

THE KIDS ARE NOT ALRIGHT. IT'S TIME FOR CANADA TO MEASURE UP!

2016 A landmark report on the state of
Canada's children



 **CHILDREN FIRST
CANADA**

GROWING UP IN CANADA

Canada is one of the best countries in which to grow up. Kids who live in Canada have won the lottery. Canada takes good care of our youth. These are great statements and most people believe them, but sadly they are not always true.

Children First Canada undertook a national study on the state of children in Canada in conjunction with the Angus Reid Institute, and with the support of many of our partners. We surveyed adults as well as children, to better understand the current challenges facing kids and to gauge public support for action.

This report contains a summary of the key findings of that survey along with the results of additional research on the quality of life for Canadian children. Together, the results paint a startling picture about the state of childhood in our country and bust several myths about what it is like to grow up in Canada.



MYTH 1: Canada is the of the best places for kids to grow up:

While the majority of Canadians believe we are a top 10 country to raise a child, the reality is starkly different. The harsh truth is that Canada is far from being a world-leading country for kids to grow up.

MYTH 2: Most kids are just fine

We are not talking about a small handful of kids falling through the cracks; millions of children from all walks of life, from coast to coast to coast, are affected. Our youngest citizens are in desperate need of help.

The kids are not alright and it's time for Canada to measure up!

MYTH 3: Adults know best

The research shows that adults and children have different points of view on what the problems are and how to solve them. We need to listen to adults as well as children and work more effectively together to achieve lasting change.

Kids can't vote, but they have a voice. It's time that Canadians listened and acted. We must ensure that children have the support, structure, and tools to prosper. The future of our children and our country depends on it.

MYTH 4: The problems are too big

The problems are daunting, but Canadians care deeply about children's wellbeing and are committed to making a difference. The study revealed strong public support for urgent action: three-quarters of Canadians (73 per cent of adults and 77 per cent of children) said that young people in Canada require more programs and services to safeguard their wellbeing and fulfill their potential. And we don't have to start from scratch; we know what is working in other countries and what steps are necessary to help Canada improve the lives of our youngest citizens.

So what now?

We want to start a conversation – in classrooms, at dinner tables, at water coolers, in boardrooms, in newsrooms, and in the House of Commons - about the state of childhood in Canada and of the urgent need for change.

The data in this report should make all Canadians very uncomfortable. Parents and children, citizens and leaders, should be angry that our country is letting our children down. Canada is considered the fifth most prosperous nation in the world, but how can a country prosper if it leaves its kids behind? We can and we must do better. This report helps to point the way forward.

Investing in kids is the right thing to do, but it also makes good economic sense for today and for tomorrow: every single dollar invested in our children's early years saves nine dollars in future spending on health care and social services. What's critical right now is the social and political will to make it happen.

That is why Children First Canada was established and why we are launching a national campaign with a bold and ambitious vision to make Canada a world-leading

country where all our kids thrive. We are harnessing the strength of individuals and organizations who share a common commitment to improve the lives of children. This goal cannot be achieved without the support of dedicated partners such as children's charities and hospitals, research centres, corporations, community leaders, and children themselves.

It is not enough to say that children are our future. Those words mean nothing unless backed up by concrete actions to invest in children right now. Today, there are more than six million children in Canada, and all of them matter.

Please join us! Together we can make this the best place in the world for our children to grow up.

Sara L Austin is the Founder and President/CEO of Children First Canada, a new national nonprofit organization with a mandate to be a strong, independent voice for all of Canada's children. Sara's commitment to children has earned her the prestigious Top 25 Women of Influence and the Top 100 Most Powerful Women of Canada.

PERCEPTION AND REALITY - THE BRUTAL TRUTH ABOUT GROWING UP IN CANADA

Perception:

Most Canadians think that this is one of the best countries on earth for kids to grow up. The survey found that two-thirds of adults ranked Canada within the top 10 countries to raise a child (26 per cent said top five, and 38 per cent said top five-to-ten). Yet this couldn't be further from the truth.

Reality:

Canada is the fifth most prosperous nation in the world, but children are not reaping the benefits. According to UNICEF's global rankings for child wellbeing, Canada is in the underwhelming middle spot amongst affluent nations overall. That puts Canada behind leaders such as Scandinavian countries, but more surprising, behind countries that are less prosperous than us such as the Czech Republic, Portugal and the UK.^[1]

Canada ranks 17th overall out of 29 nations for children's wellbeing, and what's even more alarming is that we drop to the bottom rankings on several key measures for kids' health and safety.^[2]

[1] Legatum Prosperity Index, prosperity.com/rankings

[2] UNICEF, www.unicef.ca/IRC11

[3] National Report Card on Child Poverty 2015, by Campaign 2000

[4] Canadian Medical Association Journal, April 2014

[5] Teens Talk Report, by Kids Help Phone, 2016

[6] Parachute Canada, www.parachutecanada.org

How does Canada measure up?



- **2nd** for educational achievement
- **3rd** for low smoking rates amongst children/youth
- **7th** for exercise
- **15th** for children's material well-being
- **17th** overall for children's well-being
- **21st** for bullying and child poverty
- **22nd** for infant mortality
- **26th** for child inequality
- **27th** for child health and safety
- **28th** for immunization

More than just numbers!

Millions of children are falling through the cracks. They each have a name and their lives and futures are diminished each day by preventable causes.



1 in 5 children in Canada live in poverty - that's 1.25 million kids in total ^[3]



1 in 3 Canadians have experienced some form of child abuse. Child abuse and neglect costs Canada an estimated \$21.5 billion annually.^[4]



1 in 5 children have considered committing suicide^[5]



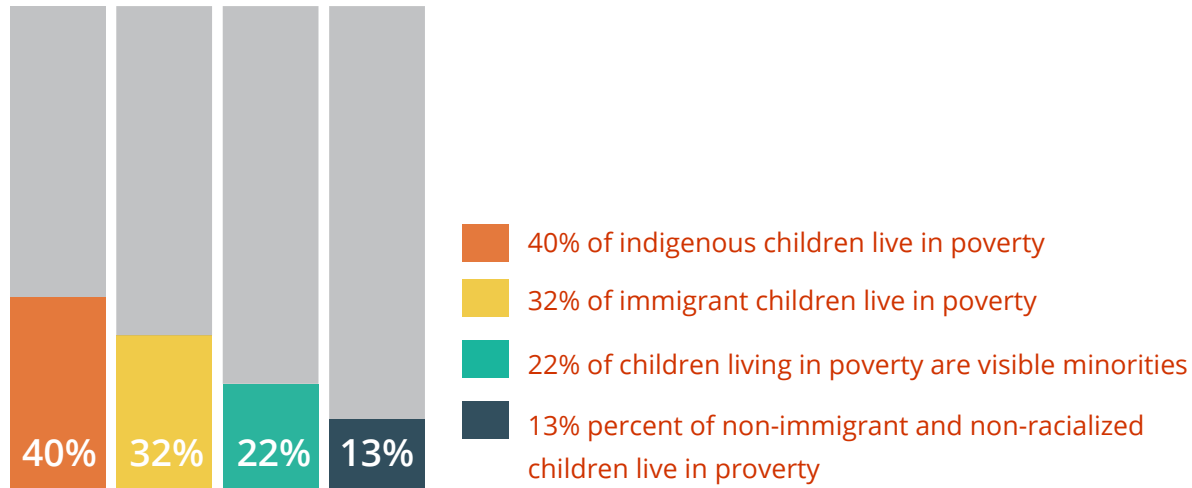
1 child dies every nine hours due to preventable injuries.^[6]

DISCRIMINATION + INEQUALITY

Children from all walks of life are affected, but specific groups of children are particularly vulnerable, including: indigenous children, kids from single parent homes, refugee children and youth in foster care.

In fact, UNICEF ranks Canada as one of the most unequal places to raise a child, placing 26th out of 35 wealthy nations for “fairness for children”. [7]

Percentage of poverty across races in Canada^[8]



One noteworthy finding from the study showed that non-parents show a higher level of support than parents when it comes to the prospects of creating more services for indigenous children and more services for immigrant and refugee children. This suggests that, having no children of their own to prioritize, they are more likely to choose programs that affect a smaller percentage of Canadians, or new Canadians.

[7] UNICEF, [unicef.ca/en/unicef-report-card-13-fairness-for-children](https://www.unicef.ca/en/unicef-report-card-13-fairness-for-children)

[8] Shameful Neglect: Indigenous Child Poverty in Canada, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2016

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I really believed that the greatness of the country and of our joint society ... is bound up in the possibility of raising a generation of First Nations who never have to recover from their childhoods, and a group of non-aboriginal children who never have to say they're sorry. //

- Cindy Blackstock



WHAT CANADIANS THINK ABOUT THE CURRENT AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

Children and adults agree on the need for urgent action:

- Approximately three-quarters of Canadians (73% of adults and 77% of children) say that young people in Canada need more support to safeguard their wellbeing and fulfill their potential.
- Almost two-thirds of Canadians don't feel we do enough to help people living in poverty in Canada.

What adults have to say:

- Adults named mental health and prevention of child abuse as the two areas in most need of action.
- Half of all parents (50 per cent) say that a lack of money is hurting their children, and 45 per cent say that parenting is a bigger challenge than they were expecting.
- 4 in 5 adults (80 per cent) think that the cost of licensed day care is pricing out the families who need it most
- 6 in 10 adults (58 per cent) say they are worried about the next generation getting a good job or finding a satisfying career

What kids have to say:

Children ranked bullying, mental health and better support for those living in poverty as their top concern.



One in five kids said they don't feel safe and supported in school.



One in five kids rated their friendships with their peers as fair, poor or very poor.



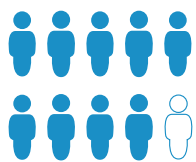
More than one in three kids said the quality of after school programs available is either fair (26 per cent) or poor (8 per cent).

CHILDREN ON THE AGENDA: PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVING THE LIVES OF CANADIAN CHILDREN

We must invest in the health and safety of Canada's children. Children deserve a brighter future and we all win when children succeed. We need investment by the government and by every Canadian to make this happen.

Research shows that investing in early childhood directly influences economic, health, and social outcomes for individuals and society; conversely, adverse experiences in early childhood create deficits in skills and abilities that drive down productivity and increase social costs, adding to financial deficits borne by the public.^[9]

The good news is that Canadians care about the wellbeing of children and support the urgent need for change:



- Nearly nine-in-ten Canadians say that investing in children will pay off and save the need for additional expenditures in the future.



- Children and adults alike call for more support for youth mental health, greater action to prevent bullying, and more funding for families in poverty to increase the level of childhood wellbeing in this country. Adults also identified prevention of child abuse as a top priority.



- Canadians recognize that kids have a key role in driving change; three-quarters of kids (77 per cent) and almost two-thirds of adults (57 per cent) say that young people don't currently have enough say on the big issues that affect them.

The research also showed strong support for public policy changes to improve the lives of children, such as establishing a federal Children's Commissioner, a Children's Budget, and a National Strategy for Children.

A large number of Canadians also believe that the government should take the lead in setting laws that are in the best interests of children, even when it may be controversial. For instance, Canada is ranked 29th globally for its low immunization rates and 73 per cent of Canadians think there should be a law that mandates vaccinations for children.

The research showed that there is less agreement when it comes to matters such setting limits on the physical punishment of children, as many believe this is still the prerogative of parents. This points to the need for greater public education about the short and long term impacts of physical punishment on children and on the need to equip parents with the knowledge and skills for positive parenting.

While Canadians may not always agree about what's in the best interests of children, we need to be guided by the best evidence available and involve children in decisions that affect their lives.

^[9] The Economics of Inequality The Value of Early Childhood Education, James J. Heckman, 2011

“The wellbeing of Canadian children must become our first priority. As adults, we have the responsibility to advocate and act on their behalf, because transforming their lives directly impacts our shared future. As we marshal our combined energy, passion, knowledge and commitment to drive change and improve the health and safety of kids everywhere, I am proud to support Children First Canada – a strong, independent voice for all of Canada's children.”

- Katie Taylor, Chair of the Board, RBC and Sick Kids Foundation, and Council of Champions for Children First Canada.

IT'S TIME FOR CANADA TO MEASURE UP!

Here are some immediate steps that will help make Canada a world-leading country for kids to grow up.

Calls to action for government:

- 1. Every child deserves a champion:** Establish a national children's commissioner – an independent official to raise the profile of children in Canada, promote the best interests of children with government and hold them accountable, and speak with and on behalf of children.
- 2. Every child needs resources to thrive:** Publish a children's budget to track the national funding that is allocated and invested in evidence based solutions for children.
- 3. Every child deserves a flying start at life:** Create a national strategy to improve the lives of Canada's children and measure progress over time.
- 4. Every child has rights:** Teach children and youth their rights and responsibilities, and ensure that Canada's laws protect the rights of children. If violations occur, ensure that children receive timely justice.
- 5. Every child has a voice:** Involve children and youth in shaping public policies that affect their lives.

We're calling on Canadians to put children first:



Raise your hand

Volunteer with groups and organizations that are investing in kids – children's charities, children's hospitals, and schools to name a few.



Raise your voice

Raise awareness within your school, workplace and community, motivate others to get involved, and speak up to hold the government accountable to protect the rights of children.



Raise funds for children

Invest your own charitable dollars in organizations that help children and inspire others to invest in kids.

OUR PARTNERS

We are uniting and leveraging Canada's leading children's charities, children's hospitals, research institutions, corporations and community leaders to speak with a united voice for Canada's children. All of our partners contributed to this study and we are grateful for their support!



DONORS

We are grateful for the support of our donors who are committed to helping make Canada the best place in the world for kids to grow up, and who generously funded this research.



The Gail B. O'Brien Charitable Foundation
The Delaney Family Foundation

OUR COUNCIL OF CHAMPIONS

We are proud to be announcing a Council of Champions for Children, a diverse group of leaders who share a common passion and commitment to drive measurable change for children.

A SPECIAL THANKS TO THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUALS FOR THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR THIS REPORT

Barbara Fallon (Fraser Mustard Institute, Univ. of Toronto); Dr. Cathie Scott (Policy Wise for Children & Families); Gwen Burrows (Sick Kids Foundation); Christine Hampson (Sandbox Project); Dr. Joan Durrant (Max Rady College of Medicine, Univ. of Winnipeg); Lisa Wolff (UNICEF Canada); Nichad Khanna (Student's Commission); Rachel Gouin (Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada); Ron Enson (Ensom & Associates).

OUR YOUTH AMBASSADORS

At the heart of Children First Canada are the voices of kids and we are pleased to have Youth Ambassadors who are working on the frontlines to make this a better country for all children.



Children First Canada has a bold and ambitious vision to make Canada a world-leading country where all of our kids thrive. By harnessing the strength of the many organizations committed to improving the lives of Canada's children, we will take the lead in building public awareness and promoting public policies that ensure our children's wellbeing.

Put children first! Pledge online today.

Visit us at childrenfirstcanada.com

