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## The time is now

- COVID-19 is significantly impacting the health and wellbeing of children as they experience poverty, abuse, social isolation, and lack of education. The time is now to engage youth and provide a platform for their voices to shape policy, as they will carry the social, emotional, financial and health impacts of this pandemic. This cannot wait.
- 2021 marks the 30th anniversary of Canada ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). An in person, national event in 2021 could be synergistic with this anniversary and support the Government of Canada's plans to commemorate the occasion in a meaningful way.
- In 2019 Canada began its periodic review by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child regarding its compliance with the UNCRC and will once again come under international scrutiny when reviewed by the UN Committee in June 2020 and January 2021. Canada does not have a strong track record for implementation of UNCRC recommendations and would be better positioned for the upcoming review if it could demonstrate tangible action.
- Canada is ranked the 8th most prosperous country in the world, but we rank 25th out of 41 affluent nations for our children's wellbeing according to UNICEF, and we drop to the bottom ranks for key measures on children's health and safety as well as child poverty.
- 182 countries have ratified the UNCRC, and Canada is ranked 54th according to the The KidsRights Index, with our Environmental ranking being as low as 136-140.
- The Young Canadians' Parliament will provide children with a platform to identify their top priorities for action and to work together with the federal government and civil society to make Canada a world-leading country for children.
- If we want to make tangible improvements in the lives of children, we must act now. Canada's credibility at home and on the international stage is on the line.

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## Did you know?

- Federal government youth engagement programs only include children over the age of 15 and do not involve a child rights perspective. All children have the right to participate meaningfully in the decisions that affect their lives. Children First Canada's youth engagement begins with very young children. We find even the youngest kids have a lot to say and share, they want to be involved and their ideas and input is meaningful.
- Canada is legally bound to respect, protect, and fulfil the rights of every child<sup>1</sup> as enshrined in the UNCRC. The current reality is that the vast majority of Canadians have

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<sup>1</sup> The UNCRC defines a "child" as any person below the age of 18.



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never learned about children's rights, and far too many children do not enjoy the protection of their rights.

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## Why engage children and youth?

- Kids can't vote so it is critical to consult with them to understand their views, concerns and perspectives on the issues that affect them. Children have a right to be meaningfully involved in decisions that affect them.
- If children learn about their rights, they are more likely to respect the rights of others.
- Programs and policies that are intended to benefit children and youth are more effective when they have been meaningfully consulted and involved in the design and implementation.

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## Young Canadians' Parliament

### Expected results of Young Canadian's Parliament include:

- 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.

### The objectives of the digital regional forums are to educate and empower children and youth by:

- Creating opportunities for mentoring, training and empowering children and youth as leaders.
- Providing a platform for young people to discuss and advise on policies related to children and the nation's response to COVID-19. In addition, seeking children's input into the development of federal policies, especially considering COVID-19 and continuing to review and update the Canadian Children's Charter as a platform for child/youth-led advocacy.
- Teaching children and youth about their rights and equipping them with the required knowledge and skills so they can be part of protecting, respecting, and fulfilling those rights.
- Providing experience that stimulates reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous kids and promotes understanding of the rights of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children to equitable services.



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### The YCP will allow young leaders to:

- Share their views.
- Learn about Canada's federal democratic system and the value of their participation now and in the future.
- Gain knowledge about their rights.
- Learn new skills and how to effectively advocate for themselves and their peers.
- Deepen their knowledge and understanding of the rights of First Nations, Métis and Inuit children and participate in acts of reconciliation.
- Practice important values such as respect, justice, compromise, diversity and inclusion.
- Allow decision makers to gain insights directly from youth and shape more effective policies.
- Cultivate the Canadian leaders of today and tomorrow!



Delegates from across Canada participated in drafting and launching the Canadian Children's Charter at the National Summit in 2017. The final version was released on National Child Day in 2018 and was recognized by the Prime Minister of Canada.

The YCP could be supplemented by activities such as: engagement opportunities with decision makers, roundtable/policy discussions, attending question period, workshops on leadership training and knowledge about their rights through the UNCRC (and would include consultations to update the Canadian Children's Charter).