



**CHILDREN  
FIRST**  
CANADA

**LES ENFANTS  
D'ABORD**  
CANADA

# WRITTEN SUBMISSION FOR THE PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS IN ADVANCE OF THE UPCOMING FEDERAL BUDGET

October 2022

# LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

## Recommendation 1:

**Make a plan** to invest in changing children's lives for the better

- a. Establish an independent Ombudsperson or Commissioner for Children and Youth that is dedicated to protecting the rights of children.
- b. Create and implement a national Strategy or Plan of Action to improve the lives of children in Canada

## Recommendation 2:

**Support evidence-based decision-making** for children and youth in Canada by improving timely access to data.

- a. Develop a comprehensive data strategy that would encompass the collection of disaggregated data on the health and well-being of children, supported by analysis, research and insights.
- b. Renew the national survey on the child- and youth-serving sector to identify and map all key decision-makers and service providers working to improve the lives of kids in Canada.

## Recommendation 3:

**Invest in the potential of children and youth** by enabling them to be active and engaged citizens.

- a. Support the creation of a national School Leadership Program that promotes knowledge of children's rights and responsibilities and develops their confidence and capacity as leaders of today and tomorrow. Investment is \$1 million for 3 years (3 million total).
- b. Continue to support the Young Canadians' Parliament as a forum for children and youth to learn about their rights, strengthen their attachment to Canada, and ensure that the voices and needs of children are represented in the Government's agenda. Investment is \$250,000 for 3 years (750,000 total).
- c. Create a Catalytic Investment Fund for Children and Youth to fund innovative and evidence-based programs that will measurably improve the lives of children.

# CONTEXT

Children and youth thrive in environments that are safe, nurturing, predictable and structured. However, this is not the reality for many kids in Canada. One-third do not enjoy a safe and healthy childhood.<sup>1</sup>

While the pandemic has brought many challenges for children to the forefront, a crisis has been brewing for more than a decade. Once ranked 10th among affluent countries, Canada has fallen sharply to 30<sup>th</sup> place.<sup>2</sup>

Children First Canada (CFC)'s latest [Raising Canada](#) research suggests Canada has reached a tipping point, putting the lives of children and youth – and the future of our country – in jeopardy.<sup>3</sup>

Many children do not make it to their 18th birthday. The infant mortality rate in Canada is higher than in most wealthy countries, and the leading causes of childhood deaths include preventable injuries, suicide and homicide. These devastating statistics are too alarming to be ignored.

Public policy decisions and budgetary allocations often do not prioritize Canada's youngest citizens, which is evident at all levels of government.

There is overwhelming evidence that investing in young people can yield great economic returns, benefiting all Canadians.

## **When children thrive, Canada thrives.**

In June 2022, the United Nation's Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) supported the call for urgent action, expressing grave concerns and issuing recommendations for urgent action. **The UN Committee publicly highlighted serious concerns about the welfare of children who live in Canada, particularly Indigenous children.** This latest review followed a scathing report a decade ago, with the Committee noting that many recommendations from that report remain unaddressed. The report can be accessed [here](#).

Many of the recommendations from the UNCRC are echoed in this briefing note.

**“There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children.”**

-Nelson Mandela

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 1:** Make a plan to invest in changing children's lives for the better

**a. Establish an independent Ombudsperson or Commissioner for Children and Youth that is dedicated to protecting the rights of children.**

A federal independent **Ombudsperson or Commissioner for Children and Youth** is a non-partisan and evidenced-based approach to improve the wellbeing of children, including children's health and safety, and addressing specific issues such as child poverty and child abuse.

Children's Ombudspersons/Commissioners have been established in more than 60 countries, including Sweden, the United Kingdom and New Zealand.

During the pandemic, children's commissioners have played a critical role in addressing the impacts of lockdowns on children. In Canada, support for children has had a fragmented approach, **there is no single lead Minister with ultimate responsibility for their wellness.**

Federal responsibility for children spans across government departments, including:

- Employment and Social Development Canada
- Women and Gender Equality Canada
- Canadian Heritage
- Indigenous Services Canada
- Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada
- Justice Canada
- Public Health Agency of Canada
- Public Safety Canada

This list is by no means exhaustive.

With a mandate to promote, investigate and advise on legislation and policies impacting children and youth – a federal Ombudsperson/Commissioner would result in better outcomes for all young Canadians.

In establishing the office, it is essential to work nation to nation, respecting and including the self-governance rights of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.

**b. Create and implement a national Plan of Action to improve the lives of children in Canada**

CFC urges the government to develop a **National Strategy or Plan of Action**. Action plans for children, such as Australia's National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy<sup>4</sup>, can help ensure that the voices and needs of children are represented in government agendas and improve the overall wellbeing of children.

Canada's last national action plan, *A Canada Fit for Children*, was issued in 2004 in response to the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children and the global goals set in *A World Fit for Children*. Regrettably, Canada's action plan was subsequently abandoned by future governments. The lack of a national policy framework to guide Canada's efforts over the past 16 years has had an undeniable impact on Canada's subsequent downward trajectory from 10<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> place amongst OECD countries.

*A National Strategy or Plan of Action for Children* developed in collaboration across with the provinces and territories, civil society organizations and with the participation of children and youth, should outline priorities, targets and timelines, with a clear delineation of the responsibilities of the various levels of government. It must also be supported by an investment of federal resources.

Priority areas to consider have been identified in the latest *Raising Canada* report.

**Recommendation 2:** Support evidence-based decision-making for children and youth in Canada by improving timely access to data.

- a. **Develop a comprehensive data strategy that would encompass the collection of disaggregated data on the health and well-being of children, supported by analysis, research and insights.**
- b. **Renew the national survey on the child- and youth-serving sector to identify and map all key decision-makers and service providers working to improve the lives of kids in Canada.**

Improve the data which is required to make better informed and evidence-based decisions for children and youth in Canada. **Canada is the only OECD country that does not annually collect data on the health and wellbeing of its children.**

While CFC's Raising Canada report highlights a substantial fraction of the enormous amount of evidence emerging in Canada related to children and youth, there is still a need to invest in research related to children's well-being and health. For example, Canada lacks national longitudinal studies (and related data) on children and youth that can provide a foundation on examining how Canadian child and youth mental & physical health and wellness, changes across time. Data should be disaggregated by age, sex, geographic location, ethnicity and socio-economic background. This will facilitate analysis on the situation of all children, particularly those who are most vulnerable, and strengthen the application of the GBA+ lens in relation to children.

**Recommendation 3:** Invest in the potential of children and youth by enabling them to be active and engaged citizens.

- a. Support the creation of a national School Leadership Program that promotes knowledge of children’s rights and responsibilities and develops their confidence and capacity as leaders of today and tomorrow. Investment is \$1 million for 3 years (3 million total).**

This program should be created to educate and engage a generation of young leaders to bring about meaningful change in their lives and those of their peers. This project would build the resilience of diverse and underrepresented children and youth in Canada through scaling up a national K-12 school-based leadership program.

*Building on our success:* In 2020, CFC developed a pilot curriculum and toolkit for schools. It was designed by teachers during the pandemic to facilitate learning and skills development with students and equip them with knowledge as changemakers on some of the most pressing issues facing their generation. Through the toolkit, students learned about parliamentary process, how to engage with democratic systems, have their voices heard, and affect real, lasting change at local and national levels! With additional financial support this program could be scaled up, expanding content, reach and impact across Canada.

- b. Continue to support the Young Canadians’ Parliament as a forum for children and youth to learn about their rights, strengthen their attachment to Canada, and ensure that the voices and needs of children are represented in the Government’s agenda. Investment is \$250,000 for 3 years (750,000 total).**

The Young Canadians’ Parliament (YCP) has begun its 3<sup>rd</sup> year of programming. We encourage the government to continue supporting this important initiative. The YCP program educates young people on Canada’s political and democratic system, supports them in advocating for themselves, provides opportunities to share their views on topics and issues that are important to them, and increases their attachment to Canada. The YCP provides them with essential skills to affect meaningful change and provides pathways to future employment. Their annual work results in drafting Bills for a national debate and tabling a report with recommendations for federal decision-makers.

The program has been made possible in part by partial funding through Canadian Heritage on an annual basis; an investment by the Government of Canada to support the **scale up of this program on a multi-year basis** would allow the program to become sustainable and more impactful on the lives of children across Canada.

**c. Create a Catalytic Investment Fund for Children and Youth to fund innovative and evidence-based programs that will measurably improve the lives of children.**

CFC recommends that the Government of Canada establish a Catalytic Investment Fund for Children to be allocated over the next four years. The aim of the fund is to catalyse efforts to tackle the immediate and urgent threats to children's wellbeing and to drive systemic change.

The proposed Catalytic Fund should be made available to credible national and local child and youth serving organizations. Further, Canada must ensure that First Nations, Métis and Inuit children receive equitable funding and services.

A more in-depth analysis is accessed [here](#).

## FINAL THOUGHTS

When kids thrive, Canada thrives. Our collective future depends on the decisions we make today. Investing in kids now is not just the right thing to do, it is also a down payment on our future that will bear enormous social and economic dividends for years to come.

## Endnotes

- 1 Children First Canada. Raising Canada 2022 - Top 10 Threats to Childhood in Canada Accessed 2022. [https://childrenfirstcanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/RC2022\\_CFC\\_RC-Report\\_09-02.pdf](https://childrenfirstcanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/RC2022_CFC_RC-Report_09-02.pdf)
- 2 *Ibid*; Timar E, Gromada A, Rees G, Carraro A. Places and Spaces: Environments and children's well-being. Accessed 2022. <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/1417-rc17-places-and-spaces-environments-and-childrens-well-being.html>
- 3 Children First Canada. Raising Canada 2022 - Top 10 Threats to Childhood in Canada Accessed 2022. [https://childrenfirstcanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/RC2022\\_CFC\\_RC-Report\\_09-02.pdf](https://childrenfirstcanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/RC2022_CFC_RC-Report_09-02.pdf)
- 4 National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy - National Mental Health Commission, Government of Australia; Accessed 2022. <https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/projects/childrens-strategy>

## 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](https://childrenfirstcanada.org) for more information.

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