



OUR COMMITMENT TO TODAY AND TOMORROW

Report on
Recommendations from
Young Canadians
2021-2022

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Children First Canada is a national organization and our staff are currently located in Ottawa, Calgary, and Toronto. In the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge that we live, work and play on:

- The traditional, unceded territories of the Algonquin Anishnaabeg;
- The territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksika), Kainai, Piikani, the Tsuut'ina, the Îyaâxe Nakoda Nations, The Métis Nation Region 3, and all people who make their homes in the Treaty 7 region of Southern Alberta;
- The traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnaabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat, and home to many diverse First Nations, Métis and Inuit covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit, and the Williams Treaties signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands.

ABOUT CHILDREN FIRST CANADA

Children First Canada (CFC) is a national charitable organization that serves as a strong, effective and independent voice for all 8 million 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 for more information.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Young Canadians' Parliament (YCP) was developed and successfully launched as a result of the effort of many individuals, including:

- Sara Austin, founder and CEO of Children First Canada (CFC) and the CFC staff team: Andy Hon Bong Lee (Youth Engagement Coordinator), Nketti Johnson-Taylor (Director of Research and Programs), and Stephanie Mitton (Government Relations Advisor); and the young people who were hired to help support the YCP Program: Kamil Kanji, Vanessa Hagan, Mélissa Sum Wah, Sarelle Sheldon, Madison Larkin, Shana Hutchinson, and Atifa Fazal, who have spent numerous hours on the planning and execution of the events. We want to thank the CFC Staff team for approaching YCP with dedication in order to provide a platform for young Canadians to voice their opinions. Also a special mention to Sara, Nketti, Stephanie, and Andy – who edited this report with the utmost respect for maintaining our voices as young people.
- The YCP Steering Committee members, composed of youth across Canada, committed to weekly meetings to develop and improve the YCP.
- The YCP Facilitators, without their leadership and support, these events couldn't have been possible.

We would also like to thank all of the guest speakers, traditional Knowledge Keepers, and Elders who joined our events to teach and share their inspiring stories.

Furthermore, we were grateful to have many Parliamentarians join us to listen to the concerns of youth, as well as provide direct feedback.

Lastly, we would like to thank and acknowledge the hundreds of participants who made YCP possible. Without the passion, commitment, and dedication of all the Young Canadians' Parliament members, this report would not have been possible.

The views expressed in this document, along with the corresponding research papers, articles and reports, reflect those of our authors and the young people who are members of Young Canadians' Parliament and do not necessarily reflect those of our sponsors or Children First Canada.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF SPONSORS, PARTNERS & SUPPORTERS

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We would also like to acknowledge all of our partners for their contribution to the Young Canadians' Parliament:

- L.I.G.H.T,
- the Mental Health Commission of Canada,
- the Black North Initiative,
- eQuality,
- Roots to Harvest
- Youth Empowering Youth
- Assembly of Seven Generations
- In This Together

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS OF THE REPORT

Beginning from the Fall of 2021, we, the four Youth Ambassadors -- Estelle, Katie, Kiah, and Melissa have worked together to craft this report. We brought our different types of knowledge to the writing of the piece, from mental health, to youth representation, to systemic racism, etc. We also played a pivotal role in the planning of YCP events.

As Youth Ambassadors, we also pledge to be a bridge between CFC and other young people in Canada. We promote CFC's events in our networks, including on social media. Finally, we embody the role beyond our commitments with CFC. We are all young activists in our communities, and are honoured to present to you this report. Below, you will find a more detailed bio of each one of us.

ESTELLE KIM



Estelle Kim (she/her) is from Calgary, Alberta, located in the Treaty 7 region of Southern Alberta and is currently attending the University of Toronto. She has formerly worked as a National Child Day Youth Activator for CFC to promote the importance and celebration of National Child Day to youth across Canada. As a YCP Facilitator and a member of the YCP Steering Committee, Estelle believes that the YCP is a powerful platform that provides youth with an opportunity to facilitate discussion with other young citizens and advocates, as well as those who have the power to make and change policies. She is passionate about supporting young Canadians and making sure that they are seen and heard on issues that matter to them.

KIAH HENEKE-FLINDALL



Kiah Heneke-Flindall (she/her) is 19, currently studying science at Dalhousie University in Mi'kmaq traditional territory, also known as Halifax, NS. Kiah has been a youth advocate with Children's First Canada for over 5 years, facilitating discussions with inspiring groups of young people at events like National Child Day, the creation of the Children's Charter, and online engagement sessions to establish a Federal Commissioner for Children & Youth. In 2019/2020, she joined CEO Sara Austin in stakeholder meetings on Parliament Hill to advocate for children's rights in government decision-making and to build support for the Young Canadians' Parliament (YCP) – a project she is now delighted to see in action!

KATIE FERNANDEZ



Katie Fernandes, pronouns she/her, is a 17-year old Youth Ambassador who lives on the traditional territory and treaty lands of the Mississaugas of The Credit First Nation, also known as Mississauga, ON. Her work within the Young Canadians' Parliament (YCP) has greatly contributed to the developments of this report with her past experience as a YCP facilitator. She hopes to continue uplifting youth voices by beginning her studies in Political Science and Public Administration at the University of Ottawa.

MÉLISSA SUM-WAH



Mélissa Sum Wah (She/Her) is from Gatineau, QC, the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabeg people. A second-year student in the Dual BA Program between Sciences Po and Columbia University, she is majoring in Human Rights. Melissa has been with CFC since the launch of the YCP in the summer of 2020, having now worked on the first and second editions of the YCP project. Melissa's favourite part about working for CFC is facilitating discussions with youth on the issues that matter most to them. Her facilitation experience includes the YCP, as well as the engagement sessions for The Honourable Dr. Rosemary Moodie, Senator. She feels that young people are wise beyond their years, and hopes that this report can show the government just how valuable young people's insights can be.

The report was edited by the following staff of Children First Canada:

Sara Austin, Founder & CEO

Nketti Taylor-Johnston, Director of Research & Programs

Stephanie Mitton, Government Relations Consultant

Andy Hon Bong Lee, Youth Engagement Coordinator

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

ABLEISM may be defined as a belief system, analogous to racism, sexism or ageism, that sees persons with disabilities as being less worthy of respect and consideration, less able to contribute and participate, or of less inherent value than others.¹

CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION refers to actions that reduce the negative impact of climate change, while taking advantage of potential new opportunities.²

ANTI-ASIAN RACISM is prejudice, beliefs, stereotyping and discrimination that is directed at people of Asian descent, rooted in their unique experience with xenophobia.³ It is frequently reproducing hostile narratives against Asian individuals through threatening physical, verbal, or digital encounters.

ANTI-BLACK RACISM is prejudice, attitudes, beliefs, stereotyping and discrimination that is directed at people of African descent and is rooted in their unique history and experience of enslavement and its legacy.⁴

CLIMATE CHANGE is the long-term shift in global average surface temperature.⁵

HOMOPHOBIA is the fear, hatred, discomfort with, or mistrust of people who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual.⁶

MENTAL HEALTH is the state of your psychological and emotional well-being. It is a necessary resource for living a healthy life and a main factor in overall health.⁷

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS is referred to here as the recognition of psychological, emotional, and social well-being as a crucial component of overall health, happiness, and welfare.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES refers here to assessments, diagnosis, treatment, or counselling that is offered for the maintenance or enhancement of mental health as well as the treatment of mental or behavioural disorders. These services can be offered in private or public settings.

MITIGATION OF CLIMATE CHANGE refers here to minimizing the severity of the short and long-term detrimental impacts of global warming.

STIGMA is negative attitudes or discrimination against someone that stems from negative stereotypes associated with a distinguishing characteristic.

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION refers here to “establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada. For that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, an acknowledgment of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behavior.”⁸

GUARANTEED LIVABLE INCOME, also called a Universal Basic Income, is a recurring cash payment allocated on an unconditional and individual basis. Through redistribution, Guaranteed Livable Income policies aim to quell the consequences of economic inequalities.⁹

PHARMACARE refers to the universal coverage of prescription drugs and medicines. It has been identified by the World Health Organisation as the next step for any State which aspires to have a more extensive universal healthcare system.¹⁰

YOUTH JUSTICE The right to a fair trial is enshrined in Article 40 of the UNCRC, comprising due process, access to counsel, and, when possible, access to a court specialised in youth justice.¹¹

YOUTH REPRESENTATION Direct representation in politics goes beyond representativeness. It implies an “ongoing conversation” with young people, making them feel like equals, and the embodiment of an “aggregate channel” of youth voices by the elected representative.¹²

The YCP Policy Recommendations

Over this past year, children and youth have experienced significant change and hardship. Our lives have been upended by a pandemic that is now well into its second year, bringing about heightened isolation and health impacts, compounding on top of all of our other stressors. We continue to worry about environmental concerns that have led to some of the worst climate-related events in Canadian history, the troubling impact of the legacy of residential schools and the unmasking of mass graves that hid our dark past, make up just a glimpse of the context in which children and youth have grown.

Young people also continue to endure issues of systemic discrimination, poverty and mental health impacts. It is important that we as young people are given opportunities to voice our concerns and support the government in the resolution of key issues impacting children and youth. Our unique experience and ideas as young people make us the best candidates to discuss issues and make recommendations. We are the future of Canada and want to be a part of the development and building of that future we want to see.

The Young Canadians' Parliament (YCP) was initiated by Children First Canada's founder and CEO Sara Austin, in response to the feedback gathered from consultations with thousands of children and youth during the creation of the Canadian Children's Charter. The YCP is an adult-child partnership program that targets young people below the age of 18. It places significant emphasis on ensuring that young people from equity-seeking groups are also part of the program. This program is designed as an effective strategy to help develop youth leadership skills and other key competencies, such as critical thinking, public speaking and communication. The YCP program will also enhance young people's understanding of their rights, democratic processes and civic engagement. Over 260 youth members from across Canada have taken part in the YCP program and its events.

Programs like the YCP are very important as they have provided an excellent opportunity and platform for young people's voices to be heard. These youth leaders will engage and influence thousands more young people across Canada and directly contribute to a vision and action plan for all of Canada's children and strengthen youth attachment to Canada. As such your support and willingness to listen is crucial as we strive towards making Canada the best place for kids to grow up.

The topics chosen by young people at the beginning of this year's program reflect similar concerns to CFC's Raising Canada report that highlights the Top 10 Threats to Children in Canada. The topics selected by our members include: Mental Health; Climate Change and Pollution; Poverty, Housing & Food Insecurity; Youth Justice, and; Systemic Discrimination - including Ableism, Anti-Black Racism, Anti-Asian Racism, 2SLGBTQI+ Discrimination, Truth & Reconciliation.

As members of YCP, we have worked hard over this past year to speak on the issues mentioned above. Through a series of events, members of the YCP learned about and created government policy briefs and advocacy strategies to address the issues that are important to us. This report highlights the recommendations as summarized by four Youth Ambassadors. This youth-written report will be provided to Parliamentarians with the hope that it will effect legislative change.

You will note that recommendations highlighted here represent our point of view. Some of the recommendations are detailed while some are kept at a more general level. Some of our recommendations may fit neatly within your jurisdiction and others may not fit as neatly. However, we ask that you approach these concerns with urgency and support the changes with urgency. The concerns of the 8 million children in Canada should not and cannot be ignored any longer. Where more information is required, we are happy to contribute and be a part of any further clarifications, developments and actions.

We hope this is the beginning of establishing a great working relationship between us young people and the government, specifically Parliamentarians.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Mental Health

- Allocate more funds to increase accessibility to mental health resources and services, especially in schools. Target funds towards increasing employment in the mental health sector, including helpline staff and Indigenous counselors.
- Create a commission for mental health representation and portrayal in media to eliminate stigma and misconceptions around mental health.
- Incorporate diverse youth representatives into conversations about mental health in government.

Climate Change

- Take the global lead in meeting IPCC climate goals¹³ by:
 - (a) withdrawing funding and support for the fossil fuel industry and
 - (b) implementing bold strategies (ie. renewable energy development, carbon tax, clean fuel standard, carbon warning labels) to achieve net-negative emissions, especially in high-emitting sectors (ie. agriculture, transportation).
- To demonstrate dedication to our future generations and to align with global sustainable development efforts¹⁴, redirect Canada's investments towards:
 - (a) strengthening relationships with Indigenous communities and integrating Indigenous ways of knowing into the conservation and management of carbon sinks (ie. wetlands, old growth forests), and
 - (b) incorporating climate education into school curriculums and promoting climate literacy in the workforce.

Waste & Pollution

- Support and fund projects to clean up polluted water, soil, and air.
- Create financial incentives and rigid legal consequences to pressure major polluters to reduce waste and begin producing reusable alternatives.
- Protect Indigenous communities from disproportionate impacts of pollution and climate change.

Systemic Discrimination: Anti-Black Racism

- Integrate more Black voices in policy-decision making decisions and committees to better represent Black leadership in parliament.
- Mandate anti-racism training programs for all public servants including the police, school educators and staff.
- Promote more educational campaigns focused on highlighting the history, culture, and positive stories identities of Black Canadians to dismantle uneducated perceptions about Black people that lead to racist stereotypes.

Systemic Discrimination: Anti-Asian Racism

- Actively consider the implications of certain policy decisions on the Asian community by incorporating more Asian-representation in parliament.
- Comprehensively defining hate crimes to include anti-Asian racism to expand the Asian community's capacity to hold discrimination accountable in the justice system.

- Increase public awareness and social media campaigns debunking misleading stereotypes around the Asian community.

Systemic Discrimination: Truth and Reconciliation

- Empower indigenous people's community building initiatives through a specialized loan program. One that will create more financial opportunities for Indigenous people to lead, design, and build any necessary infrastructure, such as schools, community gardens, homes, etc., in local communities.

Systemic Discrimination: 2SLGBTQI+

- Engage and coordinate with youth-led 2SLGBTQI+ initiatives to help destigmatize young people's representation in the 2SLGBTQI+ community.
- Model more 2SLGBTQI+ voices and representation in parliamentary decision-making.
- Provide more information about 2SLGBTQI+ health and history to remove false ideas about the 2SLGBTQI+ community and create a more accepting public environment.

Systemic Discrimination: Ableism

- Increasing funds, especially in schools, for more assistive technology resources (i.e. screen-readers and text-to-speech devices) that will make public spaces more accommodating for young people.
- Require civil servants, more specifically educators, to undergo training on how to respectfully and effectively communicate with children who have a disability.
- Encourage more disability awareness and education in school curriculum.

Poverty, Housing, and Food Insecurity

- Set up a universal pharmacare system, enabling households to save over \$7 billion¹⁵, and employers \$9 billion¹⁶, every year.
- Implement a Guaranteed Livable Income scheme, which would mitigate income and housing inequalities.
- Ensure universal, affordable, and high-quality childcare, an essential component to promote children's well-being, women's economic and social participation, and the flourishing of our communities.

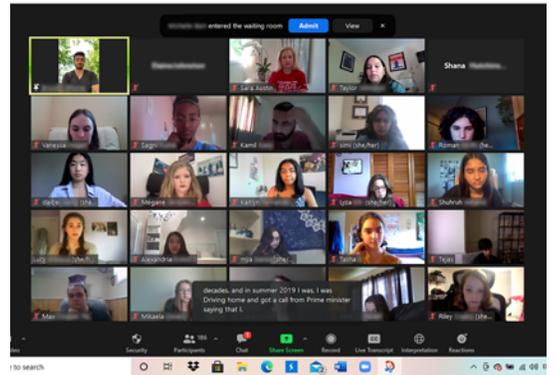
Youth Justice

- Encourage more people of colour to join a legal profession for greater representation and understanding.

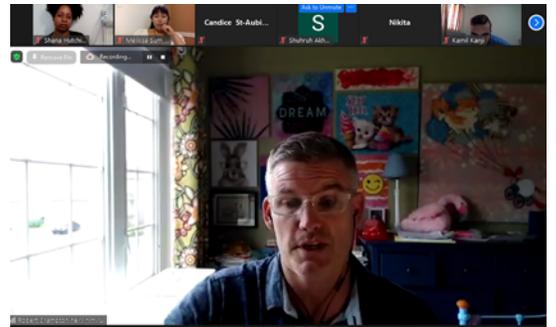
- Lower administrative legal fees for all youth, as the right to a fair trial must be affordable to all.
- Provide specialized mental health services to young people in the justice system, to ensure support to those who experience discrimination, insufficient parental support, or are simply navigating a taxing process.

Overall Youth Representation

- Require each party in Parliament to create a position of youth representative within the party, giving young people the chance to guide the party's program for the issues that affect them, in accordance with Article 12 of the UNCRC.
- Designate a representative for youth at the federal level, implying direct representation in the form of a continuous dialogue with young people.
- Maintain and strengthen the relationship between the Prime Minister's Youth Council (PMYC) and the YCP, granting the YCP an advisory role within the PMYC, and particularly when creating legislation.



Some YCP members at our June 2021 Zoom meeting



Robert Crampton, Executive Director, Youth Secretariat, Department of Canadian Heritage, Government of Canada, teaching YCP Members about policy briefs.

**WE HOPE THIS IS
THE BEGINNING OF
ESTABLISHING A GREAT
WORKING RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN US
YOUNG PEOPLE
& THE GOVERNMENT**

THERE IS **NO BETTER** **VOICE** TO TALK ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE'S ISSUES **THAN THE VOICES** **OF YOUNG PEOPLE** **THEMSELVES.**

WHY IS THIS REPORT IMPORTANT?

This report is important because it provides a detailed insight into the issues and challenges that children and youth face and provides recommendations on how to address them. We hope that these recommendations will be considered in the upcoming federal budget and in future policy decisions.

This report is the cumulative result of half a decade of youth advocacy and the input of thousands of young people across the country. The work we have done proves that it is not only possible, but immeasurably valuable, to engage young people in the decisions and policies that impact us. Our report exemplifies our capability to engage in matters that affect Canada and that our ideas and recommendations are important factors that the Government should consider in improving our country.

There is no better voice to talk about young people's issues than the voices of young people themselves. Our lived experiences tell a story of resilience and drive, which is further illustrated throughout our recommendations in this report. We want Parliamentarians to capture our stories and carry them on in the House of Commons and Senate as an extension of youth activism, fulfilling not only a wish to work with children, but also a greater demand to be accountable to youth as well.

We ask all Members of Parliament and Senators: why speculate on the priorities and problems of our future when you can just ask us directly?

In this report, we discuss key issues affecting children and youth in Canada that we, as members of the Young Canadians' Parliament, see as important to address. Within each key issue, we provide a context of what we talked about as young people and offer recommendations we would like to see. We present these to you in this report and hope that our understanding, our experiences, and our recommendations are not only supported but also championed and acted upon. We offer our understanding, our experiences, and our civic duty, just like you, to make this land a better place for all of us. Let's take action together.

THE TOPICS DISCUSSED BY YOUNG PEOPLE

Mental Health

Climate Change

Waste & Pollution

Systemic Discrimination: anti-Black racism

Systemic Discrimination: Ableism

Systemic Discrimination: Truth & Reconciliation

Systemic Discrimination: anti-Asian racism

Systemic Discrimination: 2SLGBTQI+

Poverty, Housing, & Food Insecurity

Youth Justice

Youth Representation

Mental Health

Mental health is a leading concern for children and youth in Canada and an issue that many face on a day-to-day basis. Especially today, it includes several mental health disorders that children and youth experience, both pre- and post-COVID-19, with increasing rates of anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and substance use disorders.

Issues & Challenges

For young people, beyond the mental health concerns, social stigma around mental health is also a leading problem. There are a number of misinformed views on mental health that “dramatizes the process of receiving treatment”¹⁷. As a result, children feel significantly less inclined to reach out for help. Furthermore, the portrayal of mental health in the media shows how Canadians are “not willing to acknowledge that they [or their children] have mental health issues”¹⁸. Thus, shifting responsibility to the young people. The COVID-19 pandemic furthered the severity of mental health issues as the uncertainty and sudden change led to an intensified stress and isolation on young people. For many of us, “we don’t think the topic of mental health has a beginning, middle or end, we think it has already had an impact”¹⁹ and will likely continue to affect many young people.

Recommendations

We encourage federal policies/legislations to support the implementation of mental health resources easily accessible to young people and in locations where they often visit. For example, schools, where they spend the majority of their time. As such, mandatory mental health resources and services must be provided and target those in professions that support young people, i.e. counselors and perhaps engage with provinces to support teachers to raise the awareness of mental health struggles within the education system. Furthermore, more counsellors should be placed within schools to provide children with more opportunities to receive mental health support. Teachers should not be expected to play the role of mental health professionals.

Providing these services within schools is especially crucial for children who face problems within their home. Children facing issues like domestic abuse should be provided an opportunity to reach out for help at school.

Outside of schools, funding should be allocated towards providing affordable mental health services. More psychologists should be available to provide secure and easily accessible services. Currently, help lines are putting patients on hold for extended periods of time and counselling services have waitlists up to 6-18 months.²⁰ However, mental health issues cannot and should not be waitlisted. Mental health support should be provided immediately and effectively to the children and youth reaching out for help. Furthermore, we ask that governments ensure that the mental health systems align with the 94 Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Actions. Mental health services should employ more Indigenous counsellors who are familiar with Indigenous cultural teachings. The government must acknowledge that Indigenous people are at a higher risk of mental health illnesses due to generational trauma and issues specific to the Indigenous community.

A huge contributor to mental health stigma is its portrayal in the media. “Media portrayal of mental health and mental illness are often inaccurate, and code mental illness with violence, leading to stigma”.²¹ Many Canadian mental health services agree that “both entertainment and news media provide overwhelmingly dramatic and distorted images of mental illness,” with “the offence rate of mentally ill characters being 10-fold that of other television characters”.²² These growing misconceptions surrounding mental health increase an unwillingness to accept treatments or reach out for help. Many people, especially children and youth, “look to media portrayals of mental health issues to inform their views”.²³ We believe that the far-reaching effects of media can also be used as a powerful tool to change the perception of mental health illnesses.

We propose that the federal government create a commission for mental health representation in the media. The commission should ensure that media productions featuring mental health should include correct and accurate information, with the input of psychiatrists. News outlets should be supported to promote mental health resources. Spreading awareness about mental health and current services is important in normalizing mental health related issues.

To “embrace the diversity of the issue,” the government should include diverse youth representatives²⁴ when engaging in committees and planning sessions to address mental health. For example, the concerns of a young Canadian

who is a part of a racial minority group may be different from a young Canadian who is a part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. The concerns of all groups should be taken into consideration when creating policies that reflect the various mental health resources and services needed. We must recognize that “there are differences in how children and adults see or feel about mental health”.²⁵ Many of the mental health issues children face are specific to the environment that children are placed in. Thus, we propose that the government incorporate more student and youth representatives into conversations regarding mental health issues. Fifty percent of all mental health conditions start by the age of 14 years but most cases are undetected and untreated.²⁶ This concerning statistic shows that in order to tackle the growing mental health issues and challenges in our society, youth should be able to speak up and voice their needs. Policies should reflect the needs of young Canadians who have experience and allow them to identify problems.

As a YCP member across Canada laments, “mental health is a lifelong battle; there is no ‘miracle cure’. Resources need to be available and sustainable for the long-term”.²⁷ To provide broad and adaptable solutions for all young Canadians, we ask government officials and policy makers to be aware, to listen, and to take action.

Climate Change

Climate change is a long-term shift in global average surface temperature.²⁸ The primary cause of climate change is the accumulation of greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, which trap terrestrial radiation and heat Earth. Earth is currently warming at an alarmingly rapid pace. If we continue to heighten our emissions, the impacts of accelerated global warming will persist – including extreme temperatures, heightened sea levels, disrupted production chains, and threats to human health.²⁹

Issues and Challenges

As youth, we are threatened on a global scale by climate change. The trajectory of our planet’s warming determines our future social, economic, and physical wellbeing. At the fundamental level, “we must address climate change in order to have a livable future.”³⁰ The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has proposed evidence-based solutions to curb the severity of climate

change, including limiting global warming to 1.5 °C and reaching net-zero emissions by 2050.³¹ Climate projections indicate that some countries will need to compensate for others by achieving net-negative emissions to make global climate stabilization possible.³²

Canada, as one of the top per capita carbon emitter³³ and one of the top 10 wealthiest nations worldwide,³⁴ is in no position to remain on the sidelines in the global battle against climate change. Canada has committed to the IPCC climate goals, but we feel “the government [has] not put in the work to make these solutions a reality.”³⁵ We want to reinforce that “a plan is not enough, we need action.”³⁶

Recommendations

- Take the global lead in meeting IPCC climate goals³⁷ by:
 - (a) withdrawing funding and support for the fossil fuel industry and
 - (b) implementing bold strategies (ie. renewable energy development, carbon tax, clean fuel standard, carbon warning labels) to achieve net-negative emissions, especially in high-emitting sectors (ie. agriculture, transportation).
- To demonstrate dedication to our future generations and to align with global sustainable development efforts,³⁸ redirect Canada’s investments towards:
 - (a) strengthening relationships with Indigenous communities and integrating Indigenous ways of knowing into the conservation and management of carbon sinks (ie. wetlands, old growth forests), and
 - (b) incorporating and promoting climate education and climate literacy for children and youth as well as adults in the workforce.

Our first recommendation urges the Canadian Government to demonstrate leadership and dedication to future generations by diverting funding away from the fossil fuel industry and to instead invest in strategies to achieve net-negative emissions by 2050. The solutions and infrastructure exist to take a bolder stance on climate change mitigation.

Specifically, we suggest withdrawing investments in fossil fuels to “commit funding [to the] research and development of renewable energy”³⁹ and to reform high-emitting sectors such as agriculture and transportation to depend on sustainable,

low-carbon practices. In addition, we ask that the Canadian Government implement bolder incentives to pressure high-emitting companies to transfer to renewable energy – including rigid carbon pricing, a clean fuel standard, and carbon dioxide warning labels on all products.

Emissions reduction will mitigate the impacts of climate change, but will it help society adapt to the global changes already occurring?

Our second recommendation calls on the Canadian Government to invest in climate adaptation and sustainable development.

It is important to consider that the most significant repercussions of climate change will fall upon Indigenous communities, many of whom depend on local ecosystems to survive. It is crucial that reconciliation is considered in the Canadian Government's climate plan to (a) uphold the rights of Indigenous youth and (b) conserve some of the most profound environmental knowledge on how to understand and sustain local ecosystems.

Another key component of adaptation and sustainable development is conservation. Canada's old-growth forests, wetlands, and coastal ecosystems not only house endangered biodiversity but act as carbon sinks, storing vast amounts of carbon and naturally stabilizing the Earth's climate.⁴⁰ It is crucial that the Canadian Government abolish large-scale logging and resource extraction processes in Canada and instead support the development of holistic, sustainable resource management practices in collaboration with Indigenous communities.

As a final point, one of the most pressing issues in our climate crisis is arguably "ignorance, due to [a] lack of awareness of the causes, implications and... reality" of climate change.⁴¹ Canada is committed to providing adequate climate education to the public in both the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement,⁴² but 84% of children and youth still report feeling unformed on how to mitigate and adapt to climate change.⁴³ We have the right to adequate climate education as it is "key to ensuring youth are prepared for the future."⁴⁴ It is imperative that "governments work together at all levels"⁴⁵ to (a) incorporate climate change and civil engagement education for children and youth by supporting provinces to invest in climate education, (b) establish climate literacy in the transition to a green workforce, and (c) educate the public on the importance of investing in renewable energy, green transportation, and sustainable agricultural practices. Furthermore, young people ask that government officials educate themselves on the science of climate change and acknowledge the expertise of

environmental scientists.

To conclude, we ask the Canadian Government to withdraw funding and investments in the fossil fuel industry and commit to investments in renewable energy, emissions reduction, conservation, climate education, and reconciliation in overall combat of climate change. It is possible to adapt to the realities of climate change and to create a vibrant, prosperous, and sustainable future for children and youth if the Canadian Government chooses to invest in us.

Waste & Pollution

Issues and Challenges

The global accumulation of human waste is detrimental to our environment, polluting our most vital resources – air, water and soil.

Single-use plastics, with the potential to remain intact for up to half a millennium,⁴⁶ are a primary contributor to pollution and the accumulation of waste. Plastics pose a threat to water and soil quality, impacting aquatic biodiversity as well as human health.⁴⁷ Despite the risks, Canadian consumers still lack feasible alternatives to plastic products.

Toxic waste from mining, oil extraction, and other industrial sites pollute our soil and freshwater systems. Water pollution disproportionately impacts rural Indigenous communities in Canada, with a shocking 73% of Indigenous water systems at high or medium risk of contamination.⁴⁸ The government has continually failed to provide the necessary support or infrastructure to establish clean water systems in these regions.⁴⁹ Indigenous children and youth living on this land are being denied their fundamental right to clean water - an unbelievable living circumstance, especially considering Canada's high Human Development Index.⁵⁰

Greenhouse gas emissions are a final atmospheric contaminant to consider, posing a major threat to human respiratory health. As humans continue to burn fossil fuels to produce energy, dangerous aerosols and other chemical agents accumulate in the air.⁵¹ We, as children and youth, are most vulnerable to these direct and indirect health risks of climate change.⁵²

Recommendations

- Support and fund projects to clean up polluted water, soil, and air.

- Create financial incentives and rigid legal consequences to pressure major polluters to reduce waste and begin producing reusable alternatives.
- Protect Indigenous communities from the disproportionate impacts of pollution and climate change.

We ask that the Canadian government take the lead in funding innovative waste-management projects, such as providing “tax rebates for funding... [the] clean up of bodies of water” depending on “the amount of plastic and other pollutants” collected.⁵³ We need the government to do better to protect our current and future generations, by improving waste regulation and management, creating incentives to reduce pollution, and investing in the production of affordable, reusable alternatives to plastic.

Finally, it is crucial that Indigenous youth are granted the fundamental right to safe, accessible drinking water. Indigenous communities relying on healthy, local ecosystems to survive are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, and must be protected from these inequities at all costs.

Systemic Discrimination: anti-Black racism

Anti-Black racism is a type of racially motivated prejudice that sustains structural barriers and projects hateful remarks against people of African descent. It originates from a long history of European colonization and slavery, which continues to actively impede the wellness of Black Canadians today.⁵⁴

Issues and Challenges

Within ongoing discussions about Anti-Black racism in Canada, there is great concern for a weakening sense of safety and belonging in the Black community. Racial inequities within our education and justice systems imparts a strong feeling of powerlessness amongst young people, limiting the ability of Black children and youth to exercise their guaranteed rights to safety and equity in Canada. Moreover, despite mounting evidence, several consequences of Anti-Black racism like Black-over incarceration and inaccessible opportunities for education remain largely unrecognised issues in its effects on the development Black young people today.

Beginning with the justice system, issues of over incarceration continue to prime the Canadian public with examples of living historical tensions between the relationship of law enforcement and racial minorities. In effect, the tense connection

streamlines a stiff presence of public authorities in Black communities, which permits over-policing and unfamiliar perceptions of Black Canadians to be endangered to unjust incarcerations. But especially for Black children and youth, the visible ostracization of Black Canadians evokes feelings of neglect and distrust towards the justice system and society at large.

According to recent reports from Statistics Canada “[...] black inmates represented 7.2% of the federal offender population but only 3% of the Canadian population”.⁵⁵ This evidence supports the fact that racial disparities pervade our justice system and obstruct the chances for young Black Canadians to feel secure and protected in a system that does not equally work alongside their racial communities.

Secondly, there needs to be more practices of accountability in the public service, holding leaders across our government responsible for promoting equal access of educational opportunities to Black children and youth. Specifically demonstrated in the education system, where educators often allow personal bias to unfairly evaluate the learning capacities of Black young people. As recorded by the Boston consulting group, “teachers in Ontario were twice as likely to rate a White student as “excellent” than a Black student on their report card--even when those students had the same EQAO scores”.⁵⁶ As a result, young people bear the burden of working twice as hard to be validated at the same standard as their non-Black counterparts, proving the extent of damage from a lack of guidelines and preventative bias processes in educational institutions.

Recommendations

It is critical that the Federal Government decrease the criminalization of Black adults in Canada to create a more inclusive and secure environment for Black children in Canada. Young people in the Black community need positive representations of Black people interacting with the Canadian justice system to begin to disassemble Black youth’s generationally-passing experience of distrust towards Canadian institutions.

We believe that by enforcing public authorities to follow more amicable communication measures, under newly implemented codified justice laws, young people will find the grounds to experience a justice system that is on their side. Additionally, we press that Parliamentarians take up this cause with a sense of urgency. Therefore, it is critical that we actively work to slow down the high rates of Black incarcerations, promote more positive campaigns about the Black community that focus on celebration and education of Black identities, or more simply, simultaneously spread more public

information “[...] on the positives in the Black community and not the negatives.”⁵⁷

Also, while inspiring youth to engage with more positive representations of the Black community is a priority, we also believe that new policy strategies are required in this effort to decrease the prevalence of Anti-Black racism in the lives of young Black Canadians. Being this way, we press Parliamentarians to devise a policy plan that mandates anti-Black racism training for all civil servants under the Federal and provincial government, including school educators. Black children and youth will benefit from additional structures put in place to hold government workers accountable to expressions of Anti-Black racism, and it would create more informed members of society who understand the already present implications inherent to people with a Black identity.

Systemic Discrimination: Ableism

According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission, ableism “refers to attitudes in society that devalue and limit the potential of persons with disabilities”⁵⁸. It is an experience of intentional or unintentional marginalisation, focused on shrinking people with a disability to feel excluded and humiliated. Ableism applies to those people who have mental, physical and/or any other types of disability.

Issues and Challenges

For many young people living with a disability, fears of ableism in Canada is a real and rapidly developing issue. Ableism negatively influences the design of our public spaces, normalising inaccessible building structures that frequently impede those young people who live with a disability. The culmination of uninformed biases and personal opinions has jeopardised young people’s right to confidently hold certain rights to personal security and mobility. Especially in certain areas like employment and poverty, the negative effects of rising ableism are brought to a focus.

While youth are provided a certain degree of accommodations in school, the availability of publicly provided accommodation resources is sparse. Following such limitations, the accessibility of disability aids for children-- outside of schools--can explain why there is a rising rate of unemployment among disabled youth. In a report from the Easter Seals, “15% of youth with milder disabilities are

neither in school, nor employed, compared to about 31% of youth with more severe disabilities”⁵⁹. This study explores how employers do not readily make the effort to hire young people with disabilities to avoid the ‘extra work’ of making accommodations, isolating these young people from an equal chance to participate in the work-force.

Likewise, the amount of accommodation resources provided to children by the federal government is another pressing matter. Although children with disabilities need some level of aid or accommodation, these same children also have other intersecting identities, like socioeconomic status or race, which prevent some households from paying or being able to pay for necessary accommodation resources. As stated in a report by the Government of Canada, children with a disability “are more likely to live in poverty”⁶⁰. With that being the case, children’s access to resources should not be a contested matter and further, it should be inclusive to all types of aids and assistance for more than one type, or visible type, of disability.

Recommendations

To launch a head-strong approach against ableism in Canada, we urge the Federal Government to listen to young people. It is critical to disassemble the discriminatory beliefs against children and youth with disabilities. Discrimination through misunderstood knowledge or indifference is at the root of many issues for children. Through open discussions with parliamentary leaders and an active social media delivery, the Federal Government has the capacity to share real and important information about children and youth with disabilities, and allow those young people to maintain confident relationships with people who understand how to acknowledge their existence outside of their disability.

Secondly, we believe that the federal government should devise a policy strategy around political and public accountability towards ableism. At the Federal Level, the Government’s need to consider the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child while making new policy decisions and actively promote the conditions that prioritise equal and acceptable social environments for young people with a disability. Likewise, it is critical that we hold the public accountable, by law, “for discriminating against or failing to meet the needs of youth with a disability”⁶¹. Individuals tried for acts of ableism should be provided a minimum amount of financial compensation for distress.

Finally, the Federal government should invest more resources into public institutions across the country, rather than just child-care centres for

youth with a disability. We believe that all young persons should have access to “laptops and adaptive technology as well as funding in therapy like speech therapy and musical therapy”⁶², as long as it is beneficial to their integration and participation with fellow community members, classmates, or neighbours.

Systemic Discrimination: Truth & Reconciliation

In the Canadian context, Truth and Reconciliation represents an ongoing healing process between Indigenous peoples and Canadians⁶³. It strives to rebuild new and respectful Indigenous-Settler relations, creating a modern avenue for Canada to work with Indigenous people on the present-day inflictions of settler-colonialism.

Additionally, we find that Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples also must reflect the “unique cultural, historical, and geographic environments” to properly acknowledge “the reality of what it means to be Indigenous in this country”.⁶⁴

Issues and Challenges

Despite controlling most, if not all, developments of First Nations infrastructure and housing on reserves, the Government of Canada fails to provide Indigenous communities with sustainable and adequate living conditions. Instead, Indigenous groups live in-between unsafe structures that have mould contaminations, overcrowding issues, and a need for significant housing repairs.⁶⁵

For this reason, we believe that “the isolated and remote locations of most reserves have contributed to a high rate of unemployment among Indigenous people”⁶⁶, which causes numerous Indigenous communities to endure a much lower quality of life than non-Indigenous people. The vulnerable circumstances of these communities also highlight a troubling medical concern for the children living in these Indigenous reserves, “such as tuberculosis, bronchitis and influenza; increased social challenges associated with having less success at school”.⁶⁷

The Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples indicated that between the restrictions of the Indian Act and the Federal Government’s control over First Nations reserve land, Indigenous communities’ lack the capacity to self-determine local infrastructure projects. Specifically because of section 89 of the Indian Act, which restricts Indigenous People’s

ability to obtain “private home ownership”⁶⁸ and ultimately, it “limits the ability of First Nations people to obtain mortgages”.⁶⁹ For these reasons, we believe that “The poor housing conditions in which many on-reserve First Nations children live are contributing to many health and social problems”.⁷⁰ In 2021, CMHC finalised a report on the three Northern Territories of Canada that raised major red flags against “a lack of housing options along the entire housing continuum in the North”,⁷¹ finding that most housing units in the Northern territories require its residents to, “be working near full-time to afford mortgage payments”.

Indigenous communities’ housing support is largely sponsored by funding from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), who annually provide \$280 million [...] to address the on-reserve housing needs of First Nations communities. However, the current conditions of housing on Indigenous reserves remain in a crisis-like situation. First Nations communities do not have the resources needed to sustain a healthy and full life on traditional reserve housing. We believe that the Federal Government needs to work alongside Indigenous-led projects that take an individualised approach to increasing housing affordability and improving the health conditions of Indigenous property.

Recommendations

There needs to be more Indigenous legislation put forward that will “sustainably address and maintain housing and infrastructures on reserves. As seen, a centralization around government dependent initiatives does not meet the unique needs of First Nations communities, and it does not develop economic structures to be self-dependent either.

Therefore, it is critical that we adopt more “First Nations equity ownership arrangements”, and it may “look like community infrastructure (such as water, waste treatment, power and broadband communications) or Investment infrastructure (which can provide revenue returns)”.⁷²

These steps are necessary to promote more capital revenue in First Nations communities and replicate infrastructure models that can be sustained. So, in collaboration with local First Nation Bands, we recommend a federal Indigenous loan guarantee program similar to the Ontario Aboriginal Loan Guarantee Program.

Furthermore, we believe that all Indigenous communities have the right to self-governance and recommend that this be recognized by the Federal Government and that the transfer of autonomous Indigenous decision-making be recognized for all aspects regarding Indigenous peoples, Indigenous land and property, as well as the Indigenous communities themselves.

Systemic Discrimination: anti-Asian racism

Anti-Asian racism can be considered as a form of discrimination that undermines, stereotypes, or harms individuals/groups of Asian descent.⁷³ It often reproduces hostile narratives against Asian individuals through threatening physical, verbal, or digital encounters. Leaving many, if not all, of its victims in a position of compromised safety and wellbeing. Furthermore, to understand the contemporary scope of Anti-Asian racism, this brief highlights the effects of such discrimination on the East Asian community, which includes ethnicities from “China, Hong Kong, Japan, Macau, Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea, and Taiwan”.⁷⁴

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, people’s unknown fears about the virus mutated into targeted hate against people of Asian descent, who were commonly subjected to the blame of its spread. Many people embraced an unreasonable aggression towards ethnically-identifying Asians, which was lightly and slowly corrected by Canadian officials in the government. Yet, make no mistake, such instances of Anti-Asian racism and discrimination are not new to Canada.

Throughout the twentieth century, several pieces of legislation like the 1885 “head tax” on Chinese immigrants turned Asian individuals for reasons of ethnic “unsuitability”.⁷⁵ So just like the rest of the world, Canada also has a long running history of Anti-Asian racism that raises striking concern for the growing community of children and youth in the Asian community.

Issues and Challenges

Public misinformation about the Asian community is currently a major issue in Canada. We have seen up close the violence and aggression that can be pursued by the public when hateful stereotypes and caricatures of Asian-people go uncorrected. It leads to a divided nation unsafe for people of the Asian community, and sends a message to young people indicating the permissibility of Asian-prejudice in our country. However, we believe that with proper education and awareness efforts launched by the Federal Government, harmful public ideas about Asian Canadians can begin to draw away from an antagonising perception and focus on the celebration and diversity of the Asian community.

In one report, several young Asian Canadians described how the ‘model minority myth’--the belief that all Asian people do exceedingly well in school, work, or other activities---ostracised their Asian identity amongst peers or colleagues who then

asserted underlying microaggressions, resentful expectations, and unfair standards.

Furthermore, in 2020, Statistics Canada recorded a drastic increase in racially motivated hate crimes towards the Asian community, concluding that Chinese, Korean, and Southeast Asian groups “were more likely than other groups to have perceived an increase in the frequency of harassment of attacks based on race, ethnicity or skin colour”.⁷⁶ Yet, because of insufficient standards of racial and ethnic inclusivity in the definition a ‘hate crime’, in the Criminal Code of Canada, visible minorities frequently underreport instances of hate-crimes or do not receive enough support to pursue legal action against hate crime encounters.⁷⁷

Recommendations

We propose that the Federal Government redesign the legal definition of a hate crime, creating more inclusive criteria for racial minorities to pursue proper justice against racism. To do so, the government should establish a unique investigation process into hate-crime trials, so that specific investigations on race-based crimes can be properly searched rather than be quickly checked off as a hate crime by the presiding court judge.

Also, we believe there needs to be a federally-led investigation on the background of Asian struggles in Canada and to acknowledge the history of mistrust and abuse between the Asian community and the Federal Government. It is critical that our next steps demonstrate the serious consequences for Anti-Asian racism in Canada, something that by design, cannot be tolerated in public or online. Otherwise, a high risk of desensitization remains for Young Asian Canadians who most often experience and witness acts of discrimination through social media stories of “Asians being stabbed, pushed, beat-up, and spat on [...]”⁷⁸

For this reason, the government must also subvert misleading public ideas about the Asian community by working directly with Asian-community organisations to promote more public awareness campaigns that “[helps] with the unlearning of Asian stereotypes”.⁷⁹

We believe that with these recommendations, a partnered effort between the Federal Government and the Asian community will advance more considerate and impactful actions to dismantle Anti-Asian racism in Canada.

Systemic Discrimination: 2SLGBTQ+

As defined by the 2SLGBTQ+ Secretariat of Canada, homophobia refers to an ongoing projection of prejudiced beliefs, actions, and voices that antagonize the existence of Queer people.⁸⁰ It impinges on the ability of young people to express themselves, and it fosters an environment that limits our ability “to celebrate the differences, freedoms, and identities of our peers”.⁸¹

Homophobia is not limited in the shape of its delivery either. With the rise of social media, the spread of homophobic, transphobic, or biphobic comments can easily be digitally communicated and used to threaten a wider audience, like youth, in the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

Issues and Challenges

Many adults prevent young people from exploring their sexuality and gender by writing it off as a mature conversation meant to be left for older people.⁸² However, as mentioned in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, we have the right to be heard and taken seriously by adults and pushing youth away from the 2SLGBTQ+ community works in direct violation of this clause.⁸³

Furthermore, the social stigma around young people’s participation in the 2SLGBTQ+ community aggravates mental health issues as well. According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, young people in the 2SLGBTQ+ community face “14 times the risk of suicide and substance abuse than heterosexual peers” and endure “double the risk for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than heterosexual people”.⁸⁴ Because 2SLGBTQ+ youth manage a greater risk of mental health issues than heterosexual youth, it is clear that preventing a distinction between these two groups will not meet 2SLGBTQ+ young people where we are at and impede the delivery of our mental health resources.

Finally, the disconnection of youth from the 2SLGBTQ+ community also promotes a false narrative around the community as “inappropriate”. Such efforts remove the human dignity from Canada’s 2SLGBTQ+ individuals and ultimately, it ostracises 2SLGBTQ+ individuals as identifying with a community that is “too mature” for youth.

Recommendations

Policy makers need to move forward with new policy measures that tackle homophobia with the best interest of 2SLGBTQ+ young people at heart. On that account, we need Parliamentarians to “think about all the people who identify in the community and how laws will affect them”⁸⁵ by personally interacting with 2SLGBTQ+ community groups to engage, creating more celebrations of 2SLGBTQ+ youth during Pride campaigns, and normalising youth education on 2SLGBTQ+ needs.

In this way, we can change the trajectory of social stigma around the 2SLGBTQ+ community, becoming more celebratory and accepting of the 2SLGBTQ+ youth figures in society.

Poverty, Housing & Food Insecurity

According to UNICEF, poverty is symptomized by a low standard of living, including low incomes, lower levels of health, welfare dependency, and unemployment.⁸⁶ While most of the consequences of poverty listed are borne by adults, we make the case that children suffer most. Indeed, among the 5 million Canadians affected by poverty, there are 1.3 million children.⁸⁷

More specifically, food insecurity is defined as “the disruption of food intake or eating patterns because of lack of money and other resources.”⁸⁸

As for housing insecurity, its repercussions go beyond homelessness: “living in unaffordable, below standards, and/or overcrowded housing conditions,” and spending more than 50% of one’s income on rent, are just some examples.⁸⁹

Issues and Challenges

Geographical factors further render the existing public programs to fight food insecurity less effective in certain areas. For example, 62% of children who live in the northern parts of our country struggle with food insecurity.⁹⁰ In Nunavut, for instance, families spend twice as much on food compared to the national average⁹¹.

Two important groups within the Canadian population are more vulnerable to poverty and housing insecurity: youth -- Indigenous youth in particular -- and single, working parents.

In 2014, for example, 20% (40,000) of Canadians who experienced homelessness were youth

(defined as individuals aged 13 – 24). Among this 20%, a third -- 30.6%, to be precise -- were First Nations children and youth⁹².

The Indigenous population as a whole are more vulnerable to poverty. In 2014, non-Indigenous people earned an average of \$42,102 per year while Indigenous peoples who lived on reserves only earned \$23,875.⁹³

Furthermore, single, working-aged adults who have to support a child are more vulnerable to poverty. Childcare represents a significant commitment, emotionally, and in terms of time, making these adults less available to employers than their counterparts who do not have family obligations. Additionally, the cost of childcare dilutes most of the income they may receive. For these adults particularly, poverty is a vicious cycle that is hard to break.

As young Canadians, we value free healthcare. However, low levels of income and food insecurity often lead to undesirable health outcomes. Thus, the social determinants of health cannot be neglected, especially if our healthcare system aims to adequately serve the needs of all Canadians.⁹⁴

Recommendations

In order to mitigate the effects of poverty, we want the Government to set in place a universal pharmacare system. The fact that Canada is the only country among developed nations with a universal healthcare system that does not cover essential medications is shocking.⁹⁵ We see many benefits to the implementation of Universal Pharmacare, like a lower cost for prescription drugs, increased savings for families, and a revitalised economy.

Along with lowering the cost of medications, Universal Pharmacare would also promote equitable access to medication. This is particularly important because 1 in 10 Canadians cannot afford their medication.⁹⁶

Discussions among YCP members highlighted that there should be one national drug plan instead of having over 100,000 different drug plans. This would eliminate the administrative fees associated with having so many drug plans.

YCP members believe that with a Universal Pharmacare plan, families will be able to save approximately \$7.3 billion every year,⁹⁷ allowing them to pay down their debts, start or expand a small business and invest in themselves. All in all it will improve their standard of living.

We also care about the economy. Knowing that employers would save \$9 billion every year by withdrawing their work-based drug plans,⁹⁸ we

believe that the implementation of Universal Pharmacare would increase the competitiveness of Canadian companies and be an incentive for business growth and increased employment.

We also want government to address income insecurity through a Guaranteed Livable Income. While we acknowledge the government's improvements – like Employment Insurance, the Canada Child Benefit, the Canada Workers Benefit, and the Guaranteed Income Supplement for our seniors – income security gaps remain. The many barriers -- single parenthood, lower educational attainment, etc. – to finding adequate work, receiving an adequate wage, or being able to afford housing and childcare need to be addressed through the implementation of a Guaranteed Livable Income.

Finally, we want the Government to continue to fund, improve and ensure universal, affordable, and high-quality childcare. We find childcare to be unaffordable in many of our communities, leading women to work in less paid jobs and put off their education in order to support their children. Universal, affordable, and high-quality child care is essential for children's well-being, women's social and economic engagement, and the flourishing of our families and communities across the country and should therefore be championed by the Canadian government.

Youth Justice

Youth Canada's youth justice system is governed by the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA). These sets of laws support a youth-centred justice system that judges criminal offences committed by young people under 18 in a different manner than those committed by adults.⁹⁹

Issues and Challenges

There is an overrepresentation of Indigenous youth in Canada's justice system. For the 2017-2018 cycle, Indigenous youth made up 43% of admissions to correctional services while only comprising 8% of the youth population.¹⁰⁰ We consider this to be reflective of the systemic and institutional discrimination which characterizes our youth justice system.

Recommendations

We believe that the number of employees of colour in the youth justice system should be increased, as they would feel more empathy and may be able to

counter some of the biases that exist towards Black and Indigenous youth, who make up a significant proportion of individuals in the system.¹⁰¹ Similarly, more lawyers of colour should be encouraged to work for the youth justice system. This does not, however, preclude all workers and lawyers from being, to the best of their abilities, well-versed in the young person's background when interacting with them.

The system's fees also need to be lowered. Throughout, a young offender's adolescence (12-17 years of age), the cost to both the system and the young offender is, on average, \$823,000.¹⁰² This is a large burden on the system and on the young offender. Obtaining equal treatment within the justice system "should not include a pathway to debt," defends a YCP member. Navigating the system is challenging enough;¹⁰³ debt should not be another burden. Furthermore, the majority of crimes are caused by a lack of financial resources;¹⁰⁴ we should not ask a young person to pay even more to obtain a fair defence.

Lastly, as mentioned, experiences in the youth justice system can lead to mental health issues. Experiences of discrimination, a lack of understanding about the process, or lack of parental support can be taxing on a young person. There should hence be a wide availability of specialised mental health services accessible to the youth in the system.

This youth representative would work with a group of designated young people to identify the issues that matter most to them, and, as a result, guide the party's program.

Second, we believe that there should be at least one Member of Parliament who is a young person. This would help to ensure that there is direct representation for young people at the Federal level.

Third, we applaud Prime Minister Trudeau for initially taking on the role of Minister of Youth. We, as young people, would like to have more direct interaction with our Government. We believe that young people should be more involved in decision-making. This is why we request that the relationship between the Prime Minister's Youth Council (PMYC) and the YCP is maintained and strengthened, granting the YCP an advisory role within the PMYC, and particularly when creating legislation. Such a relationship would enable more young people to have consultative power in relation to MPs and cabinet ministers.

Youth Representation

Youth representation goes beyond having young elected officials in Parliament. It also involves the inclusion of youth in consultations and advisory councils, and an encouragement of youth engagement in all areas of public and political life.¹⁰⁵

Issues and Challenges

The lack of youth representation in politics means that many youth issues are overlooked. For example, many adults falsely believe that mental health issues can simply be "grown out of," shares a YCP member. Thus, without the presence of youth voices, we cannot, for example, identify and address the mental health issues that can emerge from a young age.

Recommendations

First, to amplify youth voices in politics, it is important that each party in Parliament create a position, within the party, for a youth representative.

WE URGE YOU TO

REVIEW, CONSIDER,

CHAMPION AND

TAKE ACTION

CONCLUDING REMARKS & NEXT STEPS

Speaking as youth, and on behalf of thousands of young advocates across Canada, we are struggling. Children and youth do not have adequate representation or voice in the government decisions that impact us - critical topics including mental health, climate change, systemic discrimination, poverty, housing and food insecurity, and youth justice. In the context of the pandemic, our lives have been dismantled even further. We demand that our voices be heard on behalf of children and youth across the country in order to tackle the issues that are important to us and to ultimately improve the lives of all young Canadians.

YCP was developed to empower the voice of young citizens and to give them a platform to voice their needs. As a result, this report communicates specific and relevant recommendations that children across Canada, as a whole, are asking for. This report is an accumulation of years of CFC's work and the work of young Canadian advocates. The concerns and recommendations are a true reflection of the needs and asks of children in this country.

Going forward, all future policies regarding children's rights need to focus on preserving the integrity and voices of young people. We witnessed the effects of such disconnect throughout the eye opening experiences of the pandemic, seeing how significant groups of children are overlooked and socially stratified in issues of climate change, poverty, youth justice, systemic racism, and mental health.

However, this is an unacceptable reality for new and advancing life in Canada. We need Parliamentarians to actively focus the recommendations on this report that will set up new standards around the conditions of youth-well being and living. Taking more bold and deliberate

action to create new strategies, Parliamentarians must embolden new strategies to emphasize the spirit of young people's drive for change.

Canada, as a party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), must celebrate its commitment to children's rights by implementing the recommendations expressed in this report. This is consistent with Article 12 of the UNCRC, which stipulates that children and youth have the right to be heard when it comes to the issues that affect them.

We do not have the right to vote, but that should not prevent us from gaining access to representation in politics. This report is rendered all the more important knowing that it is a pathway to representation for us.

Finally, this report is one of the most diverse and detailed compilations of youth voices in Canada.¹⁰⁶ This report, as the culmination of years of youth engagement events, must therefore be taken into account at any stage and level of policymaking, as required by Article 3 of the UNCRC.

To conclude, we urge you to review, consider, champion and take action on the proposed recommendations on mental health, climate change, systemic discrimination, poverty, housing and food insecurity, and youth justice. It is crucial to uphold our rights and work towards making Canada the best place in the world for kids to grow up.

A **SAFE**...**ONE-OF-A-KIND** **SPACE** OF DISCUSSION FOR OUR **YOUTH** TO BECOME MORE **CIVICALLY** **ENGAGED** CITIZENS

THE YCP STORY

A national summit was held by Children First Canada (CFC) in 2017 to create a Canadian Children's Charter. This event was one of the first major events engaging young people "from coast to coast to coast" to discuss the issues impacting us and to create a set of rights and recommendations specific to protecting the wellbeing of children and youth.¹⁰⁷ One of the central calls to action in the Children's Charter was the right to "Child Participation and Youth Engagement"¹⁰⁸ as it was evident that we, as young leaders, had a lot to say but very few places to seriously voice our concerns.

As a method adopted in several other countries to encourage active civic engagement¹⁰⁹, the idea emerged, at CFC, to establish a Young Canadians' Parliament (YCP). The YCP would act as an avenue for children and youth across Canada to engage with one another, discuss current issues, critique government policies, and provide recommendations.

Alongside youth representatives, Children First Canada began advocating for the establishment of a Young Canadians' Parliament in 2019 - 2020. With the support of several key funders who believe in the importance of children to be seen and heard, a dream came true in June of 2020:

the official launch of the YCP. Due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, YCP held educational events online.

In 2021-2022, the online platform provided an opportunity for young Canadians to voice their concerns in a more accessible way. This allowed CFC to fulfil its aspiration of connecting young people "from coast to coast to coast," and many youth voices coalesced into what the YCP is today: a safe, but also one-of-a-kind space of discussion for our youth to become more civically engaged citizens.

Young people crafted policy briefs for their Members of Parliament to read, created advocacy plans to find ways to get more involved in their communities, and conceived presentations about their topic for all other participants to learn about, all the while keeping the discussion-based authenticity of the YCP alive with the help of our facilitators. As for the discussion topics, members were asked to choose the topics that most interested them, which were selected based on the top 10 threats found through research and highlighted in the Raising Canada Report as well as the topics that were addressed in the 2020 YCP sessions.

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