



OUR COMMITMENT TO TODAY AND TOMORROW

Report on
Recommendations from
Young Canadians
2022-2023



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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Children First Canada (CFC) is a national organization with staff located in Ottawa, Calgary, Toronto, Victoria, and Charlottetown. In the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge that we live, work and play on the traditional, ancestral, unceded territories of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people, working alongside children and youth. CFC affirms the spirit that we are all Treaty people, honouring the sovereignty and self-determination of Indigenous Nations. We believe that learning about the traditional territories of Indigenous people is an important first step toward Reconciliation.

THE YOUTH RESEARCHERS WISH TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE LAND WHERE THEY EACH LIVE AND WORK

Simi Sahota lives in the unceded traditional territory of the Katzie, Semiahmoo, Kwantlen and the Coast Salish Peoples.

Matin Moradkan lives in the City of Coquitlam located on the shared, traditional and ancestral lands of the Kwikwə́ləm (Kwikwetlem), Sqə́c̓i'yaʔ tənəxʷ (Katzie), and other Coast Salish Peoples.

Mélissa Sum Wah lives in the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg people

ABOUT THE YOUTH RESEARCHERS



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(she/her)
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Topic: Mental Health. Climate Change.

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SIMI SAHOTA

(she/her)
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Topic: Poverty, Housing and Food Insecurity.

Simi Sahota (she/her) is a passionate youth leader and first-year university student at the University of British Columbia. Simi joined the Children First Canada (CFC) team as a volunteer and now serves as a Youth researcher, and the vice-chair of CFC's National Youth Advisory Council (YAC). Simi has had a wide variety in experience regarding child right across Canada such as her volunteer work with the Honourable Senator Rosemary Moodie's bill on a establishing a National Child Commissioner, guest presenting at the International Course on the Rights of the Child at the Université de Moncton's with CFC, and being featured in her local newspapers discussing Raising Canada's top 10 threats to childhood.



MÉLLISA SUM WAH

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Gatineau, Québec

Topic: Systemic Discrimination & Racism. Violence Against Children.

Méllisa Sum Wah (she/her) comes from Gatineau, QC, and is a 3rd year student at Columbia University pursuing a BA in Human Rights. This is also her 3rd year with CFC as facilitator and youth researcher for the YCP program. She is passionate about amplifying the voice of children and youth all over Canada and takes pride in the children and youth whose voices make up this report.



JAYDEN PAQUET-NOISEUX

(he/him)
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Assistant Youth Researcher

Jayden is a dedicated bilingual 17-year-old. Jayden has always invested a lot of his time in his school's community outreach programs and with other organizations that focus on helping others. In the last few years, he has won many awards and scholarships for his dedication, perseverance, and involvement at school and in his community. Jayden has been involved with Children's First Canada for more than two years now and is determined to bring focus to issues that are significant to kids across Canada.

Editing and support by the following staff of Children First Canada:

Sara Austin, Founder & CEO
Cicely McWilliams, Director of Research & Programs
Stephanie Mitton, Government Relations Consultant
Wraychel Horne, Communications Specialist
Andy Hon Bong Lee, Youth Engagement Lead

CFC is a national charitable organization that serves as a strong, effective, and independent voice for all 8 million children in Canada. One of CFC's core values is that we are a child and youth-centred organization, and we are guided by the primary principle, nothing for children without children. This value and principle are at the heart of this report.

It is integral to the report that it portrays youth voice in an accurate and unapologetic way. This is why everything in the report comes from the work of our Young Canadians' Parliament (YCP) members and is written in a simple language so people of all ages can understand the report. This is also why the authors of this report are a group of diverse young people from across Canada. We can represent a variety of youth voices during the writing process. Young people have been involved in every step of this report from its conception, to the drafting, design, and publication. That is exactly what nothing for children without children means.

Visit childrenfirstcanada.org for more information.

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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.

METHODOLOGY

The YCP is a 16-week participatory program where young people under the age of 18 learn, engage, and discuss topics that matter most to them in a national online forum. The main sources for the recommendations found in this report come from our YCP members themselves, their discussions during YCP sessions, or their written work in the form of policy briefs, advocacy plans, and mock parliamentary bills. Where information was incomplete, the Youth Researchers, all of whom were facilitators during the YCP work sessions, provided context to support the YCP members' recommendations.

WHY IS THIS REPORT IMPORTANT TO YOUTH?

As young people, we view the world in a unique way and provide creative insights that are often overlooked by adults. This report shares our ideas in an accessible way and showcases our recommendations concerning issues affecting all Canadians, especially youth.

Through this report, members of the YCP and the Youth Researchers, are exercising our right to be heard as per Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. According to the Convention, children and youth have the right to participate and freely express their views “in all matters” affecting them.

The issues at the heart of this report – mental health, climate change, poverty, housing and food insecurity, systemic racism and discrimination, and violence against children – heavily affect us. From our right to be heard stems an obligation of adults and institutions like our government to listen. Our concerns and suggestions on how to best respond to the issues should be considered and acted upon. Only then can our government claim to uphold the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The YCP is a growing movement of kids who want to talk about the issues that matter most to our generation. Through national online forums, children and youth share their views and speak up for their rights with Parliamentarians, policymakers, influencers, and each other. The program provides us, with resources and education on the political system, our rights and freedoms, and how to advocate for ourselves and our peers. For more information on the Young Canadians' Parliament, please go to:

www.youngcanadiansparliament.com/

The YCP is rooted in the Canadian Children's Charter, which was created in 2017 with input from thousands of young Canadians and finalized on National Child Day 2018. One of the Charter's central calls to action was the right to "Child Participation and Youth Engagement," as it was obvious that young leaders had a lot to say but very few places to voice our concerns. The idea emerged at Children's First Canada to establish a Young Canadians' Parliament.

An important contributor to the shaping of both Children First Canada and the Young Canadians' Parliament is the United Nations' 'A World Fit for Children' document which will soon reach its 21st anniversary this year. It has also notably provided a launching pad for Canada's national plan of action, 'A Canada Fit for Children.' This document provided an early framework for child-rights and the fundamental calls for actions. As the document states:

"We pledge an equal partnership in this fight for children's rights. And while we promise to support the actions you take on behalf of children, we also ask for your commitment and support in the actions we are taking – because the children of the world are misunderstood. We are not the sources of problems; we are the resources that are needed to solve them." ¹

This very notion is reflected throughout CFC, YCP, and this report.

The YCP engages children and youth below the age of 18, and is specifically designed to fill a gap in engagement of younger children and youth in policy making that affects them. As you know, children don't have the right to vote yet. Additionally, while there are forums for youth, such as the Prime Minister's Youth Council and the many youth councils for Ministers, MPs and Senators, the majority require that you be at least 16 to participate. The YCP affirms the rights of all children to participate and directly influence decision making at the highest levels of government no matter how young.

Many other countries in the world use children's parliaments as a tool to encourage active participation of youth in the decision-making process. The YCP was adapted during the COVID-19 pandemic, to a strictly online platform. During the lockdown, many people felt isolated, alone, and confused. The YCP provided an outlet for young people to share their ideas, experience and stories with other kids across Canada, learn from each other and experts, and connect with parliamentarians in this time of uncertainty. How the YCP came together shows that, during these hard times, many of us felt motivated and inspired to create change on the issues we faced.

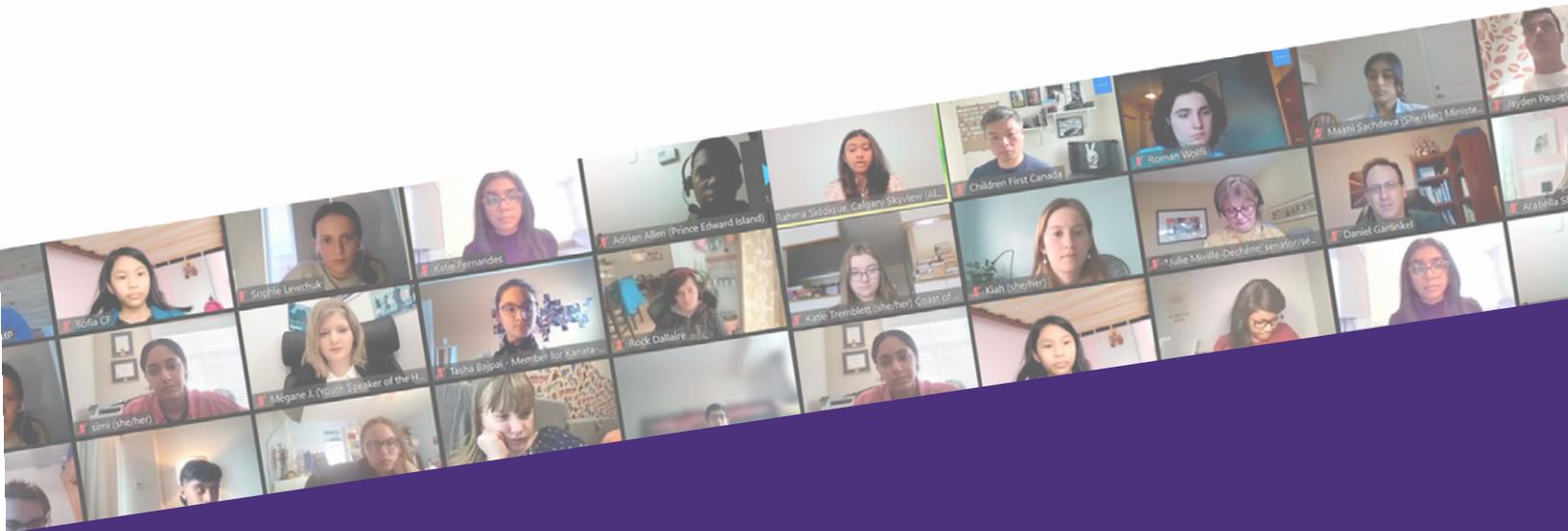


for last year's YCP Report, click on image.

The young people who participate in the program believe in the principles and actions that promote justice, equity, diversity and inclusion and the need to foster resilience and belonging. The YCP supports their commitments and promotes anti-oppressive practices. We value the importance of truth and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and aim to do our part in meeting the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action.

The YCP is also often seen as a stepping-stone for many young activists and changemakers. Many YCP graduates are activists outside the program, advocating for the issues they care about by organizing rallies and petitions, engaging with politicians from all levels of government, speaking to local and national media, and becoming important figures within the realm of child rights.

The goal of this report isn't only to showcase the hard work and brilliance of young people, but to actively collaborate with the government and decision-makers from all sectors to create much-needed solutions. As youth, we understand that we can't reach the solutions to the problems we face on our own. We need to work in partnership with adults for the sake of a better future for Canada.



“Participating in the YCP has shown me over the years that youth in Canada have a voice and that people in power are ready to listen to us. This program is very empowering for everyone that participates in it. It teaches us about the functioning of Canada’s federal government and how the democratic process takes place in our country.”

- YCP MEMBER

In this report, we base our analysis on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

UNCRC

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is an international treaty that was created in 1989 with the purpose of providing a framework for governments to prioritize the rights and best interests of children in all decisions. The convention has four main principles:

- non-discrimination,
- the best interests of the child,
- the right to life and development, and
- the participation and the views of the child.

Canada ratified the CRC in 1991, meaning that as a country, Canada has a duty to implement and uphold the rights of children. Though there undoubtedly has been action for the betterment of young people since 1991, there are still many children struggling because of poverty, discrimination, abuse, neglect and more.

We, the youth of Canada, have rights, but many are being ignored and overlooked. This is why we use the CRC as proof of the legitimacy of our asks, and as a reminder of the responsibility that Canada must support our rights.

In 2015, Canada, alongside all other member states in the United Nations, adopted the agenda for the SDGs. The goal was to globally call for “action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030.”² All of the recommendations in this report directly link to more than one SDG. This proves that the recommendations of young people, are relevant to meeting the global goals. To ensure a sustainable future for Canadians, the government must take action to implement these solutions.



The recommendations provided in this report require actions from different levels of government and sectors, but specifically the government of Canada. According to the Constitution Act of 1867, section 91 and 92, the government's powers are split between two main levels: the federal, and the provincial (municipalities are bodies of the province). This means that different levels of government – Federal, Provincial, and Municipal – have different jurisdiction.

In order to implement our recommendations, we understand that certain responsibilities fall under each level of government, that is why we clearly outline which level is responsible for what. As an overview.

FEDERAL

The Federal Government deals with matters that affect the nation as a whole. Regarding the report, the Federal Government can respond to our recommendations by using their federal tools like national funding, national research, creating legislation, and creating national standards and providing leadership. The Federal Government also has a cabinet of different Ministers who lead Ministries that, each have responsibility for the different areas we discuss such as mental health and addictions, environment and climate change, and families, children and social development, and more. Ministries are responsible for the design and implementation of public policy.



Just a few of the Parliamentarians who have met with our members: top - The Honourable Karina Gould - Minister of Families, Children & Social Development, MP Karen Vecchio, Députée Kristina Michaud, and MP Taylor Bachrach.

PROVINCIAL

The Provincial Government deals with things that specifically affect their Province, but all oversee areas relevant to children and youth including education, healthcare, child protection, poverty, housing and more. Regarding the report, the provincial government can respond to our recommendations using their tools including taxation, welfare programs, and creating provincial legislation and regulation. Like the Federal Government, Provinces also have Ministers and ministries for the relevant sectors we discuss.

MUNICIPAL

The Municipal Government deals with things that affect their Municipalities. Regarding the report, the municipal government can respond to our recommendations through the implementation of legislation and administering the programs funded by higher levels of government, and by providing local resources such as workshops, and using local regulations. Though Municipalities have the least power and money of the three levels of government, the impact of inaction has the greatest impact at the municipal level and their role can be central to on-the-ground changes in people's lives.

It is also important to note that the federal government has jurisdiction over Territories (Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut), unlike the rest of the provinces that are jurisdictionally independent. The territories however have their own governments and make decisions particularly regarding health and education.

THE TOPICS DISCUSSED BY YOUNG PEOPLE

-  *Mental Health*
-  *Climate Change*
-  *Poverty, Housing, & Food Insecurity*
-  *Systemic Discrimination & Racism*
-  *Violence Against Children*

MENTAL HEALTH

YCP 2022 had 3 teams focused on Mental Health. The young people ranged in age from 12 to 17 and represented all provinces across Canada.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

The issue of mental health equity, and access to mental healthcare for all Canadians, is a priority for children and youth. The current statistics show that there is a lack of treatment for children and youth dealing with a mental health crisis, and there are accessibility issues to receiving the proper mental healthcare they need.

The Canadian Institute for Health Information's most recent statistics show that, in 2022, only 3 out of 5 children and youth, with mild to moderate mental

health needs, can access it.³ Even for those young Canadians who were able to access mental health services, half report that the services were difficult to access.⁴ This data validates the concerns children and youth have about equitable access to mental healthcare. As Canada works to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, it is evident that wellness for all (SDG3) cannot be achieved with the current gaps in mental healthcare.

WHAT YOUTH ARE SAYING

"MENTAL HEALTH IS A SERIOUS TOPIC, AND PEOPLE MAY OVERLOOK THE TOPIC AND NOT KNOW ITS IMPORTANCE. HAVING TALKED TO A LOT OF YOUTH, IT IS EVIDENT THERE IS A PROBLEM ABOUT HOW MENTAL HEALTH IS HANDLED IN SCHOOLS AND THAT NEEDS TO CHANGE BECAUSE WE ARE THE FUTURE."

"SOME OF MY CLOSE FAMILY (OLDER AND YOUNGER GENERATION) SUFFER FROM MENTAL ILLNESSES BUT DUE TO THE LANGUAGE [BARRIERS] AND GENERAL ACCESSIBILITY ISSUES TO THERAPISTS, OF THESE GROUPS, IT'S BEEN DIFFICULT TO RECEIVE [HELP]"

Mental healthcare is healthcare and the mental health services recognized under the Canada Health Act need to be extended beyond the hospital and psychiatric setting to increase access. As youth, we have a Charter right to life, liberty and personal security (Section 15) and under the CRC we have a right to the "highest attainable standard of health" including mental health (Article 24). A healthy Canadian society is one that includes access to mental healthcare for all, and especially for equity deserving groups.

The YCP members highlighted four main categories of mental health recommendations, that include: increasing the mental health workforce through education, increasing funding for more resources and first responders, creating training programs for professionals (police and social workers), and mental health literacy for youth.

1. Increase the mental health workforce through education

The YCP advises the **federal government** to increase the mental health workforce and reduce the burden on these professions. This will allow mental health workers to not only focus on those who need their support the most, young people in crisis. But also, be able to treat kids before they are in crisis. The YCP teams focused on mental health don't see enough diversity in the types of mental health options available. While they thought it might be necessary to create other professional designations, that would be a recommendation for the consideration of professional associations and educational institutions.

Provincial governments, however, can have an impact by offering incentives to both colleges and universities to increase the number of mental health courses offered. The Provincial governments can provide direct incentives through full scholarships (particularly for young people from equity deserving groups) to increase enrollment in mental health education. Furthermore, the YCP members request that all general mental health professionals have access to robust training, with a focus on children and youth rights as part of the requirement of licensing and a core element of their degree or diploma programs. All mental health professionals must be trained in youth-led and youth participation research methods and ethics.

2. Increase funding for mental healthcare resources, support mental health professionals and increase access through standardized virtual care:

The YCP recommends that the federal and **provincial governments** to allocate more funding to social workers and other trained professionals. Youth mention that crisis responses (911 calls) should be done by social workers and/or police that have adequate mental health training, with a focus on children and youth rights.

We also recommend the **federal and provincial governments** support mental healthcare professionals, by allocating funding to virtual care and working with app developers to increase access to mental healthcare through virtual options. Youth recommend the government to expand the services offered by apps like Wellness Together⁵, for use by mental healthcare providers as part of their practice while ensuring equitable access to these virtual services, through Medicare. These apps will supplement the existing mental health and hospital programs currently available and will allow young people to start their treatment as soon as possible, reducing wait times.

The YCP recommends that governments should regulate mental health support apps and develop standards for all child and youth mental health care.⁶ These apps should be regulated and must be able to demonstrate positive outcomes supported by scientific evidence. Not everyone who can code an app should be able to produce a mental health support app. These apps should be designed to meet a set of standards, set by mental healthcare professionals to support the needs of patients, providing a safe and inclusive space for them.

HOW DOES IT RELATE TO SDG INDICATORS

3. Creating training programs for professionals (police and social workers)

The YCP recommends the **provincial and municipal governments** create a training program that educates all police officers on the danger of mental health stigma and techniques to de-escalate mental health crisis situations. Furthermore, the youth ask municipal governments to focus on hiring more police officers who have social work diplomas or degrees to create specialized units. Furthermore, we ask municipal governments to plan the inclusion of mental health professionals in crisis response units that are part the policing system.

4. Investing in social change by raising awareness and providing youth with more mental health education

The YCP recommends that the **federal and provincial governments** and school boards increase funding allocated to mental health promotion in schools, by introducing designated courses for mental wellness for all youth. Young people need to be able to identify signs of a mental health crisis in themselves or in their friends. They also need to know how to access the services and supports they need at the right time. More educational resources for young people that can raise their awareness and mental health literacy and potential services will give them needed tools.

The **Government of Canada** has taken some steps to solving the mental healthcare crisis. While the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, has announced investments like \$8.6 million for 6 projects across Ontario to promote mental health and wellbeing, that funding needs to be expanded to insure equitable mental healthcare for all Canadians.⁷ Furthermore, although the Government of Canada has committed to increasing support for mental health by introducing apps like Wellness Together, their services need to be expanded and the standards for virtual mental healthcare need to increase.



also affects:



relevant to achieving several SDGs and is therefore a priority for sustainable development. It is an aspect of, wellbeing (SDG3), worker safety (SDG 8), housing (SDG 11) inclusivity (SDG10), and climate change (SDG 13). SDG 3 “Ensure[ing] healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages” is linked to the idea that without access to proper mental health treatment for all, there can be no sustainable wellbeing in the future.⁸

CLIMATE CHANGE

YCP 2022 had 6 teams focused on Climate Change. The young people ranged in age from 12 to 17 and represented all provinces across Canada and the territory of Nunavut.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

This year youth have continued to voice our concerns about the climate crisis. The climate crisis had the most YCP teams (6) of all the issues raised by the members. While some YCP members were mainly focused on the need to strongly regulate the fossil fuel industry, other members talked about their concerns about the use of plastics and the need for public education on the risks and solutions. Statistics show that Canadians throw away 3 million tonnes plastic waste every year, with only 9% of the waste being recycled.⁹ Furthermore, Carbon dioxide emissions were the highest on record in 2022.¹⁰ Global Warming has worsened many natural disasters – such as hurricanes, snow and rainstorms – and has contributed to the increase in the number of forest fires in Canada. This shows that climate

change touches all of us right now. It also explains why young people can and want to engage on even very technical policy discussions about the issues that most affect them.

Climate change is such a significant and looming threat to everyone globally. As young people, we will be the generation to fully face the consequences of the choices made by the generations before us. It is incredibly important that adults today consider future generations, and make sure there are resources and a livable planet to pass on.

WHAT YOUTH ARE SAYING

“DO YOU WANT TO SAVE THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY? DO YOU WANT YOUR CHILDREN TO HAVE A PLANET TO LIVE ON? WE NEED TO ADDRESS CANADA’S CARBON FOOTPRINT SOONER THAN LATER. OUR PLANET COULD BE DESTROYED BEFORE WE KNOW IT (LIFE OR DEATH SITUATION). IF WE PROCRASTINATE ON ADDRESSING THIS ISSUE, IT MAY BE TOO LATE! THAT’S WHY WE MUST FOCUS ON IT NOW.”¹¹

“ROUGHLY 8 MILLION TONS OF PLASTIC GOES INTO OUR OCEANS EVERY YEAR. ONE OF THE BIGGEST HABITATS IS THE GREAT PACIFIC PLASTIC PATCH: A GARBAGE PATCH OF MARINE DEBRIS IN THE NORTHERN PACIFIC OCEAN ESTIMATED IN 2020 TO BE 1.6 MILLION SQ. KM; THAT IS APPROXIMATELY THREE TIMES THE SIZE OF FRANCE!”¹²

“THE CLIMATE CRISIS HURTS EVERYONE IN THEIR OWN WAY. THAT IS WHY WE NEED TO ACT NOW INSTEAD OF WAITING FOR THE END TO COME. [IT] IMPACTS HEALTH, QUALITY OF LIFE, [AND] HURTS OTHER COUNTRIES AND THE WORLD IF WE DON’T CARE ABOUT OUR COUNTRY’S CARBON FOOTPRINT”

“IT IS A THREAT TO CHILDREN AND YOUTH, BECAUSE CANADA CONTINUES TO RELY ON NON-RENEWABLE ENERGY WHICH CONTRIBUTES TO CLIMATE CHANGE, THREATENING THE FUTURE OF YOUTH AND CHILDREN”

There are four main categories of recommendations to tackle the issue of climate change and its impacts, they include: (1) incentives and taxation; (2) education (3) accountability and transparency; and the use of (4) various forms of energy.

1. Incentives & Taxation:

The YCP recommends that polluting corporations that use unreasonable amounts of plastic should be taxed by the **Federal Government**. The YCP recommends a tax based on the percentage of plastic package compared to the product. The Youth Researchers note that although the government has taken steps to ban single-use plastics, there should be stricter regulations and increased taxation to encourage a circular economy.

Other YCP members believe that **federal corporate tax rate** on oil and gas companies should be raised by a minimum of 5 percent. They recommend that this tax revenue should support Indigenous communities impacted by fossil fuel development.

The YCP recommends that the **federal and provincial governments** award grants to corporations researching green products/packaging.

The YCP recommends that the **Federal Government** further incentivize electric vehicle ownership, through higher consumer tax rebates, by creating more manufacturer incentives to build more EVs, and by increasing government support for EV infrastructure. The message from young people – speed up the transition to a carbon-free transportation system.

2. Education

There should be more education and awareness raising on the threat of climate change by the **Provincial Government**. Future voters need to be informed of the risks of ignoring climate change. Climate change education in schools ensures that

young people have the adequate knowledge. When youth can vote they will be able to assess the climate policies offered by the different parties. This will mobilize votes and increase voter turnout over the course of time.

3. Accountability and Transparency

The YCP recommends that large corporations be held accountable by **the Federal Government** for sending their plastic waste overseas and should be required to deal with their waste responsibly.

The **Federal Government** must clarify and amend the Duty to Consult for fossil fuel corporations, so that no more oil pipeline construction projects are approved without local Indigenous people's consent.

The **Federal Government** must create a website that publishes all the information regarding the projects affecting climate change and share this information to increase transparency with the general public. All details of environmental damage and actions taken should be available to the general public for full transparency.

The YCP recommends that **Provincial Governments** incentivize natural resource companies to establish mandatory ecosystem awareness training for their workers. It should also include training to work with Indigenous communities and honour Indigenous environmental knowing at the design and implementation of new projects. This training should be a requirement for all new extractive permits.

The YCP recommends the **federal government** to increase the liability for fossil fuel corporations in the Pipeline Safety Act, so that oil companies are responsible for fully covering the cost of losses and damages to local Indigenous communities if any leaks occur.

4. Promoting Renewable Energy

The **Provincial and Municipal Governments** must invest in the use of wind and solar power in suitable areas.

The YCP recommends that the **federal government** focus on geothermal power and stop the production of fossil fuels. Government agencies and entities should transition to carbon-free energy.

Furthermore, The YCP recommends that **Federal and Provincial Governments** have a fully funded strategy to transition fossil fuel workers to the new sustainable energy sector.

It is obvious that climate change is a huge concern for young people. As the recommendations show, youth are calling on governments to increase the use of new and sustainable forms of energy, invest in raising public awareness about climate change, commit to full transparency, regulate the dying fossil fuel industry, and promote the use of renewable energies.

While climate plans such as “Canada’s 2023 Emissions Reduction Plan” that aim to provide strategies to reduce emissions by 40-45%¹⁴ is a step in the right direction more needs to be done to ensure that we are on track to reduce emissions by 2030, including incentivising the use of electric vehicles and increasing the fundings towards Zero-Emission Vehicles Program (iZEV), to extend its accessibility to more consumers.¹⁵ There are also bills and legislation that align with our recommendations such as Bill S-5: Strengthening Environmental Protection for a Healthier Canada Act, Bill S-234: The Canadian Environmental Protection Act, and S-243 the Climate-Aligned Finance Act.



also affects:



SDG 13 “Taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts,” The impacts of climate change are widespread and affect most if not all the sustainable development goals. There is No Planet B, and as the YCP member said: “If we procrastinate on addressing this issue, it may be too late! That’s why we must focus on it NOW.”

POVERTY, HOUSING & FOOD INSECURITY

YCP 2022 had two teams focused on poverty, housing, and food insecurity. The young people ranged in age from 9 to 17 and represented the provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, and Nova Scotia.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

The issue of poverty, housing, and food insecurity remains relevant and of major concern to young people. Working-class Canadians are experiencing increased economic insecurity because of the current employment, food, and housing crisis initially caused by the pandemic, and now the War in Ukraine, that has led to climbing inflation.¹⁶ The Canadian inflation rate is almost double the long-term average of 3.14%, at 6%. Poverty however was a problem before recent world events.

According to Canada Without Poverty, “No benefit, social assistance program, or minimum wage rate in Canada provides people with enough money for necessities.” The Food Bank of Canada states almost a third of food bank users are children, and that there has been a 15% increase of users since March 2022. Seventy-five percent of Canadians believe that more affordable housing could solve the social issues we are currently facing as a country and almost 1 in 3 Canadians are forced to live in rental housing. Despite the economic downturn, homes are expected to rise in price across Canada and rents have gone up and the vacancy rate in most cities has gone down;

It is also important to acknowledge these issues affect people to different degrees, with marginalized groups such as Indigenous and Black people women, and people living with a disability experiencing these insecurities in a disproportionate manner. These issues also affect young people specifically since children and youth have little to no control over their own socio-economic status.

The issue of poverty, housing, and food insecurity should not exist in Canada. As a developed country, we have the means and ability to eradicate poverty and its associated impacts, but these insecurities flourish. On top of this, Canada has made a

commitment to several charters, declarations, and conventions such as the UNCRC, that state specifically under articles 26 and 27 that children have the right to social and economic security, food, clothing, and safe home[s].

Children have rights, and it is the Government’s duty to ensure all Canadian children have a decent standard of living and social services that will, in turn, alleviate poverty.²² Despite promising to protect these rights, Canada continuously allows millions of people, many

“...THE HOMELESSNESS RATES IN CANADA ARE INCREASING OVER THE PAST FEW DECADES AND THIS HAS MANIFESTED ITSELF INTO MORE COMPLEX ISSUES. AMONG PEOPLE WHO MAKE HOUSING DECISIONS FOR THEIR HOUSEHOLD, WOMEN WHO EXPERIENCED HOMELESSNESS REPORTED WORSE SOCIOECONOMIC AND HEALTH OUTCOMES THAN MEN IN THE SAME SITUATION,”

“IT SHOULDN’T BE UP TO CHARITIES TO FEED (PEOPLE). WE WANT A COMMUNITY WITH NO FOOD BANKS”

“HOMELESSNESS IS A HUGE ISSUE THAT IS PREVALENT EVERYWHERE IN CANADA TODAY, FROM SPRAWLING TENT CITIES TO PEOPLE ON THE STREETS. [WE] SEEK TO FIND A SOLUTION TO THE MANY HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS IN ORDER TO GET A ROOF OVER THEIR HEADS,”

of whom are children and adolescents, to live below the poverty line. This topic is especially important as we transition into young adults. The realities of our lives — struggling to find employment, to find support for those who don’t have university degrees or degrees from outside of Canada that aren’t recognized and struggling to become financially independent while dealing with student debt — are of rising concern.

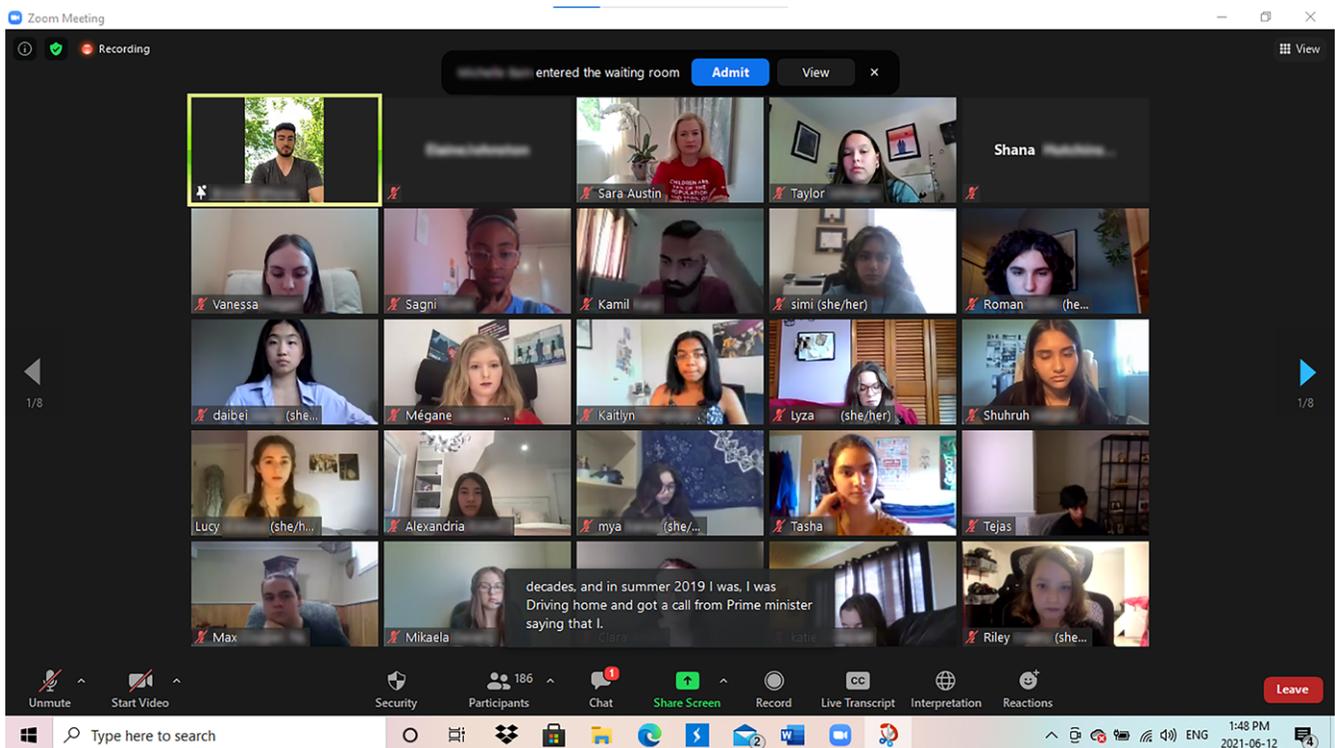
WHAT YOUTH ARE SAYING

“...THE HOMELESSNESS RATES IN CANADA ARE INCREASING OVER THE PAST FEW DECADES AND THIS HAS MANIFESTED ITSELF INTO MORE COMPLEX ISSUES. AMONG PEOPLE WHO MAKE HOUSING DECISIONS FOR THEIR HOUSEHOLD, WOMEN WHO EXPERIENCED HOMELESSNESS REPORTED WORSE SOCIOECONOMIC AND HEALTH OUTCOMES THAN MEN IN THE SAME SITUATION,”

“HOMELESSNESS IS A HUGE ISSUE THAT IS PREVALENT EVERYWHERE IN CANADA TODAY, FROM SPRAWLING TENT CITIES TO PEOPLE ON THE STREETS. [WE] SEEK TO FIND A SOLUTION TO THE MANY HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS IN ORDER TO GET A ROOF OVER THEIR HEADS,”

“OUR MAIN MOTIVE [AS YOUNG PEOPLE] IS TO ENSURE FAMILIES HAVE A STRONG FOUNDATION TO ENSURE THEIR CHILDREN ARE BROUGHT OUT OF POVERTY AND FOOD INSECURITIES.”

“IT SHOULDN'T BE UP TO CHARITIES TO FEED (PEOPLE). WE WANT A COMMUNITY WITH NO FOOD BANKS”



one of our YCP Zoom meetings.

There are four main categories of recommendations concerning poverty, housing, and food insecurity: housing stock, unemployment, taxes, and food insecurity

1. Housing

The YCP recommends that the **Municipal Governments** implement a minimum number of homeless shelters in major cities to ensure the availability of emergency shelter.

There must be support for the building of dorms/affordable housing, like the federally funded Modular Housing projects in Toronto and Vancouver. This includes small hotels with employees that can assist homeless people and implement restitutive-care programs.

Much of the housing that low-income people can afford is in poor repair or fails to meet safety and housing standards and health codes. Recognizing that it is a landlord's obligation to ensure the safety of their tenants, further inspection and stricter supervision of these safety codes by the **Municipal Governments** is necessary.

The **Federal Government** must regulate housing prices. People purchasing their first home should take priority over those who own multiple properties.

2. Unemployment

The **Provincial Government** must combat unemployment experienced by people who are houseless, by having education days so they can improve their résumés and can be better prepared for their job search. These events will help to create opportunities and more equity for Canadians who are struggling.

3. Taxes

The **Federal Government** must tax the rich more to help fund social programs and ensure all Canadians have access to necessities. Specifically, taxing the rich can help homeless people have access to basic needs such as shelter and food.

The **Federal Government** must implement laws and investigate to ensure there is no preferential tax treatment for the rich, and stricter regulation is needed to prevent the use of loopholes and tricks to avoid paying taxes.

Alongside this, many houses are left vacant in Canada. To reduce these "ghost" homes, taxes such as BC's Speculation and Vacancy Tax, Vancouver's Empty Homes Tax, or the proposed Underused Housing Tax should be widely adopted by all **Provincial Governments** to fund solutions to the homelessness crisis.

4. Food insecurity

Though inflation is increasing, the rising cost of food is increasing even faster at double the rate. Understanding that food is a necessity people must purchase groceries despite the high prices, and action by the **Federal Government** is needed to address this inequality. Solutions can include investing in and promoting local farmers by the **Municipal Government**.

Also, addressing topics such as climate change will directly help the issue of food insecurity.

HOW DOES IT RELATE TO SDG INDICATORS

It is evident that poverty, housing, and food insecurity are a growing concern to young people. Their concerns about housing go beyond the crisis of houselessness. The YCP team members were also concerned about general housing affordability. They hear the news and the experts who project that many kids today will never be able to afford to buy a home and that rents in major Canadian cities are already unaffordable.

Our federal government has already committed to ending poverty, housing, and food insecurity in international human rights commitments, but is failing to do so. But as the YCP members have shown, there are many potential solutions. Any solution requires the work and commitment of all three levels of government. These solutions benefit Canadian society and lifts the barriers experienced by too many to living a safe, healthy, and prosperous life.

Our recommendations align with much of the government's current work. Notably, our recommendations correspond with the listed Sustainable Development Goals, Canada's poverty reduction strategy²³, and other long-term goals. Bills such as C-30: the Cost-of-Living Relief Act, S-233: National Framework for a Guaranteed Livable Basic Income Act, and C-212: School Food Program for Children Act, are all examples of current bills that align with our recommendations.

1 NO POVERTY



2 ZERO HUNGER



11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



also affects:

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



4 QUALITY EDUCATION



5 GENDER EQUALITY



8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



Poverty, food insecurity and housing directly relate to the first, second, third, fourth, and eighth United Nations' social developmental goal (SDG). Poverty (SDG1) leads to housing and food insecurity (SDG2). Food insecurity causes poor nutrition that causes ill health (SDG3). When children and youth experience poverty, food insecurity, poor nutrition, and health, their education is affected (SDG4) that impacts their ability to get decent work (SDG8).



Our members get to dialogue with notable civil servants, policy-makers, and advocacy strategists. Two YCP members in conversation with Annie McEwen, a director at Indigenous Services Canada and Gordon Taylor Lee, Managing Director at National, a PR and communications firm.

SYSTEMIC DISCRIMINATION & RACISM

YCP 2022 had 2 teams focused on Systemic Discrimination and Racism. The young people ranged in age from 9 to 17 and represented all provinces across British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

The Youth Researchers acknowledge that the recommendations in this section don't exclusively target our government but rather address the change young people hope to see within several institutions and locations where they spend the majority of their time, such as school. An Angus Reid and University of British Columbia survey²⁴ in 2021 showed that over half of Canadian high schoolers had seen bullying or exclusion based on race/ethnicity at school, with 14% experiencing it themselves. Kids from diverse communities were three times more likely to experience it than white kids, and Indigenous kids two times more likely.

Despite existing legislation requiring pay equity in the workplace, our youth are not only worried about their present, but also a future in which systemic racism

and discrimination will prevent them from accessing the full range of opportunities that Canada has to offer. According to Statistics Canada, they are right to be worried. In three consecutive censuses (2006, 2011, 2016) it was reported that racialized Canadians between the ages of 24-65 were half as likely as other Canadians to hold senior management positions.

Youth are particularly worried about biases in the hiring process and pay equity. Discrimination affects many in the workplace, including women (1 in 3), racialized workers (2 in 5), Indigenous workers (2 in 5), Indigenous women (45%), young adults (1 in 3), and employees with disabilities (1 in 4)²⁵. They feel it is unfair that large companies – especially their most powerful leaders -- can continue to thrive when systemic racism and discrimination remain rampant in workplaces across Canada. The YCP members also feel a chilling effect and expressed concern about the repercussions of speaking up in the workplace.

They YCP believe that pay equity laws are not universally respected in Canada. Our youth therefore hope for a future in which the labour rights of all equity deserving groups, including the right to a workplace free of discrimination, are respected fully.

WHAT YOUTH ARE SAYING

“WHAT WE LEARN IN SCHOOL [WHEN IT COMES TO SYSTEMIC RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION] IS INSUFFICIENT.” “WE HOPE THAT SCHOOLS CAN “GIVE [THEIR] STUDENTS THE TOOLS TO ADDRESS DISCRIMINATION.”

“THE EXPERIENCE YOU HAVE WHEN YOU ARE YOUNGER AFFECTS YOU WHEN YOU’RE OLDER TOO! FOR EXAMPLE, YOU MAY BE AFRAID YOU WILL BE DISCRIMINATED AGAINST AGAIN. YOU FEEL INSECURE AND FEEL LIKE YOU NEED TO CHANGE YOURSELF. YOU DON’T HAVE HOPE THAT ANYTHING WILL CHANGE.”

“EVERYONE IS BORN EQUAL. NO ONE SHOULD BE TREATED UNEQUALLY. THERE ARE DIRE CONSEQUENCES; PEOPLE MIGHT DIE FROM IT. MPS HAVE THE POWER TO STOP IT.”

“THIS HAPPENS (IN) A LOT IN SCHOOLS. BUT SCHOOLS SHOULD BE A SAFE PLACE WHERE ONE SHOULD BE FREE TO EXPRESS THEIR GENDER, ETHNICITY, CULTURE, ETC. THIS IS WHAT WE SHOULD ASPIRE TO.”

Equitable Education and Unlearning Discrimination

1. The YCP recommends that the **federal government** prepare and publish annual reports comparing funding for the education of First Nations children on and off reserves, as well as educational and income attainments of Indigenous peoples in comparison with non-Indigenous people.
2. The **federal government** should lead consultations with groups facing financial/educational discrimination to ensure their perspectives inform decision-making and raise awareness about what they are facing.
3. Schools may be a productive place to lead consultations, given that young people spend most of their time in school. Many of our members also reported schools as a location where they are likely to experience discrimination. Consultations will foster dialogue, helping students better understand how discrimination can affect others. Parents and teachers should also be consulted, diversifying perspectives and informing decision-making. YCP members indicated that discussion-based consultations should be prioritized, and suggest that when possible, in-person sessions are preferred over virtual sessions. Members further specified that the government should:
 - A. Establish a program allowing for weekly meetings where students share personal experiences and brainstorm solutions relating to systemic discrimination and racism, therefore contributing material as part of the consultation process.
 - B. Ensure that consultation participants are informed, by:
 - Inviting experts and other guest speakers into consultations as educators or simply facilitators.
 - Broadcasting educational videos on the effects of discrimination

This would respond to the call for schools to be more involved in anti-discrimination efforts, as

schools would become a prime location to conduct awareness-raising programs.

Consultations should always result in the creation of a relationship between participants and their policy makers such as their MPs.

4. In collaboration with our **municipal governments/school boards, provincial governments** should also rely on the records of the federal consultations to improve curriculums, putting the importance of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging at their centre.

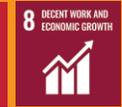
Regarding pay equity

6. Akin to the federal government's Legal Aid Program, legal services should be made available by our **provincial governments** to economically-disadvantaged persons seeking to file a complaint of racism or discrimination in the workplace.
 - A. Beyond the provision of information and advice, legal representation would be provided.
 - B. Representation would be provided in cases of workplace sexual harassment as well as workplace racism and discrimination. Sexual harassment in and of itself has already been recognized as a form of discrimination [1]. For us, expanding access to representation in dealing with other forms of discrimination is the next obvious step.

HOW DOES IT RELATE TO SDG INDICATORS



also effects:



Equity is at the heart of the SDGs. SDGs 5 and 10 are specific to ending discrimination. Several SDGs however can't be achieved without ending systemic discrimination including achieving good health (SDG3), quality education (SDG4) and decent work for all (SDG8).

The YCP youth feel that our governments could do more to listen to the people who rely on them most, such as those living in poverty, including Indigenous people, people of colour, and newcomers. And even though voting rates among these groups also happen to be lower, voting isn't the only way governments can understand their citizenry. In fact, governments have the duty to represent all their citizens, whether they exercise their right to vote. This duty becomes even more important when it comes to youth, who don't (yet) have the right to vote. As such, governments have a duty to create more mechanisms to allow all citizens to exercise the full panoply of their democratic rights. Consultations, for instance, are a mechanism that ensures that those who are least powerful have their needs heard.

Additionally, youth want an equitable schooling experience. And, when they enter the working world, they hope to find systems that will protect them from discrimination, and that there will be no barriers to achieving their full potential.

While we acknowledge that offices tasked with investigating complaints of discrimination and racism in the workplace already exist – the federal and provincial human rights commissions – we believe that the federal and provincial governments could increase their respective funding allocations, thereby increasing the number of cases commissions can take on. Additionally, there is precedent for providing legal aid in bringing forward workplace-related claims. For example, legal information and advice is already being provided, free of charge, to persons who have experienced workplace sexual harassment, regardless of their economic status.²⁶



The Parliamentary Internship Programme

Information for applicants and their friends

www.pip-psp.org



YCP Members had the chance to work on their policy briefs and mock bills with support from Parliamentary Interns. Here Parliamentary Interns, Nina Sartor and Alyth Roos, introduce the Parliamentary Internship Programme to YCP members,

VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

YCP 2022 had 2 teams focused on violence against children. The young people ranged in age from 10 to 17 and represented the provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Ending violence against children is a critical global issue, reflected in the United Nations' goal of SDG16 to eliminate all forms of violence against children by 2030. The Convention on the Rights of the Child highlights the importance of protecting children from violence, including from those closest to them such as parents and guardians, in Article 19.

In Canada, police-reported data in 2019 shows that there were 69,691 child and youth victims of violence. This statistic highlights the disproportionate impact of violence on girls, who accounted for 57% of the reported cases. Children and youth are mostly abused by people they know. Thirty-two percent of offenders are casual acquaintances, followed by parents (19%). Sixteen percent of offenders against kids are strangers.²⁷

Our governments must recognize that, for many children, the system isn't working well. Removing kids from their homes usually isn't the best solution. A balance must be found between protection (from harm), connection (to their families and communities), and healing (following traumatic experiences). We believe that substantial improvements are needed in the foster care system.

It is imperative that we prioritize the protection of children from violence. Addressing the root causes of this issue and raising awareness is key to creating a safer environment for all children and ensuring that the United Nations' goal of ending violence against children is realized

Concurrent to addressing the root causes, our recommendations reflect our hope that more support can be provided to foster parents, helping them understand children's needs better, and fostering more compassion in dealing with trauma. We find that a good starting point is to understand the importance of a stable environment for a child to grow and cannot under-estimate the urgency of implementing these recommendations – i.e. finding the best placement for a child in foster care.

WHAT YOUTH ARE SAYING

“TEACHERS [...] ARE MORE THAN JUST EDUCATORS; THEY ARE [...] GUARDIANS AWAY FROM THE HOME.”

“ABUSE NOT ONLY AFFECTS THE WELLBEING OF CHILDREN, BUT ALSO HINDERS SOCIETY AS A WHOLE. CHILD ABUSE CAUSES RIPPLE EFFECTS THAT LEAD TO WASTED POTENTIAL [IN CHILDREN], AMONG OTHER THINGS.”

[CHILD ABUSE], PLAGUING UPCOMING GENERATIONS WITH [ITS] EFFECTS, CAN HINDER CANADA'S FUTURE DOCTORS, POLITICIANS, AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS THAT ARE VITAL IN THE CONTINUITY OF OUR COUNTRY.

THE INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA OF CHILD ABUSE IS PREVALENT IN CANADIAN HISTORY. ONE MAIN ILLUSTRATION: THE HEINOUS ACTIONS COMMITTED AGAINST INDIGENOUS CHILDREN IN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS. TO ENSURE [SUCH] EVENTS [...] NEVER OCCUR AGAIN, [WE MUST] ACTIVELY FIGHT FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN. BY REFORMING

For us, the school can be a safe environment away from abuse, neglect, and exploitation, and teachers have a particular role to play in this environment.

The YCP teams working on the issue of violence against children wish to remind our governments that children have a right to be safe and they should also know how to protect themselves from harm. The teams were especially passionate about breaking the cycle of violence against children. They call not only on our governments, but also society at large to create an environment for all children that is free from abuse, neglect and exploitation.

Substantial improvements are needed in the foster care system. The CFC youth found that the child protection and foster care system isn't working well for kids; too many Black and Indigenous kids are being removed from their homes. They argue that a balance must be found between protection (from harm), connection (to their families and communities), and healing (following traumatic experiences). provide "safe, educated, and trusted adults" for young people to confide in, as well as "reduce the number of abusive circumstances." The goal is also to reduce "the cycle of abuse."

In this section, by "safe environment," we mean an environment that is free from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

1. To parents or people who want to be parents

Provide more support to people who plan to be parents (both natural and adoptive).

Breaking the generational cycle of abuse is key in preventing child abuse. Parents should be encouraged to work on their own trauma to avoid revisiting it on their child.

Parents should also be encouraged to seek out positive parenting training.²⁸

2. To provincial governments and school boards

At school, educate children about what rights they have, how to identify patterns of abuse, and where to find help.

Develop a mandatory curriculum in order to reduce stigma related to all Violence against Children. Kids need to feel safe and empowered to share their experiences and have much needed conversations.

Ensure that teachers and school counsellors undergo more professional development related to Violence against Children, emphasizing their role in protecting children in their care (this applies to municipal school boards as well)

Standardize this professional development in order to maintain a consistent level and quality of training.

Invest in research in view of expanding this professional development requirement to other professions involving regular interaction with minors, such as non-profit employees and volunteers, health professionals, and child protection workers.

3. To provincial governments and child protection agencies

For children who must be removed from their families, we recommend they t be more quickly matched with a family that will respond to their needs. For example, the CFC youth wished for all children to be matched with a family that would be responsive to the psychological needs of their child and therefore better understand their trauma.

We call on the provincial government to provide more funding to foster care agencies.

We call on said agencies to provide more support to foster parents, helping them understand children's needs better, and fostering more compassion in dealing with trauma.

Government must Invest in research and programs that aim to address the overrepresentation of Black and Indigenous children in foster care.

4. To federal and provincial governments

Provide more funding to provincial agencies and non-profits, especially those whose initiatives focus on identifying and working on past trauma and provide mentors who are educated about child abuse.

Governments have a duty of care towards children and should ensure that support for current and future parents are fully accessible, including in terms of language and online/in-person availabilities. Initiatives should also be culturally appropriate and available at times and locations.²⁹

Conclusion

We find that the systems designed to protect kids from violence are, in practice, not enough. There needs to be:

- More investment in programs
- Better training for professionals
- Connecting recommendations to the current work, policies, and legislation.

HOW DOES IT RELATE TO SDG INDICATORS

5 GENDER EQUALITY

16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

also affects:

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

4 QUALITY EDUCATION



YCP Members learn about the different branches of Government and their roles in creating legislation.

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

WHAT ARE THE STEPS NEEDED TO ACHIEVE THIS

Through the document we have noted which levels of government or which institutions should be responsible for the changes we call for. Below are overarching steps that we believe are required of all decision-makers and the broader society:

- Proper data collection on both a federal and provincial level to better understand which resources and what specific programs are needed in different areas.
 - In order to help create solutions to these issues, one must understand the issue at hand. Without the proper statistics and information, it becomes unclear how many people are affected and to what degree. Data also highlights how certain groups may be affected disproportionately and whom the perpetrators are.
- Cooperation, collaboration, and political will amongst levels of governments are needed to better resolve the issues.
 - Because these issues are multifaceted and often intersectional with each other, proper solutions are only possible through the joint collaboration of different levels of government because of their different jurisdiction. Alongside this there must be the will and drive to actively want to make change. We know that in-order to create a long-lasting change, it will undoubtedly take a lot of time and effort that is why it is important to have the unwavering desire to continue to work towards a better Canada.
- Shifting social attitudes regarding these issues and who they affect by de-stigmatizing the topic. This may include social campaigns of real-life stories of individuals who deal with the very real issues of climate change, mental health, poverty/housing/food insecurity, racism and discrimination, and child abuse.
- As much as government plays a large role in the ability to make change, it is also up to us young people and Canadians to reflect the change we would like to see happen. Engaging with these issues with empathy for each other and having the uncomfortable conversations about the reality of the situation builds an important social will. This social will can also be used to pressure the government to promote legislation that reflects our own views and interests.

WE URGE YOU TO

REVIEW, CONSIDER,

CHAMPION AND

TAKE ACTION

CONCLUDING REMARKS & NEXT STEPS

It is clear through our research and the recommendations from the YCP members that children and youth are struggling. During these hard times where we are experiencing things like a mental health crisis alongside the looming crisis of climate change, young people across Canada are undoubtedly facing immense adversities. But in the face of adversity, we not only rise, we also help our peers and counterparts rise with us, advocating for fellow young people within our local communities. The face of modern social change and a brighter future is the face of Canadian children.

Young people want to be engaged in meaningful ways, to be a part of decision-making processes, and contribute to the policies that affect our lives. As shown by the report, youth have an acute awareness of the problems we face and have created recommendations. We provide a fresh, bold, and unapologetic insight that is different from adults. It is essential that adults understand that we, young people are the experts of our own experiences when addressing child and youth-centred issues. Therefore, it is fundamental for children and youth to contribute to the solutions.

Like all individuals, young people should have a say in the decisions that directly affect our lives, and the report clearly demonstrates that young people are willing to put in the work. Youth cannot vote (for now), but just because we aren't able to directly participate in our democracy does not mean children should be erased from politics. For far too long, the voices of young people have been pushed aside and not taken seriously.

Despite Canada ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child for over 30 years, our country can do more to respect our rights. Canada has neglected some of its commitments and we demand the government uphold its past promises. The responsibility lies with eligible voters and lawmakers to keep in mind the well-being of children when making decisions. They should encourage meaningful youth participation in decision-making and build policies and mechanisms to bridge the gaps between legislators and youth. This report serves as a guide in how to represent us as youth and clearly outlines our belief on what should be done about these issues.

In order to reach the best solutions, adults and young people must form a partnership.

Though youth may be experts of our own lives, it is also fair to recognize that we don't have the same level of expertise on the complex institutions built to address the problems we identified. This is why it is critical that we – children, youth and adults – work together to fill the gaps in our knowledge. Just like a puzzle, when put together, we can complete the larger picture. Without this collaboration we are left with fragments, knowing we have the potential to form a better Canada, yet choosing not to.

Now is the time to invest in Canadian children and youth to build a sustainable future for all Canadians today and the generations to come.

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