

Thank you again for supporting the first ever digital event for the Young Canadians' Parliament (YCP) hosted by Children First Canada (CFC)!

The objectives of the digital forums are to educate children about their rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), to educate them on their options to take action, advise on the impacts of COVID-19, and to provide a platform to exercise their rights, including having direct access to parliamentarians and decision makers to share their recommendations and perspective.

While there were some nail-biting technical issues, working together, young people created a wonderful opportunity to exercise their right to be heard and their perspective considered under Article 12 of the UNCRC. Thank you to each young person who attended!

This program was co-designed with CFC Youth Ambassadors to contribute to the vision and outcomes of the YCP:

- A coordinated response by federal government and civil society organizations that responds to the priorities of children and youth impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Public policies intended to improve the lives of children will be reflective of the interests and concerns of young Canadians.
- Improved outcomes for the health and wellbeing of all 8 million children in Canada.
- Increased political will to address the urgent threats to childhood.
- A coherent policy framework to improve children's wellbeing.

MENTAL HEALTH BREAKOUT SESSIONS: WHAT CHILDREN AND YOUTH SAID

This topic relates to three rights under the UNCRC:

Article 12: Respect for the Views of the Child

Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. This right applies at all times, for example during immigration proceedings, housing decisions or the child's day-to-day home life.

Article 24: Quality Healthcare

Children have the right to the best health care possible, clean water to drink, healthy food and a clean and safe environment to live in. All adults and children should have information about how to stay safe and healthy.

Article 17: Access to Information

Children have the right to get information from the Internet, radio, television, newspapers, books and other sources. Adults should make sure the information they are getting is not harmful. Governments should encourage the media to share information from lots of different sources, in languages that all children can understand.

More than anything else, we want you to know:

- It has been difficult coping with the isolation as the result of school closures and the cancellation of many other activities. Not being able to be with friends and access services such as therapists has often compounded pre-existing depression and anxiety
- Home has sometimes been stressful; we have had stress in the family. We worry about family members here and in different countries that may not have the same healthcare
- Many of us feel like we're dealing with two pandemics: COVID and systematic racism
- We want to support protests but are concerned about risks of contracting COVID-19
- Feeling like we are unable to do anything about injustices occurring
- Shameful that people of African descent face brutality and racism in Canada
- We are bombarded with stressful news from social media and the internet
- There is prejudice and stigma around mental health so people don't speak about it, especially lesser known mental health disorders
- There is a lot of stigma around mental health for men and boys; mental health is not gender-specific
- Lack of access to mental health resources, due to lack of infrastructure and resources in rural areas, or due to long waitlists
- It is stressful waiting to see what will happen and not being able to plan the future

There have been some opportunities during COVID such as:

- We have increased appreciation of nature
- Time for personal reflection, find yourself
- There is space and time to pursue hobbies and to learn new skills, such as baking or cooking
- Not being at school may be easier for children who have anxiety or otherwise struggle in school
- We've helped each other and family members during stressful times and are learning to deal with grief through things like writing letters
- We value our friends more when public health measures ease

How we would like decision makers to address mental health concerns:

- Make more people aware of online mental health resources, generally making more accessible resources, address long waitlists, and share hope around mental health
- Focus on prevention of mental health issues
- Make mental health resources available to parents because they may not know as much as teachers
- Make sure to keep mental health supports after the pandemic
- Support mental health literacy through things like theatre and specialists
- Ensure youth engagement on youth mental health. We want an opportunity to speak our mind and share our thoughts with decision makers. Partner with youth to create a Parliamentary Youth Committee on Mental Health or panel of children to advise on mental health, during and after the COVID-19 crisis
- Create opportunities for us to talk to each other about mental health
- Provide more mental health education in school and make sure teachers know what to teach or ask for specialists
- We need recreation space spaces like splash pads, skate parks, walking trails, and parks while enforcing social distancing
- Government should do research on the effects of COVID-19 on youth mental health
- Next Canadian census should include mental health during COVID-19
- Create more opportunities for us to stay connected to our friends, family and community, including providing education for older people on how to use technology to stay in touch
- Provide more education directly to us, both, children and teenagers on how to safely social distance and how we can still see family members and friends while following public health recommendations
- We would like to have online summer camps so that our parents can focus on work and we have something fun to do
- Strengthen our communities, including helping the elderly
- Support and value hospital workers (frontline workers) who are helping so many of us right now

SUMMER PLANS BREAKOUT SESSIONS: WHAT CHILDREN AND YOUTH SAID

This topic relates to three rights under the UNCRC:

Article 12: Respect for the Views of the Child

Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. This right applies at all times, for example during immigration proceedings, housing decisions or the child's day-to-day home life.

Article 31: Rest, Play, Culture, Arts

Every child has the right to rest, relax and play and to take part in cultural and creative activities.

Article 27: Standards of Living

Children have the right to food, clothing and a safe place to live so they can develop in the best way possible. The government should help families and children who cannot afford this.

More than anything else, we want you to know:

- We have been impacted by so many things being cancelled, such as class graduations, summer camps, sports teams, local recreation options like swimming pools, trips to see family members, potential summer jobs and volunteer opportunities
- We have had limited ability to engage in physical activity
- With school being online, we have not been able to get outside and be active
- We want to be outside and stay active, but we are worried about our health and about a second-wave of COVID-19
- Especially as high school students who want to go to post-secondary education, we are worried about the quality of our education and are concerned that virtual learning will impact future opportunities
- For those of us with poor immune systems, we are even more limited in what we can participate in outside of our own home

There have been some opportunities during COVID such as:

- Time to do things like go bike riding, taking online courses to learn new things, or running to stay active!

How we would like decision makers to address our summer plan concerns:

- Continue breakfast and lunch programs and food banks to ensure access to food!
- We would like decision makers to fund online resources developed to help us be outside and be active. Some of our ideas include:
 - Sports videos from young Canadians such as Sidney Crosby, Alphonso Davies, Paul Pogba
 - Sports videos from members of the federal government, maybe even the Right Honourable Justin Trudeau!
 - How to garden in your own backyard
 - Videos created by coaches of sports teams and other young people
 - Online camps that include activities like scavenger hunts around the house, playing kahoot, etc.
 - Online masterclasses for young people interested in different fields of work
 - Summer classes in learning a new language and science topics like marine biology or biomedical sciences
- Many of us have barriers to access online platforms that allow us to take part in activities and stay connected to our loved ones. Here are ways we would like you to address that:
 - Provide devices to children whose families cannot afford them
 - Provide internet access to everyone
 - Remove overages on data plans
- Invest in education to build the next generation
- The creation of a free streaming service for all Canadian youth with a limit to how much you can watch without exercise
- We want you to invest in public spaces and open roads to ride bikes
- When thinking about school, we would like the option to either have less student attending class at one time, have students go to classes as normal, or have the option of studying online
 - Those of us with special needs, or Individual Education Plans need funding for more support and to ensure accessibility in learning whether it be online or in person
 - If learning online continues, we would like more live classes
- Provide funding to businesses so that our parents can purchase work technology and work from home
- Create strategies for people and businesses to continue the progress we have made in reducing pollution during COVID-19

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