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Safe-Schools-Report-2021-Full-Report.pdf>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

102 “Data reveals impact of cyberbullying on girls’ lives in Canada - Plan ....” 5 Oct. 2020, <https://stories.plancanada.ca/data-reveals-impact-of-cyberbullying-on-girls-lives-in-canada/>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

103 “Accountability in Our Lifetime: - First Nations Child and Family ....” [https://fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/accountability\\_in\\_our\\_lifetime.pdf](https://fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/accountability_in_our_lifetime.pdf). Accessed 5 May. 2021.

104 “Child and Family Outcomes Following Pandemics: A Systematic ....” 21 Oct. 2020, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7665615/>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

4. Invest in interventions to support resilience in children.<sup>105</sup>
5. An increase in uptake of tele-mental health services (mental health support that is provided online or by phone) has the potential to provide the opportunity to obtain mental health support while reducing barriers that often limit accessibility, such as location or time.<sup>56, 106, 107</sup>
6. Since one of the central barriers to practitioners using tele-mental health is digital literacy,<sup>108</sup> funding online training modules to increase practitioners' digital literacy for tele-mental health platforms will directly expand access to care.<sup>56</sup>
7. Supporting adult caregivers in the midst of the pandemic will support children and youth. The more support adults receive, the lower perceived stress and potential for child abuse.<sup>109</sup>
8. Provide access to positive parenting resources, as well as adapt specialized services for children and families.<sup>100</sup>
9. Policies need to balance the need to protect the public as a whole and also vulnerable individuals. Other families who are "at risk",

meaning that they may have been living under stressful conditions prior to COVID-19, should also be considered, as their stress would likely have risen to intolerable levels during the pandemic. These are families coping with domestic violence, youth protection issues, mental health concerns and disabilities. These families have particular needs that cannot be put on hold during a pandemic. The removal of the essential supports that they rely on daily may be enough to provoke a crisis.<sup>105</sup>

10. Mental health recommendations from Centre for Addiction and Mental Health<sup>110</sup>:
  - a. Provide a range of mental health resources, supports and care
  - b. Support and expand virtual mental health services
  - c. Prioritize workplace mental health
  - d. Invest in the social determinants of health
  - e. Commit to a public health approach to alcohol policy
11. Mental Health for marginalized youth (In This Together – Calls to Action)<sup>111</sup> :

105 "Responding to Adverse Childhood Experiences - Public Health Wales." <https://phw.nhs.wales/news/responding-to-adverse-childhood-experiences-an-evidence-review/responding-to-adverse-childhood-experiences/>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

106 (n.d.). Protecting, Educating, and Empowering Children during COVID-19 .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.righttoplay.ca/en-ca/news/protecting-educating-and-empowering-children-during-covid-19/>

107 "era of virtual care: Perspectives of youth on virtual appointments in ...." 20 Mar. 2021, <https://academic.oup.com/pch/advance-article/doi/10.1093/pch/pxaa138/6179087>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

108 "Evaluating barriers to adopting telemedicine worldwide: A ... - PubMed." <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29320966/>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

109 (2020, August 20). Stress and parenting during the global COVID-19 pandemic. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7440155/>

110 (n.d.). Mental Health in Canada: Covid-19 and Beyond CAMH Policy .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.camh.ca/-/media/files/pdfs---public-policy-submissions/covid-and-mh-policy-paper-pdf.pdf>

111 (2020, November 11). In This Together - ABRAR. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.abrarmh.ca/post/in-this-together>

- a. Immediately work towards ensuring access to early intervention and a stepped-care type model for mental health care services, as recommended by CAMH.<sup>110</sup>
- b. Immediately establish a Post-Pandemic Mental Health Recovery Plan and ensure the well-being of marginalized young people is prioritized.
- c. Ensure the recovery plan involves collaboration between governments, ministries and sectors, and places a great priority on funding and supporting grassroots and community-based services.
- d. Work collaboratively with young people to ensure the plan is informed by and co-created with young people.
- e. Identify specific, measurable, and achievable goals and a clear outline of actionable steps and timelines to ensure the successful implementation of the recovery plan.

## Policy/Program Solutions:

1. Check in with families via telephone calls (“How are you doing?”) as an approach that is low-technology, yet a highly effective strategy.<sup>40</sup>
2. Ensure safety in discrete ways, such as setting up code words and creating pretences for in-person check-ins.<sup>40</sup>
3. Increase accessibility of social supports and mental health services through virtual

care via telemedicine and digital/virtual platforms:

- » Alberta Health Services innovation, Text4Hope, is an evidence-based tool that helps people identify and adjust the negative thoughts, feelings and behaviours a pandemic might be expected to provoke. Through a set of daily messages, people receive advice and encouragement that is helpful in developing healthy personal coping skills and resiliency. Community members simply subscribe to receive ongoing supportive content.<sup>112</sup>
- » Foundry British Columbia has created an app (and a desktop version) for kids and youth to book appointments with counsellors. B.C.’s young people, ages 12-24, and their caregivers can access Foundry’s virtual services.<sup>113, 114</sup>
- » For eating disorders, telehealth includes video conferencing/telephone services (for family-based treatment [FBT] and cognitive behavioural therapy [CBT]), smartphone apps, and self-help. CBT-based virtual group therapy and guided self-help, internet-based Maudsley Model guided self-help, and guided parental self-help CBT are strongly recommended.<sup>95</sup>

4. Northwest Territories Department of Education, Culture and Employment has demonstrated results to improve mental health counselling services to children and

112 (n.d.). COVID-19 Text4Hope | Alberta Health Services. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page17019.aspx>

113 (n.d.). Foundry Virtual - Get Support Online - Foundry BC. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://foundrybc.ca/virtual/>

114 (2021, February 18). Supporting youth 12-24 during the COVID-19 pandemic: how .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1757975920984196>

youth where all N.W.T. regions are supported by 42 Child and Youth Care Counsellors and 7 clinical supervisors. Both classroom-based (Tier 1) and school-wide (Tier 2) mental health training, resources and strategies for prevention have also been developed.<sup>45</sup>

5. The Government of Canada announced the provision of emergency funding in May 2020 for organizations that support individuals experiencing gender-based violence.<sup>115</sup>
6. Update and reform legislative frameworks to deal with online harassment and violence, especially against girls and young women, with the acknowledgment of intersectional characteristics of race, age, disability, ethnicity, LGBTIQ+. Enact innovative laws addressing violence against women and girls, holding social media platforms and other third-party internet platforms to account.<sup>103</sup>
7. IWK Mental Health and Addictions Program and Nova Scotia's Department of Early Education and Childhood Development (EECD) developed a webinar series entitled "Road to Resilience: Skills and strategies to prepare for the upcoming school year." A mental wellness strategy that people could learn at home and at their own convenience.<sup>116</sup>
8. A new online, self-directed family violence awareness course, which is now available to Manitoba government employees and other front-line workers around the province, was developed by Willow Place in partnership with the Manitoba government and community stakeholders across the province to support greater empathy for survivors and increased awareness of available resources.<sup>117</sup>

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115 (2020, April 1). Women at the core of the fight against COVID-19 crisis - OECD. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/women-at-the-core-of-the-fight-against-covid-19-crisis-553a8269/>

116 (n.d.). Road to Resilience Webinar Series - IWK Health Centre. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.iwk.nshealth.ca/mental-health/parents/road-resilience-webinar-series>

117 (2020, November 19). Province announces online training on family violence for civil .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://generalauthority.ca/2020/11/province-announces-online-training-on-family-violence-for-civil-servants-front-line-workers/>



# SOCIOECONOMIC OUTCOMES

Learn about the impacts of school closures on children’s socioeconomic outcomes from the School Closures and COVID-19: Interactive Tool.

*Raising Canada 2020* also discusses this within its top threats. Learn more [here](#).

The COVID-19 pandemic is “a crisis on top of a crisis”<sup>107</sup> and is disproportionately affecting women<sup>118</sup> (Statistics Canada 2020), those with less education, and families with lower socioeconomic status (SES).<sup>21, 119</sup> The unintended and disproportionate consequences for people living in vulnerable circumstances will continue to be magnified as the number of people put in vulnerable circumstances continues to grow.<sup>99</sup> As an example, those who live in urban apartment complexes or who live in larger households have an increased mortality risk.<sup>120</sup>

There are also employment consequences that have resulted in a gender gap for parents of young children. The employment gender gap is exacerbated even more in families with less education.<sup>120</sup> In British Columbia, working mothers have reported losing 26% of their work hours, compared to 14% reported by working fathers.<sup>119</sup> Single parents also face critical decisions around remaining in the workforce

during the pandemic versus exiting the workforce to care for children at home, thereby directly impacting their family’s economic stability or SES.<sup>99</sup>

Youth are also not immune to the economic consequences from the pandemic. The rate of young people aged 15-19 who are “Not in Employment, Education or Training” (the NEET rate) has increased to unprecedented levels. This is due to school closures and an unemployment rate of almost 30% by May 2020.<sup>13, 121</sup>

The outcome for youth is not only a “more challenging start to adult life, but also the increased risk of the intergenerational transmission of vulnerabilities.”<sup>3</sup> As such, it is anticipated that the economic impact of poverty on children and youth will continue for up to five years after the pandemic.<sup>3</sup>

## Policy Suggestions:

1. Implement policies such as universal paid sick leave to alleviate the financial concern around missing paid work or losing a job if a parent becomes sick with COVID-19.<sup>105</sup>

118 “UNMASKING GENDER INEQUITY - BC Women’s Health Foundation.” <https://assets.bcwomensfoundation.org/2020/11/20122829/BCWHF-Unmasking-Gender-Inequity-Report-2020-1.pdf>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

119 “COVID-19 and the Gender Employment Gap among ... - UTP Journals.” 5 Jul. 2020, <https://www.utpjournals.press/doi/full/10.3138/cpp.2020-077>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

120 “People living in apartments and larger households were at higher ....” 13 Apr. 2021, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2021001/article/00004-eng.htm>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

121 “Cross-National Variation in School Reopening ... - SAGE Journals.” 19 Apr. 2021, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/23328584211010180>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

2. Policies are needed that emphasize flexibility for the diversity of child care needs with easy and accessible government relief funding to prevent financial burden and help ease the transition back to work, and child care support programs that allow parents to better cope with their responsibilities during the pandemic.<sup>105</sup> Implementing flexible leave policies beyond the period of infancy helps working parents manage caregiving demands equitably.<sup>120</sup>
3. Policies are needed that provide financial security for parents that are front-line workers because of an increased risk to contract COVID-19 – and because they are vulnerable due to elevated stress levels they experience on a daily basis and its impact on the entire family's well-being.<sup>105</sup>
4. For youth living in Canada to remain competitive in the post-pandemic economy, the implementation of a “Youth Guarantee”<sup>11</sup> commitment would ensure all young people receive a quality offer of employment, education or training within four months of leaving school, a program or a job. This policy in Europe has led to a reduction of two percentage points in the NEET rate before the pandemic.<sup>12, 13</sup>
5. Expand targeted financial measures to offset direct and indirect costs related to COVID-19, targeting poorest students or students with demonstrated financial needs. This includes providing school materials,

school transportation or free school meals to ensure children return to school.<sup>14</sup>

6. Funding and granting agencies should consider funding frameworks that proactively offer a range of unrestricted grants in amounts that are comparative to pre-pandemic ranges. This would ensure ongoing financial stability to necessary community support programs for vulnerable families.<sup>122</sup>

### Policy/Program Solutions:

1. The Government of Canada, Canada Revenue Agency Canada Child Benefit (CCB).<sup>123</sup>
2. The Government of Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada invested \$350 million to help community organizations serve vulnerable Canadians during the COVID-19 crisis through the Emergency Community Support Fund.<sup>124</sup>
3. To reduce financial stress during the COVID-19 situation, Nunavut's Child and Family Services have implemented short-term financial support to help families meet their basic needs if they cannot get enough assistance from other programs.<sup>125</sup>
4. Toronto Public Library launched a new Internet Connectivity Kits initiative to give a laptop and a Wi-Fi hotspot with two years of unlimited data to those with the most urgent

122 “Report | Approaches to Learning Amid Crises: Reflections from ....” 15 Mar. 2021, <https://lawson.ca/report-approaches-to-learning-amid-crises-reflections-from-philanthropy/>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

123 (2021, March 4). Canada child benefit (CCB) payment increase: CRA and COVID-19 .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/campaigns/covid-19-update/covid-19-ccb-payment-increase.html>

124 (2020, September 28). Emergency Community Support Fund - Canada.ca. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/emergency-community-support-fund.html>

125 (n.d.). Social Indicators - Health and Social Services. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/sites/hss/files/resources/social-indicators-covid-19-pandemic.pdf>

needs. Participating community agencies referred vulnerable households that could benefit from these programs.<sup>25</sup>

5. The Province of Nova Scotia has provided funding to support 350 Nova Scotian youth who are currently under-represented in the workforce. The funding will provide a free, 15-week technical and professional skills training program. Participants will also receive mentoring and other support, including individual counselling. Graduates will receive industry-recognized credentials. This will help to prepare them for jobs in the information technology sector. Training will be delivered by NPower Canada, a registered charity that helps to reduce poverty in Canada by launching youth-facing employment barriers into IT careers.<sup>126</sup>
6. Upon school closures, JA Canada created JA Digital Campus to teach financial literacy and career readiness via an online portal that contains self-directed modules for students, alongside teaching tools that can be used by parents and teachers.<sup>127</sup>

## FOOD INSECURITY

In support of healthy development and learning, many schools/school districts provide nutritious meal and snack programs for students. Children who are hungry are shown to have more difficulties learning.<sup>128</sup> “For those

families who were already food insecure, school closures mean the situation may now be worse, a meal, let alone a nutritious meal, may not be accessible.”<sup>99</sup> There is also the disproportionate impact of food insecurity on First Nations, Métis and Inuit children and youth.<sup>14</sup>

## Policy Suggestions:

1. Establish a federally-funded, national, universal school food program to provide healthy food for all students.<sup>129, 130</sup>
2. Ensure First Nations children have prompt access to the program and are provided with traditional or other culturally-appropriate food.<sup>14</sup>

## Policy/Program Solutions:

1. Create online cooking classes that use ingredients in food boxes distributed to families to normalize the use of food boxes and create community around food as a basic right.<sup>40</sup>
2. The Government of Manitoba created Home Nutrition and Learning pilot project in partnership with community organizations. Breakfast packages of nutritious foods along with recipes and learning activities were delivered to school-aged children and their families to cook at home together. These families would otherwise experience

126 (2020, November 6). Free Training, Career Support for 350 Nova Scotia Youth .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://novascotia.ca/news/release/?id=20201106001>

127 (n.d.). Program Library - JA Canada Digital Campus. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.jacampus.org/program-library/>

128 (n.d.). Student Nutrition Program | Ontario.ca. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.ontario.ca/page/student-nutrition-program>

129 “Food Insecurity | The Impact of COVID-19 on Canadian Children.” <https://www.breakfastclubcanada.org/covid-impacts/>. Accessed 5 May, 2021.

130 (n.d) “For a Universal Healthy School Food Program”. Retrieved May 3, 2021 from [https://2edb03c8-6d8c-411f-88a8-2708d30ad344.filesusr.com/ugd/e7a651\\_31dd1ff281c1486bb4ee4489c44e7a8d.pdf](https://2edb03c8-6d8c-411f-88a8-2708d30ad344.filesusr.com/ugd/e7a651_31dd1ff281c1486bb4ee4489c44e7a8d.pdf)

food disruption due to school closures and limited access to meal programs.<sup>131, 132, 133</sup>

3. The Government of Ontario's Student Nutrition Program (SNP) made program changes to continue to meet the needs of families during school closures and summer break. The program adapted to include new approaches, such as: providing grocery gift cards or farm vouchers offering food boxes, meal kits or frozen meals, and partnering with local food banks. Program support staff were able to shift the SNP's focus from the universal access in-school nutrition programs to targeted food security initiatives for families.<sup>129</sup>
4. Ottawa Network for Education School Breakfast Program created School Breakfast Replacement Kits (March 2020) and subsequently School Breakfast Learn-at-Home Kits (January 2021), which contain one month's worth of school breakfasts and are delivered to students across Ottawa.<sup>134</sup>
5. Newfoundland and Labrador's School Lunch Association collected food left in various school kitchens during the March 2020 closures and provided the food to other community groups, such as food

banks, homeless shelters and other service organizations aiding vulnerable people.<sup>135</sup>

6. The Government of Canada, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada has introduced a Surplus Food Rescue Program to help manage and redirect existing food surpluses to organizations addressing food insecurity and to avoid food waste. The program aims to rescue surplus commodities that would otherwise go to waste, and to ensure the food reaches vulnerable populations in Canada.<sup>136</sup>
7. The Government of Canada provided the Emergency Food Security Fund to Canadian food banks and other national food rescue organizations to help improve access to food for people experiencing food insecurity in Canada due to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>137</sup>
8. The Government of Canada has made enhancements to the Nutrition North Canada Subsidy Program during COVID-19. This included adding new items to the subsidy list and increasing medium- and high-subsidy rates so that families can buy healthy food and other essentials during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>138</sup>

131 (2020, June 15). News Releases | Manitoba Launches \$2.5-Million Home Nutrition .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://news.gov.mb.ca/news/index.html?item=48458&posted=2020-06-15>

132 (2020, September 23). Manitoba Extends Home ... - Province of Manitoba | News Releases. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://news.gov.mb.ca/news/index.html?item=49285&posted=2020-09-23>

133 (n.d.). Manitoba Home Nutrition and Learning Program. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://mbnutritionlearning.ca/>

134 (n.d.). School Breakfast Program - Ottawa Network for Education - Réseau .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://onfe-rope.ca/our-work/school-breakfast-programs/>

135 (2020, October 13). School food programs pivot to keep feeding students during COVID .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/covid19-school-food-programs-1.5752019>

136 (2020, July 31). Surplus Food Rescue Program: Applicant guide - Agriculture and .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.agr.gc.ca/eng/agricultural-programs-and-services/surplus-food-rescue-program/surplus-food-rescue-program-applicant-guide/?id=1591883799138>

137 (2021, February 4). Emergency Food Security Fund - Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.agr.gc.ca/eng/agricultural-programs-and-services/emergency-food-security-fund/?id=1585855025072>

138 (2020, September 4). Enhancements to the Nutrition North Canada subsidy program .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.nutritionnorthcanada.gc.ca/eng/1593803686454/1593803714791>

9. First Nations Health Authority developed “Planning Food Security – A toolkit for the COVID-19 Pandemic.” With this toolkit, Indigenous communities can make short-, medium- and long-term plans for food security using a food systems approach. This toolkit includes ideas, templates, tools and information to support community planning.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> (n.d.). Planning for Food Security – A Toolkit for the COVID-19 Pandemic. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.afn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/FNHA-Planning-for-Food-Security-A-Toolkit-for-the-COVID-19-Pandemic.pdf>

# DIVERSITY AND DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACTS

Learn about the impacts of school closures on diverse children and the disproportionate impact from the School Closures and COVID-19: [Interactive Tool](#).

*Raising Canada 2020* also discusses this within its top threats. [Learn more here](#).

Canada has had a documented increase in racism<sup>140</sup> as well as racial inequality<sup>21, 40</sup> during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the pandemic continues to unfold, it is important to recognize the disproportionate impact of population-level mitigation and containment strategies on racialized and immigrant populations.<sup>141</sup> Racialized individuals and immigrants are additionally over-represented among the groups of essential workers in jobs that require direct contact with people or involve precarious conditions.<sup>142</sup> They also tend to be more socioeconomically disadvantaged, making them more susceptible to both COVID-19 and adverse health outcomes.<sup>143</sup> Examples of how public health measures did not take into consideration the lived experiences of immigrant families:

***“Most of these policies ignored the realities of families living in apartment buildings where physical distancing is a challenge. For many Toronto immigrant families living in such spaces, the physical distancing required by policies—and especially separate spaces for children and older persons—was extremely difficult as they tried to navigate crowded apartment buildings, shared elevators, and laundry rooms. Moreover, many take public transport, live in multi-generational and/or multi-family households, and work in essential services.”<sup>21</sup>***

***“Beyond the impact on education, COVID-19 restrictions and government-mandated public health measures such as closure of schools, childcare, and other non-essential services curtailed access to formal and informal support networks. Due to limited English language proficiency and social networking, newcomer immigrant parents already lack social support apart from informal support from their ethno-cultural communities.”<sup>21</sup>***

140 “Chinese Canadians reveal their experiences with racism during ....” 22 Jun. 2020, [https://angusreid.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020.06.22\\_Discrimination\\_Chinese\\_Canadians.pdf](https://angusreid.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020.06.22_Discrimination_Chinese_Canadians.pdf). Accessed 5 May. 2021.

141 (2020, March 26). Combating COVID-19: health equity matters | Nature Medicine. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41591-020-0823-6>

142 (n.d.). Policy statement on a human rights-based approach to managing .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-statement-human-rights-based-approach-managing-covid-19-pandemic>

143 “Knowledge, Psychological Impacts, and ... - Research Square.” 15 Apr. 2021, <https://www.researchsquare.com/article/rs-362857/v1>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

## Policy Suggestions:

1. Proactively put the needs of people first and understand the importance of intersectionality when discussing issues stemming from or a part of systemic racism.<sup>104</sup>
2. Implement laws, acts and programs that address food insecurity, policing in schools and access to good affordable health care without racialized stigma and trauma and/or racist incidents associated when seeking professional medical help from hospitals.<sup>104</sup>
3. Future public health measures should adopt an equity-lens as data continues to be collected that prioritizes the needs of diverse populations.<sup>144</sup>
4. Ontario Human Rights Commission has released a policy statement on a human rights-based approach to managing the COVID-19 pandemic. The policy statement sets out principles that provide guidance to decision-makers across a range of potential policy, legal, regulatory and enforcement-related responses.<sup>143</sup>
5. Working in partnership with, instead of on behalf of, community members increases the possibility for better, more responsive programs.<sup>40</sup>
6. Mental health resources that are sensitive and responsive to the unique needs and contexts of immigrant families are needed. Increasing the availability of resources to support immigrant parents will be of benefit to the mental and physical health of parents, parenting, and parent-child relationships. Supportive strategies could include community-oriented approaches, for example, online community group discussions and parenting groups. This kind of strategy should include interpreters and translators, and may require creativity in order to respond to the varying abilities to access the internet, communication devices, and levels of digital literacy.<sup>21</sup>
7. Create safe community spaces outside the family, especially for mothers, because community networking is known to facilitate positive parenting and positive outcomes for children. This will build on the resilience of immigrant families and communities to help them adjust and adapt as the pandemic progresses.<sup>21</sup>
8. Local, provincial and federal governments should provide targeted information in addition to instrumental, financial and health-related resources and support to immigrant communities.<sup>21</sup>
9. Propose bills and enforce educational laws that make anti-racism training mandatory for teachers and faculty across each province.<sup>104</sup>
10. Anti-Asian Racism - Chinese Canadian National Council - Toronto Chapter<sup>145</sup>
  - a. Recognize the importance of anti-racism education by committing financial and other resources to community-led organizations to carry out anti-racism education.
  - b. Fund more educational initiatives about the long history of Chinese Canadians and Asian Canadians in Canada, their historical experiences with racism and their contributions to Canada.

144 "Public health measures to reduce the risk of SARS- CoV ... - BMJ Open." 9 Mar. 2021, <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/bmjopen/11/3/e046177.full.pdf>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

145 "A Year of Racist Attacks: Anti-Asian Racism across Canada One Year Into the COVID-19 Pandemic", <https://drive.google.com/file/d/193CdIC8uq623VRIAzoO3ShfDTEutXQi2/view>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

- c. Recognizing that anti-Chinese and anti-Asian racism happens to anyone who is perceived to be from such a group, adopt a targeted approach based on intersectional equity, to ensure those who are most vulnerable are protected.
11. Anti-Black Racism - Parents of Black Children Demands<sup>146</sup>
- a. Education Act be reformed to include and identify Black people in Canada as having a right to a curriculum that represents them, as much as any other student; to recognize the right of Black people to control, manage and deliver educational programs and services for Black students.
  - b. All Ontario curriculum be decolonized to prioritize Black history. Black Canadian experiences must be built into all school curriculums, K-12.
  - c. The Ministry of Education should create an education data oversight division to rank, monitor, and hold school boards accountable for their commitment to equity. School boards across Ontario collect race-based data on student achievement and discipline. All publicly-funded boards must be required to publicly publish disaggregated race-based data and to act on the data that they are collecting.
- d. The Ministry of Education and publicly-funded school boards create short-term and long-term plans to hire Black teachers, Black guidance counsellors, Black administrative and front office staff.
12. To minimize the consequences of systemic racism, the Parliamentary Black Caucus calls on all levels of government in Canada to<sup>147</sup>:
- a. Measure the pervasiveness of systemic discrimination through the collection of race-based data.
  - b. Assist Black Canadians in providing economic prosperity to all through measures to support Black-owned/run businesses.
  - c. Eliminate the barriers to access to justice and public security for Black Canadians and Indigenous people.
  - d. Make our public administration more effective and resilient by ensuring it actually reflects the diversity of the public it serves.
  - e. Recognize and support the artistic and economic contributions of Black Canadian culture and heritage.

## Policy/Program Solutions:

1. #FaceRace educational campaign is “an open challenge to all Canadians to confront racism amid the COVID-19 pandemic.”<sup>148</sup>

146 “Our Demands | Parents of Black Children.” 8 Nov. 2020, <https://parentsofblackchildren.org/our-demands/>. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

147 (2020, June 17). Statement by the Parliamentary Black Caucus - Canada.ca. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/corporate/transparency/open-government/standing-committee/chagger-whole-senate-addressing-ending-systemic-racism/statement-parliamentary-black-caucus.html>

148 (n.d.). CCNC-SJ - FaceRace - CCNC - SJ. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://ccncsj.ca/campaigns-facerace/>



2. The Multicultural Council of Windsor and Essex County is providing targeted information to immigrant communities in their own languages by translating vaccination program information posters into 12 different languages.<sup>149</sup>
3. British Columbia Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) has published information about COVID-19 on its website, in handouts and in videos in eight different languages.<sup>150</sup>
4. To address systemic racism, the Ontario College of Teachers updated their Professional Misconduct regulations to now include “making remarks or engaging in behaviours that expose any person or class of persons to hatred on the basis of a prohibited ground of discrimination under Part I of the Human Rights Code.”<sup>151</sup>
5. Community-based participatory research and program design have the potential to support communities in better health outcomes. Punjabi Kids Health is an example of a program developed through this process. Dr. Ripudaman Singh Minhas, Developmental Pediatrician with St. Michael’s Unity Health Toronto, and a group of volunteers from various professional backgrounds are combining their efforts to

bring Punjabi families health care resources in both English and Punjabi in a simple and relatable manner. Their goal is to promote health literacy and equity among the Punjabi community and empower parents and caregivers by sharing clear, relevant and evidence-based information on children and family health, parenting and child development through social media platforms.<sup>152</sup>

## INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

There is a disproportionate risk to Indigenous people, families and communities associated with COVID-19.<sup>153</sup> The Government of Canada recognizes that First Nations, Inuit and Métis are among the most at risk and that during the pandemic, in particular, those in remote and fly-in only parts of the country are uniquely vulnerable.<sup>154</sup> According to Canadian census data from 2016, 30% of unhoused persons identified as Indigenous. Only 5% of people in what is currently Canada identify as Indigenous, suggesting that Indigenous Peoples experience higher rates of houselessness.<sup>155</sup>

149 (n.d.). COVID VACCINE GUIDES (MULTILINGUAL) > Multicultural Council .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://themcc.com/covid-vaccine-guides/>

150 (n.d.). Translated Content - BC Centre for Disease Control. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/about-covid-19/translated-content>

151 (2020, November 6). Professional misconduct recognizes hateful remarks and behaviour .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from [https://www.oct.ca/public/media/press-releases/2020/20201106\\_3](https://www.oct.ca/public/media/press-releases/2020/20201106_3)

152 (n.d.). Punjabi Kids’ Health (@punjabikidshealth) • Instagram photos and .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.instagram.com/punjabikidshealth/>

153 (n.d.). An Important Message About COVID-19 from Right To Play. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.righttoplay.ca/en-ca/national-offices/national-office-canada/whats-new/an-important-message-about-covid-19-from-right-to-play/>

154 (2021, January 26). Indigenous Community Support Fund - Canada.ca. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1585189335380/1585189357198>

155 (2020, August 31). Everyone Counts 2018: Highlights - Report - Canada.ca. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/homelessness/reports/highlights-2018-point-in-time-count.html>

## Policy Suggestions:

1. Canadian governments (including the Senate) must read, understand and implement existing reports, recommendations, treaties and literature by Indigenous communities and youth.<sup>104</sup>
2. Include and centre counsel from Indigenous communities, specifically including Youth and Elders, when having an initiative or doing anything that concerns them.<sup>104</sup>
3. Pass Bill C-15: An Act respecting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.<sup>156</sup>
4. Evaluations of the success of programs, policies and services must be developed by and for Indigenous communities. Measuring success within federal systems requires approaches that move beyond numbers and data towards qualitative methods that measure well-being of Indigenous youth in outcomes. This must be integrated into all frameworks, programs and policies.<sup>104</sup>
5. Proactively understand and learn more about the quality of schooling (especially on reserves) and work to ensure that all reserves have a high-level quality of education and learning materials and/or supplies.<sup>104</sup>
6. Provide free, equitable access to reliable internet for core educational content, with a focus on content delivered in Indigenous languages. Develop or expand device affordability and availability, as well as connectivity initiatives for Indigenous communities.<sup>14</sup>

7. Support culturally-based equity for Indigenous families so that all Indigenous peoples have a fair opportunity to raise their children at home and in their communities.<sup>104</sup>
8. Collaboration among the different arms of the provincial government to develop a holistic framework for addressing the structural barriers impacting Indigenous women [and children] accessing adequate and appropriate health care.<sup>65</sup>

## Policy/Program Solutions:

1. British Columbia expanded suicide prevention programs to support the wellness of Indigenous youth, who are disproportionately impacted by suicide. The funding will be used to deliver expanded suicide prevention and life promotion activities in First Nations communities, expand First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) youth advisory committees to more regions and to support Métis Nation B.C. to promote youth wellness initiatives by developing Métis-specific online mental health support courses, as well as anti-stigma and awareness campaigns.<sup>157</sup>
2. Nunavut's Child and Family Services is supporting families by providing support to go out on the land. Connection with culture and the land supports family cohesion and helps to prevent some instances of child maltreatment and neglect.<sup>126</sup>

156 (2020, December 3). Government Bill (House of Commons) C-15 (43-2) - First Reading .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/43-2/bill/C-15/first-reading>

157 (2020, December 3). Expanded suicide prevention programs support ... - BC Gov News. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2020MMHA0063-001999>

3. The Government of Nunavut developed the 2020-21 Educator Toolkit for Nunavut Schools<sup>15</sup> and the 2020-21 RESTORE School Toolkit for Nunavut Schools<sup>43</sup> to support school staff and teachers with the return to school:
  - a. Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit values and beliefs are important to keep the language and culture alive. By using Inuit values, beliefs and principles, students will learn traditional values while engaged in their learning activities. Today, these land-based and cultural activities can be designed to support learning and curricular outcomes for all students.
4. The Government of Nunavut developed an online resource to provide access to [Inuit language based] educational materials for families and caregivers to support learning at home.<sup>158</sup>
5. Rumie, a free digital microlearning library, has formed a Canadian Indigenous Content Coalition with the goal to deliver no-cost digital resources that will keep communities up to date on COVID-19, support mental well-being and provide new [online] activities for Indigenous children and youth at home.<sup>159</sup>
6. Jordan's Principle<sup>160</sup> continues to help First Nations children access the products, services and support they need (whether they are related to COVID-19 or not), regardless of where they live in Canada. This can include, for example, laptops, tablets or other e-learning tools, if they meet an identified health, education or social need.<sup>161</sup>
7. Indigenous Community Support Fund<sup>154</sup>.<sup>162</sup> was created by the Government of Canada to address immediate needs in First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities and provide Indigenous leadership with the flexibility needed to design and implement community-based solutions to prevent, prepare and respond to the spread of COVID-19 within their communities. These funds could be used for measures including, but not limited to:
  - Support for Elders and vulnerable community members
  - Measures to address food insecurity
  - Educational and other support for children
  - Mental health assistance and emergency response services
  - Preparedness measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19

158 (n.d.). Angirrami Ilinniarniq | Learning from Home. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://angirrami.com/>

159 (n.d.). Covid-19 Indigenous Content Coalition - Rumie Initiative. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://about.rumie.org/covid19-indigenous/>

160 (2021, April 15). Jordan's Principle - Canada.ca. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1568396042341/1568396159824>

161 (2020, April 17). COVID-19 and Jordan's Principle support for First Nations children Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.afn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-and-Jordan%E2%80%99s-Principle-support-for-First-Nations-children-.pdf>

162 (2020, October 2). Government Bill (House of Commons) C-4 (43-2) - Royal Assent .... Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/10876137>

8. Indigenous Services Canada's Family Violence Prevention Program supports the day-to-day operations of shelters, as well as funding for community-driven proposals for family violence prevention projects on and off reserve. The Government of Canada is investing an additional \$10 million to support shelters in First Nations communities.<sup>163</sup>
9. The Government of Canada transferred the Emergency Food Security Fund from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada to Indigenous Services Canada to help improve access to food and increase food supply for Indigenous communities.<sup>154</sup>

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163 (2020, August 14). (ISC)'s Family Violence Prevention Program (FVPP) - Canada.ca. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1100100035253/1533304683142>

# A CALL FOR AN EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Across Canada, COVID-19 has led to devastating effects on the mental and physical health of kids. School closures, the lack of access to sports and recreational programs, and social isolation have taken a high toll on young people. The urgency to support children and youth has never been greater.

Children First Canada and its partners recently launched a campaign to call for an emergency response and declare #codePINK (a term used for pediatric emergencies) in light of the crisis facing kids.

Together, they are calling for an urgent meeting of Canada's First Ministers to take action to address the crisis facing the 8 million kids in our country. This includes safely scaling up virtual care programs, reducing backlogs for surgeries and rehabilitation, reopening schools, camps, parks and other recreational facilities as quickly as possible, and planning now for a safe return to school in the fall.

Visit [childrenfirstcanada.org/codepink](https://childrenfirstcanada.org/codepink) to learn more.

