



**CHILDREN  
FIRST  
CANADA**



**RAISING CANADA® 2024**

# TOP 10 THREATS

TO CHILDHOOD IN CANADA

1

**UNINTENTIONAL  
PREVENTABLE  
INJURIES**

Unintentional and preventable injuries are **the leading cause of death for children >15 years**.

**Substance-related injuries** such as cannabis use among youth aged 16 to 19 years **increased from 36% in 2018 to 43% in 2023**, with users obtaining cannabis from social sources (43%) and “legal purchases” (41%).

2

**POOR MENTAL  
HEALTH**

**20% of kids** in Canada (1.6 million children) **have diagnosed mental health challenges**.

**Suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth aged 15-34 and third leading cause of death for ages 10-14.**

Low-income, 2SLGBTQIA+, and Indigenous children and youth **face unprecedented challenges related to mental health and substance use**.

3

**VIOLENCE/  
CHILD ABUSE**

Approximately **60% of Canadians reported experiencing maltreatment before the age of 15**.

**Over 45% of teens aged 15 to 17 report dating violence, most commonly emotional abuse.**

**40 children died by homicide in 2022.** Newer data is not available but there have been several publicly reported recent deaths of children due to intimate partner violence or while involved with the child welfare system.

4

**VACCINE-  
PREVENTABLE  
ILLNESSES**

**Vaccination rates remain below optimal levels**, leading to a resurgence of illnesses like measles, COVID-19, and influenza.

**Respiratory illnesses were the top reason for hospitalizations of children 0-4 years** old in 2023, accounting for 32% of all hospital stays, up from 20% the previous year. Hospitalizations for pneumonia nearly tripled and COVID-19 hospitalizations rose by 43%.

Only **8.4% of children aged 0-4 years received at least one COVID-19 vaccine dose** and **only 1.1% are fully vaccinated**.

5

**SYSTEMIC  
RACISM AND  
DISCRIMINATION**

The rise of global conflicts including the escalation of violence in Palestine, Lebanon and Israel, has resulted in **Muslim and Jewish youth experiencing increased rates of hate crimes and hate-motivated incidents**.

**70.5% of Indigenous youth experiencing homelessness** in Canada have been involved in the **child welfare system**.

**2SLGBTQIA+ youth** experience higher rates of isolation, bullying, symptoms of depression, and lower scores on self-determination compared to their cis-gender heterosexual peers.

6

**POVERTY**

**2.1 million (28.4%) children** in the ten provinces **lived in a food-insecure household in 2023**, compared to almost 1.8 million in 2022 (24.3%).

**More than 1/4 children in Canada do not have access to sufficient food, or food of an adequate quality**, to meet their basic needs.

7

**INFANT  
MORTALITY**

The 2024 projected infant mortality rate is 3.843 deaths per 1000 live births, a **2.54% decline from 2023**.

Rates of infant mortality are **higher for Indigenous infants**.

8

**BULLYING**

Police reports of **online sexual exploitation of children nearly tripled since 2014**, reaching 160 incidents per 100,000 Canadian children and youth in 2022.

**Sextortion reports increased by 150%** since June 2022.

There has been an **815% increase in online sexual luring reports** over the last five years.

9

**LIMITED PHYSICAL  
ACTIVITY & PLAY**

**Only 39% of children get the recommended 60 minutes of daily activity** according to ParticipACTION’s 2024 Report Card.

The number of **overweight/obese youth aged 12-17 has increased by 57%**, from 428,900 in 2018 to 673,100 in 2022.

Children experiencing **poverty, racialization, or disability** are at greater risk of limited activity.

10

**CLIMATE  
CHANGE**

37% of youth reported that **their feelings about climate change negatively affect their daily life** at least moderately.

Children continue to be **impacted by extreme weather events: wildfires, floods, heat waves, rising sea levels, and face threats from air and water pollution, food contamination**.

Climate change has a **disproportionate impact on young people’s health and future and direct effects on children’s physical and mental well-being**.



**CROSS-CUTTING THEME 1:  
Influence of Technology on  
Children and Adolescents**

Digital media platforms make it easier to create and share messages of hate, discrimination, and cyberbullying, leading to adverse implications on mental health, physical activity, and the risk of violence and abuse.

During the past year, several provinces have taken steps to restrict or ban cell phone use within schools, including Quebec, Ontario, Alberta, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and British Columbia, with exceptions made for students who use cell phones for health needs.

**CROSS-CUTTING THEME 2:  
Inaccessibility to Health Care  
and Other Social Services**

Lack of timely access to primary health care directly impacts children and youth during a critical stage of their development.

Prolonged wait times have been connected to adverse youth mental health outcomes, given the inaccessibility of diversified interventions

**CROSS CUTTING THEME 3:  
Active Youth Engagement**

Children and youth face significant barriers to realizing their right to participate in decisions that affect their lives.

Equity deserving youth across Canada experience a unique set of challenges that intersect with almost every sector of society.

**CALLS TO ACTION**

The following Calls to Action for policymakers are a direct response to the findings in the Raising Canada report. They have been endorsed by Children First Canada’s Council of Champions and developed with the input of the Young Canadians’ Parliament and Youth Advisory Council:

- 1. Develop a National Strategy for Children:** This strategy must tackle the top 10 threats to childhood head-on and ensure the full realization of children’s rights. Central to this strategy should be the appointment of an independent Commissioner for Children and Youth.
- 2. Invest in Kids:** Publish a Children’s Budget, ensuring a clear line of sight to an equitable distribution of resources that prioritizes the needs of all children. Additionally, we call for equitable funding and services for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children and the full implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s 94 Calls to Action.
- 3. Empower Children:** Invest in child rights education and actively involve children and youth in the decisions that affect their lives.

*“Children today are facing unprecedented threats—from rising poverty and mental health crises to violence in their homes and online. Parents are struggling to offer their children a better way of life than they had. Canada’s kids deserve better—a better childhood and a brighter future, and their survival and ability to thrive depend on the choices we make today. We must act with urgency and conviction to turn this around.”*

- SARA AUSTIN, FOUNDER AND CEO  
OF CHILDREN FIRST CANADA

**About Children First Canada:**

Children First Canada is a national charity that aspires to create a country where children can grow up free from the barriers that prevent them from achieving their full potential – starting with the protection of their most basic rights to childhood. As a charity that’s uniquely focused on the rights of children in Canada, we conduct research and raise awareness of the issues, equip children and youth as leaders and changemakers, and unite our country around a shared vision and plan to make Canada the best place in the world for kids to grow up.®

Children First Canada recognizes the generous support of the Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids) and CHEO for making the Raising Canada 2024 report possible.