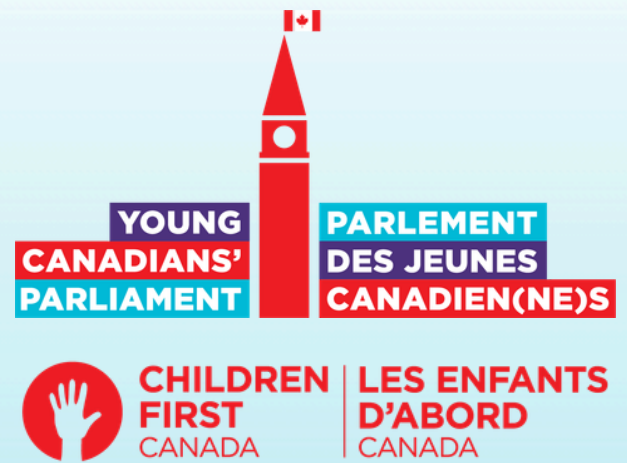




OUR COMMITMENT TO TODAY AND TOMORROW

Report on Recommendations from
the Young Canadians' Parliament
2025-2026

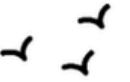


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LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT



Children First Canada is a national organization with staff, volunteers, and youth participants from coast to coast to coast. Our head office is located in Calgary, Alberta, on the traditional territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksika, Kainai, Piikani), the Tsuut'ina, the Stoney Nakoda Nations (Chiniki, Bearspaw, Goodstoney), the Otipemisiwak Métis Government (Districts 5 and 6), and all people who make their homes in the Treaty 7 region of Southern Alberta.

In the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge that we live, work, and play on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples.

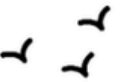
We affirm the spirit that we are all Treaty people, honouring the sovereignty, self-determination, and enduring relationships of Indigenous Nations.

At Children First Canada, we believe that learning about the traditional territories of Indigenous peoples is just one step on the path toward reconciliation. An essential part of our mission is to engage children and youth in learning about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action, inspiring them to take meaningful, youth-led actions and encouraging them to hold our government accountable.

As a movement committed to making Canada the best place for children to grow up, we recognize the need for collective efforts to acknowledge and address the injustices – both past and present – that Indigenous peoples face. We thank you for joining us on this important journey of reconciliation, working together alongside children and youth to create a more just and equitable future for all.



HONORER NOTRE ENGAGEMENT ENVERS LA VÉRITÉ ET LA RÉCONCILIATION



Enfants d'abord Canada est un organisme national comptant des employés, des bénévoles et des jeunes participants d'un océan à l'autre. Notre siège social est situé à Calgary, en Alberta, sur les territoires traditionnels de la Confédération des Pieds-Noirs (Siksika, Kainai, Piikani), des Tsuut'ina, des Nations Stoney Nakoda (Chiniki, Bearspaw, Goodstoney), du gouvernement métis d'Otipemisiwak (districts 5 et 6) et de tous les peuples résidant dans la région du Traité n° 7, dans le sud de l'Alberta.

Dans un esprit de réconciliation, nous reconnaissons que nous vivons, travaillons et jouons sur les territoires traditionnels, ancestraux et non cédés de nombreux peuples des Premières Nations, Métis et Inuits.

Nous affirmons l'esprit selon lequel nous sommes tous des peuples visés par un traité, honorant la souveraineté, l'autodétermination et les relations durables des nations autochtones.

Chez Enfants d'abord Canada, nous croyons que la connaissance des territoires traditionnels des peuples autochtones n'est qu'une étape vers la réconciliation. Un aspect essentiel de notre mission est de sensibiliser les enfants et les jeunes aux 94 appels à l'action de la Commission de vérité et réconciliation, de les inciter à poser des gestes concrets, menés par des jeunes, et de les encourager à demander des comptes à notre gouvernement.

En tant que mouvement engagé à faire du Canada le meilleur endroit où grandir pour les enfants, nous reconnaissons la nécessité d'efforts collectifs pour reconnaître et corriger les injustices – passées et présentes – auxquelles les peuples autochtones sont confrontés. Nous vous remercions de vous joindre à nous dans cet important cheminement vers la réconciliation, en travaillant ensemble aux côtés des enfants et des jeunes pour créer un avenir plus juste et équitable pour tous.



ABOUT 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. 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 the YCP and this report. It is integral to the report that it portrays youth voices accurately and unapologetically. This is why everything in the report comes from the work of our Young Canadians' Parliament (YCP) members. It is also written in simple language so people of all ages can understand the report. 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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF SPONSORS, PARTNERS, & SUPPORTERS

Children First Canada acknowledges the generous financial support from the Government of Canada and the *in-kind* support of BeaconNorth Strategies. We would also like to acknowledge all of our youth volunteer facilitators for their contributions to the Young Canadians' Parliament.

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

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WHY IS THIS REPORT IMPORTANT TO YOUTH?

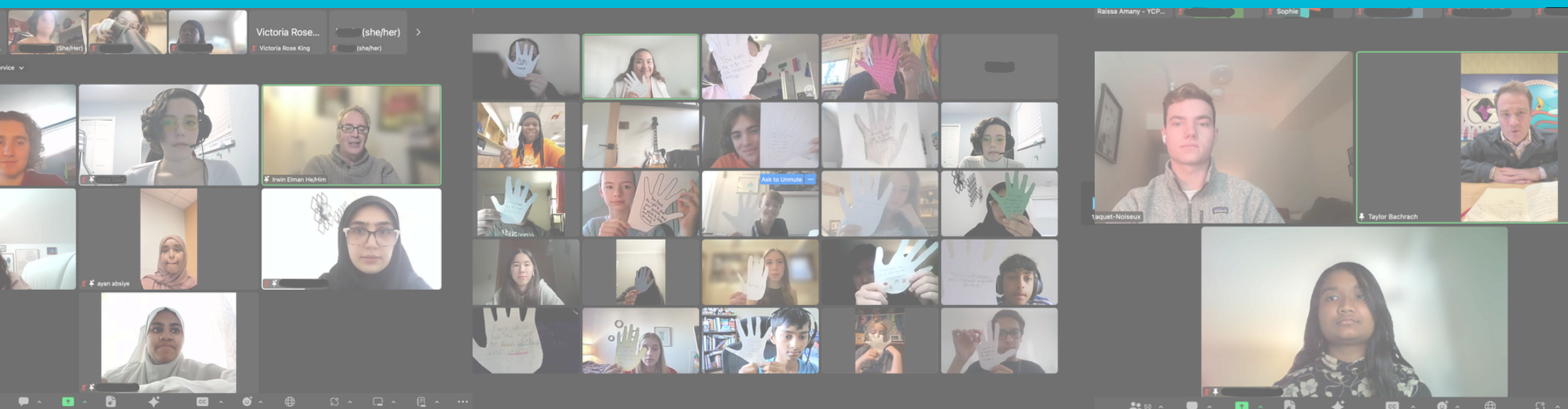
As young people, we view the world in a unique way and provide creative insights that are often overlooked by adults. This report shares our ideas in an accessible way and showcases our recommendations concerning issues affecting all Canadians, especially youth. Through this report, members of the YCP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

HISTORY AND STORY OF THE YCP

Launched in 2020, the YCP is a growing movement of kids who want to talk about the issues that matter most to our generation and take action. Through national online forums, children and youth learn about civics, democracy, and our rights, and 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 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 created by 500 youth who attended the UN Special Session for Children in 2002. It has also notably provided a launching pad for Canada's last national plan of action, 'A Canada Fit for Children,' in 2004.

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." 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.

ABOUT THE YCP 2026 PROGRAM

The Young Canadians' Parliament (YCP) was intentionally designed with an **Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging (EDIB)** lens woven throughout all aspects of the program.

Recognizing that meaningful civic engagement must reflect the diverse experiences, identities, and perspectives of young people across Canada, YCP created opportunities for participants to explore issues of equity and social justice while developing their leadership skills. Programming incorporated cultural teachings and learning opportunities related to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, encouraged reflection on the ongoing impacts of colonialism, and highlighted the importance of advancing reconciliation through action.

Participants engaged with concepts rooted in the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, Anti-Racism, Accessibility, Inclusion, and Belonging**, while learning how public policy can be used to address systemic barriers and create more equitable communities. By fostering respectful dialogue and culturally responsive learning environments, YCP empowered youth to become informed and engaged citizens who are equipped to contribute to a more inclusive and equitable Canada.

YCP Member



"I did feel a sense of belonging, because there was a lot of different people from different cultures and I felt included"

YCP Member



"After attending the YCP, one action I could take toward reconciliation is to actively learn about and share Indigenous histories, perspectives, and cultures within my school community. Reconciliation begins with understanding, and many students still know very little about the experiences of Indigenous peoples in Canada, including the impacts of residential schools and the importance of Indigenous knowledge and traditions"

YCP Member



"I enjoyed how each and everyone who joined, had a sense of belonging. Even the french speaking people had a way to learn in their own language"

CONNECTING TO THE UNCRC and SDGs

In this report, our analysis is grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The UNCRC, an international treaty established in 1989, provides a framework for governments to prioritize children's rights and best interests in all decisions.

The convention is based on four main principles:

- Non-discrimination
- The best interests of the child
- The right to life and development
- The participation and views of the child

Canada ratified the UNCRC in 1991, obligating the country to implement and uphold children's rights. Despite progress since 1991, many children still struggle due to poverty, discrimination, abuse, neglect, and more. We, the youth of Canada, have rights that are often ignored and overlooked. Therefore, we use the UNCRC to validate our demands and remind Canada of its responsibility to support our rights.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

In 2015, Canada, along with all other United Nations member states, adopted the SDGs agenda. The aim is to globally call for “action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030.” Every recommendation in this report directly aligns with multiple SDGs, demonstrating that young people's suggestions are crucial for achieving these global goals. To secure a sustainable future for Canadians, the government must take action to implement these solutions. These recommendations support multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and together, they provide a roadmap to address one of the most urgent issues facing youth in Canada, ensuring every young person has access to resources to ensure they thrive.



THE TOPICS DISCUSSED BY YOUNG PEOPLE

Mental Health



Poverty, Housing, and Food Insecurity



Climate Change



Systemic Discrimination and Racism



Physical Health



Violence Against Children



MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health is one of the most urgent issues facing children and youth in Canada today. Across the country, young people are grappling with the lasting impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, persistent stigma surrounding mental illness, and growing social isolation. Together, these challenges create significant barriers that prevent many youth from accessing the support and care they need.

Youth mental health extends far beyond the treatment of illness. It is about ensuring young people have access to the tools, resources, and supportive environments necessary to grow, succeed, and thrive. It means recognizing mental health as equally important as physical health and understanding that early, accessible, and culturally responsive interventions can have a profound and lifelong impact.

STATE OF YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Youth across Canada have been sounding the alarm: mental health systems are overwhelmed, and too many young people are being left without the support they need. According to the Canadian Health Survey on Children and Youth (CHSCY), 12% of youth aged 12-17 rated their mental health as “fair” or “poor” in 2019. By 2023, that figure had more than doubled to 26%, reflecting a sharp and troubling decline in youth well-being. Many young people who once described their mental health as “good” or “excellent” reported significant deterioration in the years following the pandemic.¹

At the same time, access to mental health care remains deeply unequal. Youth from rural, racialized, Indigenous, low-income, and otherwise marginalized communities often face additional barriers to receiving support. Services can be costly, difficult to access, culturally disconnected, or not designed with youth needs in mind. As one young person explained, “Even when help is there, it’s not helpful for me.”

WHY YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ARE VITAL

Mental health solutions must include youth perspectives. Too often, decisions are made without the voices of those most impacted. Young people have unique insights into the realities of their generation and the gaps that exist in current systems. Mental health supports designed with youth, for youth, are more effective and equitable because they reflect young people's real experiences, center their diverse needs, and foster trust, accessibility, and relevance in the care they receive.

YCP RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Guarantee Timely Access to Youth Mental Health Care

The Government of Canada should work with provinces and territories to establish national youth mental health wait-time standards and provide dedicated funding to expand counselling, psychology, psychiatry, and social work services in schools and communities.

2. Expand Indigenous-Led and Culturally Grounded Mental Health Services

Increase long-term, stable funding for Indigenous-led mental health programs, including land-based healing, Elder support, youth mentorship, and trauma-informed care, while ensuring Indigenous communities lead the design, and evaluation of services.

3. Remove Geographic and Financial Barriers to Mental Health Support

Invest in virtual mental health services, mobile mental health teams, and travel supports for youth in rural, remote, northern, and Indigenous communities, ensuring no young person is denied care because of where they live or their ability to pay.

4. Make Mental Health Literacy a Core Part of Education

Work with provinces and territories to integrate age-appropriate mental health education into K-12 curricula, including mental health literacy, stigma reduction, help-seeking skills, and emotional well-being education.

5. Ensure Mental Health Services Are Safe, Inclusive, and Accountable

Require culturally safe and anti-racist training for mental health professionals, collect disaggregated data on youth mental health outcomes, and publicly report on service accessibility, equity, and effectiveness to ensure systems meet the needs of all young people.

POVERTY, HOUSING, FOOD INSECURITY

Reducing poverty, guaranteeing housing, and increasing access to food are all important priorities affirmed in Canada. In the Canadian government's First Poverty Reduction Strategy, poverty is defined as “the condition of a person who is deprived of the resources, means, choices and power necessary to acquire and maintain a basic level of living standards and to facilitate integration and participation in society.” In the National Housing Security Act, 2019, the government reaffirmed that a safe and affordable place to live is a fundamental human right that every Canadian should have.²

STATE OF POVERTY, HOUSING, FOOD INSECURITY

According to Campaign 2000, a non-partisan coalition dedicated to ending poverty for families and children, it could take almost 400 years to end child poverty in Canada at the current pace of progress.³ In a recent survey by Habitat for Humanity Canada, a non-profit that provides Habitat shelters to families living in poverty, 84% of Canadian respondents indicated that they believed that buying a home now feels like a luxury.⁴ StatsCan reported that from 2021 to 2022, prices for food purchased from stores increased by 9.8% on average nationally. This year-over-year growth is a continuing trend, with food prices up by 19.1% from 2018 to 2022.⁵ Food security and poverty are necessarily linked. According to the same StatCan report, in 2022, food insecurity was greater for people living in poverty (34.0%) than for people not living in poverty (15.0%).⁶

YCP RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthen Income Supports for Children, Youth, and Families

Increase and modernize income-support programs to reduce child poverty, ensuring families can meet the rising costs of housing, food, transportation, and other essentials.

2. Expand School Food Programs Nationwide

Guarantee access to universal, stigma-free school meal programs that provide nutritious breakfasts, lunches, and snacks to all children and youth, regardless of family income.

3. Improve Youth Economic Opportunities

Invest in youth employment, paid internships, skills training, and financial literacy programs to help young people build economic stability and reduce barriers to workforce participation.

4. Advance Indigenous Food Sovereignty and Resource Security

Support Indigenous-led initiatives that strengthen local food systems, protect access to traditional foods and clean water, and address the unique drivers of food insecurity in Indigenous communities.

5. Reduce the Cost Burden of Essential Needs

Work across all levels of government to improve affordability by addressing the rising costs of housing, groceries, utilities, transportation, and other necessities that disproportionately affect children, youth, and low-income families.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is an incredibly impactful issue, both within Canada and across the world. From physical hazards like wildfires, droughts, and air pollution, to feelings of helplessness among today's youth, the effects of climate change are detrimental on several fronts. While Canada does not face the impacts of climate change to the same extent as some other countries, its youth still deserve to live safely and comfortably. As Canada's climate situation becomes more urgent, today's youth are at the forefront of its effects. Whether they are facing natural disasters or worrying about the future of the planet, many youth are never free from thoughts of climate change. If nothing is done to protect the planet, these effects will only multiply in the coming years. Action needs to be taken, and it needs to be taken now.

STATE OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN CANADA

Canada is one of the fastest warming countries on the planet, and its heatwaves are growing in frequency and intensity year by year.⁷ Canada's north is warming three times faster than the global average, and this rapid change has the potential to disrupt supply chains, medical access, and cultural practices in many northern communities.⁸ Across Canada, 37% of youth reported that climate change negatively impacts their mental health and well-being.⁹ Only 9% of the 3.3 million tonnes of plastic waste generated by the Canadian economy annually is recycled¹⁰ A 2024 poll commissioned by Oceana Canada found that 82% of all Canadians support the ban of single-use plastics, including checkout bags, six-pack rings, straws, takeout containers and cutlery.¹¹

YCP RECOMMENDATIONS

1.Introduce Certification-Based Incentives for Businesses and Institutions that Reduce their Single-Use Plastic Reliance

Single-use plastics are incredibly harmful to the environment, and by incentivizing organizations to reduce their dependency on them, Canada's output of single-use plastics can be significantly reduced. YCP members recommend that such incentives be issued through a certification, specifically for organizations that reduce their single-use plastic dependency. Organizations with this certification will be eligible for federal income tax reductions, encouraging further climate action. To maintain these certifications, organizations must also provide concrete evidence of a reduction in their single-use plastic usage.

2.Launch a National Awareness Campaign on Climate Change

While many people are aware of the current climate situation, there are still those who either don't know about it or don't accept it. As of right now, there are few climate education programs, and they are generally toned towards current middle and high school students. In order to effectively raise awareness about climate change across Canada, educational events should be hosted in both in-person and online forums, climate change lessons should be incorporated at an age-appropriate level across curriculums, and Canadians should be invited to participate in various climate action challenges that they can complete wherever in the country they may be.

3.Provide Accessible Information on Climate Footprint Reduction

It is incredibly important to be aware of your climate footprint, but not many people know what kind of impact they have on the planet. YCP members recommend that this information be provided in a more accessible manner, primarily relying upon informational posters/media within workplaces and schools.

4.Increase Indigenous Representation and Consultation in Environment-Related Decisions

Indigenous elders and activists need to be included in environment-related decisions, especially those that consider land use and the allocation of natural resources. To increase Indigenous input in such discussions, all levels of government should implement opportunities for consultation and offer a seat at the table for Indigenous people to share their voices.

SYSTEMIC DISCRIMINATION AND RACISM

Systemic racism and discrimination happen when laws, institutions, and social systems create unfair disadvantages for certain groups of people. In Canada, Indigenous and Black communities continue to experience inequalities caused by the lasting effects of colonialism, slavery, segregation, and prejudice. These inequalities can affect education, employment, healthcare, housing, and interactions with the justice system. For many Indigenous and Black youth, systemic racism creates barriers that make it harder to access the same opportunities and support as others. Experiencing racism and discrimination can have serious impacts on the mental, emotional, and physical well-being of young people. Many young people report feeling excluded, unheard, or judged because of their race, which can lead to stress, anxiety, low self-esteem, and reduced trust in important systems meant to support them.

STATE OF SYSTEMIC DISCRIMINATION AND RACISM IN CANADA

As of May 2025, there were still 37 long-term drinking water advisories on public systems in First Nations communities in Canada.¹² In 2023, 89% of boil water advisories in Canada were issued for communities serving 500 people or fewer, showing how smaller and remote communities are disproportionately affected.¹³ According to the 2019 General Social Survey, 18% of Black Canadians reported having little or no confidence in police, compared to 8% of non-Indigenous, non-racialized people.¹⁴ An Ontario Human Rights Commission report found that almost three-quarters (about 75%) of Black survey respondents said they had experienced racial profiling.¹⁵ Indigenous peoples in Canada experience higher rates of poverty, homelessness, food insecurity, and barriers to healthcare due to systemic inequalities and the lasting effects of colonialism.¹⁶ Indigenous and Black patients have reported experiencing racism and discrimination in healthcare settings, which can discourage people from seeking medical treatment and support.¹⁷

YCP RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Improve Access to Clean Water in Indigenous Communities

The government should continue investing in long-term solutions to end the Indigenous water crisis and ensure that all communities have reliable access to clean and safe drinking water. Working directly with Indigenous leaders and communities is important in creating sustainable water systems that meet local needs. Public awareness campaigns, advocacy groups, and partnerships with schools and organizations can also help educate Canadians about the importance of water justice and Indigenous rights.

2. Expand Indigenous- and Black-Led Healthcare Clinics

Increasing the number of Indigenous- and Black-led healthcare clinics can help reduce medical racism and create culturally safe spaces for patients. Clinics led by people within these communities can help individuals feel more respected, understood, and comfortable seeking care. Long-term funding and government support would help these clinics expand services, reduce wait times, and improve healthcare access in underserved communities.

3. Incorporate Traditional Healing and Cultural Medical Practices

Healthcare systems should respect and include traditional healing practices used in Indigenous and Black cultures alongside modern medicine. Indigenous healing methods, ceremonies, herbal medicines, and culturally familiar wellness practices can help patients feel more connected, respected, and supported during treatment. Allowing space for traditional practices in clinics and hospitals can improve trust between patients and healthcare providers while helping preserve important cultural knowledge and identity.

4. Support Indigenous and Black Youth Pursuing Healthcare Careers

Creating more scholarships, mentorship programs, outreach initiatives, and financial support for Indigenous and Black students can encourage more youth to pursue careers in healthcare. Many students face barriers such as financial challenges, limited access to educational resources, and lack of representation in healthcare professions. Supporting Indigenous and Black youth in these career paths can help create a more inclusive healthcare system that better reflects and understands the communities it serves.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

Physical health is one of the most significant factors shaping the well-being and future of children and youth in Canada today. Across the country, young people are facing growing challenges related to chronic illness, food insecurity, limited access to recreation, and the long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on healthy development and daily routines. These barriers can negatively affect not only physical well-being, but also mental health, academic success, and overall quality of life.

Youth physical health is about more than treating illness or injury. It is about ensuring young people have equitable access to nutritious food, safe and inclusive spaces for physical activity, preventative healthcare, and the resources needed to build healthy lifestyles from an early age. It means recognizing that early intervention, accessible healthcare, and community-based supports play a critical role in helping young people lead healthy and fulfilling lives.

STATE OF PHYSICAL HEALTH IN CANADA

The state of youth physical health in Canada is becoming an increasing concern. According to Statistics Canada, only 21% of youth aged 12–17 met Canada’s recommended physical activity guidelines between 2022 and 2024, a significant decline from 36% in 2018–2019. The decline was particularly notable among girls, with only 8% meeting recommended activity levels. At the same time, youth are spending more time sedentary, averaging 10.6 hours of sedentary behaviour per day.¹⁸

These trends point to growing challenges surrounding youth physical health and well-being in Canada. Limited access to recreation, disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and broader social and economic barriers continue to affect young people’s ability to maintain healthy lifestyles. The data underscores the need for stronger investments in accessible recreation, preventative healthcare, and community supports that help children and youth lead active and healthy lives.¹⁹

YCP RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Expand Culturally Safe and Community-Led Health Care Services

Increase funding for Indigenous-, Black-, and other equity-deserving community-led health clinics, particularly in rural, remote, and underserved regions, to improve access to primary care and reduce health disparities.

2. Invest in Youth Physical Health Prevention and Early Intervention

Strengthen preventive health programs for children and youth by expanding access to routine screenings, vaccinations, nutrition supports, and community-based health services to identify and address health concerns before they become more severe.

3. Strengthen Child Protection Systems to Prevent Physical Harm

Improve reporting mechanisms, investigation processes, and protective services to ensure children experiencing violence, abuse, neglect, or physical harm receive timely intervention and support, with the best interests of the child prioritized in all decisions.

4. Increase Representation of Indigenous and Equity-Deserving Groups in Health Care

Provide scholarships, mentorship opportunities, and targeted recruitment initiatives to support Indigenous and underrepresented youth pursuing careers in health professions, helping create a more inclusive and representative health-care workforce.

5. Promote Health Equity Through Anti-Discrimination and Public Education Initiatives

Implement mandatory cultural safety and anti-discrimination measures across health systems and invest in public education campaigns that address medical racism, promote patient rights, and ensure all young people can access health care free from bias or discrimination.

VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

Violence against children remains one of the most pervasive and harmful issues facing young people in Canada and around the world. Whether physical, emotional, sexual, or online, violence can have profound and lifelong impacts on a child's health and well-being. Many young people experience violence in spaces that are meant to protect them, including homes, schools, communities, and digital environments.

The impacts of violence extend far beyond immediate harm. Children and youth who experience violence are at greater risk of mental health challenges, physical health problems, social isolation, disrupted education, and long-term trauma that can continue into adulthood. Violence against children is also a systemic issue shaped by poverty, discrimination, inequality, and gaps in social supports.

Addressing violence against children demands prevention-focused approaches, accessible support services, trauma-informed care, and policies that prioritize the safety and rights of every child and young person.

STATE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN CANADA

Violence against children remains a serious and ongoing issue in Canada. Recent data from the 2023 Canadian Health Survey on Children and Youth found that nearly half of youth aged 15–17 reported experiencing emotional abuse during childhood, while over one-third reported exposure to intimate partner violence between caregivers. The study also found significant disparities, with gender-diverse youth reporting the highest rates of violence and maltreatment.²⁰

Police-reported data further highlights the scale of the issue. In 2023, 26,777 children and youth under the age of 18 were victims of police-reported family violence in Canada, with girls accounting for more than three in five victims. Family violence against children and youth also increased by 32% between 2018 and 2023.²¹

These statistics demonstrate that violence against children is a widespread and systemic challenge with lasting impacts on young people's safety, health, and well-being.

YCP RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthen Child Protection and Reporting Systems

Governments should establish clear, accessible, and confidential reporting mechanisms for children experiencing violence, abuse, neglect, or exploitation, while ensuring reports are investigated promptly by trained professionals.

2. Expand Prevention and Awareness Education

Implement age-appropriate education programs for children, parents, caregivers, and communities on recognizing signs of abuse, understanding children's rights, and preventing violence before it occurs.

3. Guarantee Timely Access to Support Services for Victims

Ensure that children who experience violence receive immediate access to trauma-informed counselling, mental health supports, protective services, and safe housing regardless of geographic location or service-provider capacity.

4. Prioritize Early Intervention and Child Safety

Strengthen protocols for rapid intervention when a child is identified as being at risk of violence, including safety planning, protective measures, and coordinated responses between schools, child welfare agencies, health-care providers, and law enforcement.

5. Increase Accountability for Violence Against Children

Strengthen legal and policy frameworks to hold perpetrators of child abuse, neglect, and violence accountable, while ensuring that all decisions and proceedings prioritize the safety, well-being, and best interests of the child.

YCP SCHOOL TOOLKIT PRESENTATIONS

For the 2025/2026 Young Canadians' Parliament session, we have continued to offer a condensed version of the 14-week program as a 1-hour presentation and toolkit. Designed to reach more young people across Canada, this new format provides an accessible introduction to children's rights, civic engagement, and youth leadership in action.

The presentation gives participants a high-level overview of our democratic system, what the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child means in their daily lives, and how they can use their voices to create positive change in their communities. The accompanying toolkit equips educators and youth with ready-to-use resources to inspire civic engagement. To strengthen peer-to-peer learning, we engaged alumni and older YCP participants to co-facilitate and deliver these workshops within their schools and communities. This year, we have engaged a number of schools and communities across Canada.



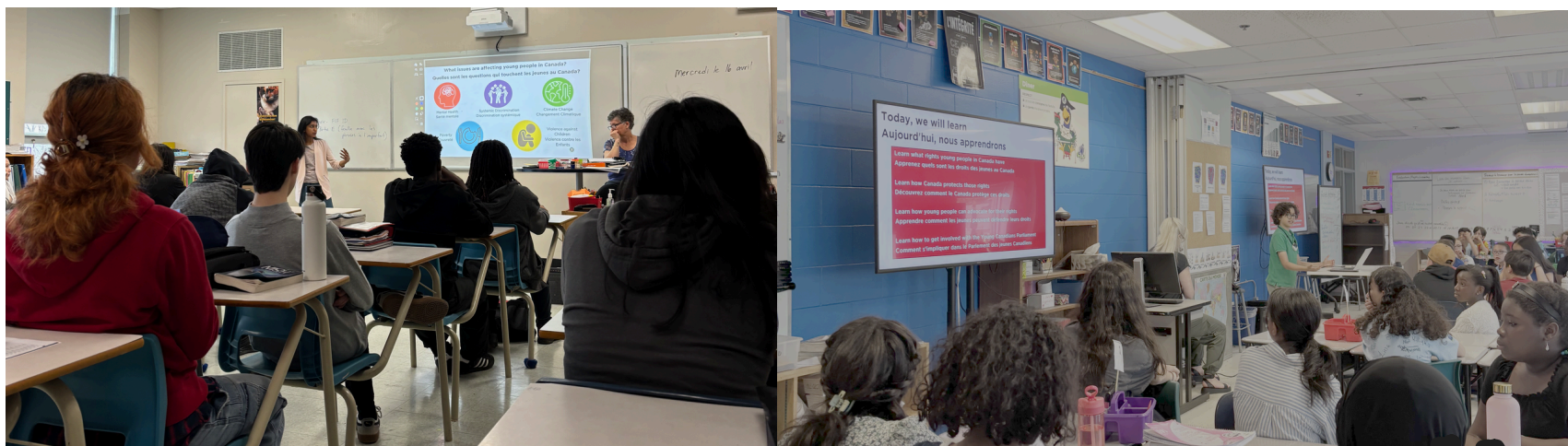
Expanded our network to 10 schools across Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta



20 YCP Alumni Trained as Facilitators (Age: 11-17)



250+ Students Engaged (Grades 6-12)



CONCLUDING REMARKS AND NEXT STEPS

The recommendations from YCP members reflect the serious challenges that children and youth face today. With the growing mental health crisis and the ongoing effects of climate change, young people across Canada are navigating complex issues that affect their well-being. Despite these challenges, youth continue to show resilience by supporting one another and speaking up for change in their communities.

Children and youth are essential partners in shaping a more equitable and sustainable future. They want to be involved in decisions that directly affect their lives and are ready to share their ideas and solutions. This report shows that young people understand the key issues and have developed thoughtful recommendations to address them. Their perspectives bring valuable insight that can strengthen policy and program development.

It is important to recognize that young people are experts in their own experiences. Their input is critical to ensuring that initiatives focused on children and youth are relevant and effective. While most youth cannot yet vote, they still deserve a place in conversations and decisions that shape their future. Excluding their voices limits progress and overlooks their capacity to create meaningful change.

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