

A BETTER FUTURE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN CANADA

REIMAGINE PLAYBOOK

2023

Youth views about:

2SLGBTQ+ RIGHTS
CHILD LABOUR
EDUCATION
HEALTHCARE
MENTAL HEALTH

A UNICEF Canada
Youth Advocacy Initiative

UNICEF Canada extends our gratitude to:

The young people who contributed to writing this Playbook.

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UNICEF Canada recognizes that our work takes place on Indigenous territories across Turtle Island and pledges to work in reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. UNICEF Canada's national office is situated on the ancestral, traditional territory of many nations including the Huron-Wendat, Petun, Seneca and, most recently, the Mississaugas of the New Credit. This territory is part of the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement for all people to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. This territory is also covered by the Upper Canada Treaties. It is home to diverse First Nations, Metis and Inuit Peoples today, and we are grateful to live and work on this territory.

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ABOUT THIS **PLAYBOOK**

This playbook represents the work of youth advocates who came together throughout 2023 to learn and share knowledge and skills about their human rights and how to advocate for them. These young people identified five interconnected issues that unite them in their passion for shaping a better country and a reimagined world: **2SLGBTQ+ Rights, Child Labour, Education, Healthcare and Mental Health.**

Each group statement summarizes how young people are experiencing these issues in Canada and around the world, in their own words. Each section includes recommendations from the youth for decision-makers, adult allies, and other young people on how we can support them in their advocacy. While these words are their own and may not represent positions of UNICEF Canada or our partner organizations in National Child Day, we are proud to provide this platform for the views of young people on the issues that matter to them. Please read and share them widely to amplify youth voices and experiences and help reimagine a better future for young people in Canada.

The playbook was formally released at the Youth Advocacy Summit on November 20, 2023, in recognition of National Child Day and World Children's Day (November 20).

A digital version of this playbook is available at
www.unicef.ca/reimagineplaybook 

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SPOTLIGHT: U-REPORT CANADA



U-Report is a polling platform developed by UNICEF for youth ages 13 to 24. It provides quick, real-time pulse checks of young people's views about issues they care about; to understand how different groups of youth are affected by decisions, policies, services and events; and to involve youth in decisions that affect them. There are more than 1,400 U-Reporters in Canada, and they reside in every province and territory.

Visit www.ureportcanada.ca for more information and to sign up for U-Report Canada.



A MESSAGE FROM THE YOUTH ADVOCATES

For all who read this, know that this land belongs to you, to all of you, from every background and walk of life. From the numerous Indigenous communities across this great land to the migrants that make our culture so unique. To our young people from Sea to Sea, do not let anyone make you feel like you don't matter or don't have a voice in our story, because you do. **You have the right to be exactly who you are.**

Over the past ten months, UNICEF Canada's Youth Advocacy Program brought together inspiring young people from across our country. During our time together, we discussed the factors that are pushing us to the extremes.

Our young people are confronting a range of pressing challenges that demand immediate attention and action.

From the recent pandemic to the wave of high inflation, our **healthcare** systems are being stretched to their limits. The amount of funding and accessibility for basic healthcare and **mental health** are at unacceptable levels in 2023. We strive to have a country where no person suffers the consequences of unmet medical needs.

Each child deserves to grow up in a safe, accepting environment. The rights of our **2SLGBTQ+** family are being threatened daily with inhumane legislation being passed by our political leaders.

Education should be a birthright, not a privilege. So many young people are affected by the lack of spending on education.

We see the effects of this every day, as well as the inhumane practices of **child labour** causing detrimental harm to our children both mentally and physically. It is our hope to craft a future where their hands are free to weave their own dreams.

Decisions being made now by our governments will determine our shared tomorrow. These key issues are crucial to address, as it is a matter of human rights and justice, ensuring that all individuals have the opportunity to live fulfilling lives. We must choose and we must act.

This playbook is not meant to gather dust on shelves. It's a living document, and we call on you to use it as a guide towards Canada's path forward, and hopefully breathe life into the aspirations of our youth. In this year's playbook, we discuss how we can work together, so we can create a world driven by hope, not fear.

With our continuous fighting spirit, we are pushing ourselves to create a Canada where everyone can thrive, in an effort towards **a better tomorrow.**

2SLGBTQ+ RIGHTS



The Current State of 2SLGBTQ+ Rights

As members of the 2SLGBTQ+ family, we ask ourselves questions on a daily basis: will we be judged? Will we be harassed? Will we be attacked? The issues surrounding 2SLGBTQ+ youth are incredibly pressing, as evidenced by the data which shows an uptick in anti-2SLGBTQ+ demonstrations in Canada in 2023, alongside the larger increase in the United States (ACLED, 2023).

We can look at the “1 Million March 4 Children” protests that took place across Canada in the summer of 2023, which called for the elimination of the sexual orientation and gender identity curricula, pronouns, gender ideology and mixed bathrooms in schools. The demonstrations were met with counter-protests from 2SLGBTQ+ activists and youth, many stating that by bringing 2SLGBTQ+-based discussions into the classrooms, they are providing space for youth to navigate feelings without the worries of repercussions, and worrying about internalizing those feelings of self-hatred and isolation (CBC, 2023).

Certain groups of the 2SLGBTQ+ family may be more likely to become a victim to anti-2SLGBTQ+ legislation. For example, some people have called for policies that would require single-sex spaces that are only open to cisgender women. Such policies intend to keep transgender people out of women’s prisons, shelters, locker rooms and washrooms.

Most notable is the “Use of Preferred First Name and Pronouns” policy in Saskatchewan. The policy pushed forward new anti-2SLGBTQ+ legislation: “schools must now seek the permission of parents or guardians before allowing students under the age of 16 to change what the province refers to as their “preferred” name and pronouns.” Many 2SLGBTQ+ activists, organizations, and leaders began to weigh in within hours of the policy’s introduction, with many describing the policy as making it “more dangerous to be a 2SLGBTQ+ student in the province” and “shredding the rights of students....and not in the best interest of students,” (CBC, 2023). This may cause many students to be outed to anti-2SLGBTQ+ family, which can result in increased physical and verbal abuse, depression, self-mutilation, and even suicide. Thirty percent of teen suicides are committed each year by 2SLGBTQ+ youth. Suicide is the leading cause of death among 2SLGBTQ+ youths. These youth are 2 to 6 times more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual people. This is an especially dreadful statistic, as 15-24 year olds make up 29.7% of 2SLGBTQ+ people in Canada, while elders (55+) make up only 16.5% (Statistics Canada, 2022).

As a result, young people are forced to take on the burden of finding solutions. Youth are constantly reminding the government of the effects of anti-2SLGBTQ+ policies, yet they are constantly being turned away. A future safe for 2SLGBTQ+ youth is imminent; they will no longer be pushed to the side.

How Young People Are Experiencing Issues Surrounding 2SLGBTQ+ Rights

Young people are facing imminent threat to their rights and autonomy as independent people. We see “parents rights” activist groups calling for restrictions to be put in place, to take away the right for a young person to self identify in the way they choose and authentically feel. The youth in the UNICEF Canada Youth Advocacy Program have spoken, and this is not the future they want for themselves or their peers or the youth that come after them.

Currently, about 10% of the Canadian population identifies as 2SLGBTQ+, and by some estimates, 2SLGBTQ+ youth make up between 25-40% of homeless youth. This would put the rate at 1 in 3 Canadian homeless youth being 2SLGBTQ+ (CMHC, 2022). This can only be attributed to the rejection of 2SLGBTQ+ people. We will only see this number stagger to even higher rates as these policies are implemented and forcibly out students who may not have a safe space at home.

Instead of operating on the belief that every youth has parents/guardians who want the best for them, we must acknowledge the reality that many youth do not have safe guardians. They could not come out without fear of losing their home, family, community and even physical safety.

We instead urge those pushing for the “safety” of our children to see that the only danger children face from changing their pronouns and name is the danger that may be posed by bigotry and hate. Many of the “facts” spread by those pushing for these policy changes are not grounded in scientific fact or research, such as the “cat litter box hoax”, which was a hoax being passed around in anti-trans groups that said that schools were implementing litter boxes for those children that “identified as cats”. The reality behind the implementation of litter boxes was actually much different, with them being utilized in one specific school country as “go boxes” for usage during school shooting lockdowns (NBC, 2022). This is the only example of cat litter boxes being kept in schools.



2SLGBTQ+ RIGHTS RECOMMENDATIONS

YOUNG PEOPLE

2SLGBTQ+ youth are paving the way for a more welcoming society. Meanwhile, many federal and provincial policies are being used to hurt the 2SLGBTQ+ communities. Young people have a unique opportunity to use the internet to their advantage. With easy access to information, young people can seek out ways to use the internet to support 2SLGBTQ+ issues: by working on what content is shared, reporting anti-2SLGBTQ+ content, and even using the internet to learn more about the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

- Hold yourself and others accountable and avoid making derogatory or negative comments about the 2SLGBTQ+ community whether or not it affects people around you. Better yet, make a statement by making positive comments about 2SLGBTQ+ people.
- Learn more about the coming out process. Coming out is a very daunting task and is a personal decision made by an 2SLGBTQ+ individual. When/if someone does “come out” to you, embrace them and make them feel comforted. It took a lot of energy for them to do so.
- Help 2SLGBTQ+ youth to find 2SLGBTQ+-affirming spaces. These safe spaces offer a sense of community and allows young people to see that 2SLGBTQ+ people can be happy with successful careers and build their own future.
- Use the correct names and pronouns. We cannot assume an individual’s name and pronouns. It’s best to always introduce yourself with your own pronouns when you meet someone new, which in turn gives them the opportunity to share theirs in a comfortable manner. Some examples of pronouns that people commonly use include:
 - She, her, hers, and herself
 - He, him, his, and himself
 - They, them, their, theirs, and themselves
 - Ze/zie, hir, hirs, and hirsself
 - Xe, xem, xyx, xyrs, and xemself
 - Ve, ver, vis, vis, and verself
- Raise awareness and become an ally to the 2SLGBTQ+ community. You may not know everything, and that is alright. Many websites and books may help you in understanding the history of 2SLGBTQ+ people.

“Part of being a good ally is continuing your education.”

–The Trevor Project

ADULT ALLIES

Adult allies are able to assume more responsibility in standing up against injustice, holding others accountable, and advocating for the rights of 2SLGBTQ+ People. While there is a rise of challenges surrounding the issues 2SLGBTQ+ people face, there are many adult allies who can shift that focus on helping overcome these challenges. Many adult allies have done great work to help 2SLGBTQ+ individuals become more accepted by society in recent decades.

- Listen to what your 2SLGBTQ+ friends are saying, and ask questions if you do not understand. 2SLGBTQ+ people do not have to explain to you how they identify or their experiences of being a member of the 2SLGBTQ+ Community. But they may do so because they trust you. Be open to listening and learning from what they are telling you, and don’t be defensive if something your friend or family says makes you uncomfortable.
- Educate your children, family, friends and others about 2SLGBTQ+ history, culture and issues. Have those difficult conversations about the harassment 2SLGBTQ+ people face in daily life, and discuss the unequal access to resources and opportunities.
- Foster support such as family acceptance and safe, affirming spaces both in schools and at home. It is important to build on the strengths, resilience and factors that keep 2SLGBTQ+ youth safe. Show young people that they have a home, they may feel that things will never change, that the world will not want them, but show them that the world is not harsh and that they are needed here.
- Show young people that they can be themselves around you, many 2SLGBTQ+ youth mute their self-expression. Tell them that there is not one way to be a boy or a girl or non-binary.
- Stay informed and keep a lookout for 2SLGBTQ+-related events in your area. The road to acceptance is long and hard. Offer 2SLGBTQ+ friends and family that you will walk with them outside, sit next to them on public transport and stand beside them in other spaces to ensure that they have an ally who can provide a physical presence in unsafe spaces.



“ Kids should be able to attend a Gay Straight Alliance with or without parental knowledge and/or approval. Kids should also be able to go by their chosen name and pronouns with or without parental knowledge and/or approval.”

– U-Reporter, November 2021

2SLGBTQ+ RIGHTS RECOMMENDATIONS

DECISION-MAKERS

The advancement of the rights of 2SLGBTQ+ has progressed in the past century. However, rising anti-lgbt political groups pose a significant threat by spreading misinformation and propaganda. Therefore, decision-makers have the ability to stop or reverse damaging actions caused by these anti-lgbt groups by means of executive actions that prioritize protecting the lives of 2SLGBTQ+ people and youth.

- Create a plan to address anti-LGBT hate, decision makers should prioritize addressing the killings of and violence against 2SLGBTQ+ people.
- Collect data: without the proper data it is impossible to create effective policies that target and address 2SLGBTQ+ needs. Our decision-makers should reach out to advocacy groups as well as universities to see which institutions are currently collecting data from across the country which in turn will be used to create a comprehensive spreadsheet of the difficulties of LGBTQ individuals. The spreadsheets should be made available via government websites and through social media.
- Ensure greater promotion of 2SLGBTQ+ awareness and history in the education system. Increase the access to students so they may receive positive instruction on the history, culture, and people of the LGBTQ community. Include the leaders who pushed for equality, like Alan Turing, Oscar Wilde, Niel Richards, Doug Wilson among many others.
- Address your own internal bias: we all carry it on some level and everybody must be on an active journey everyday to address those biases and examine where they may be playing a role in our lives, opinions, work, etc.
- Listen to 2SLGBTQ+ people and research over opinions coming from places of bigotry and hatred. Things like disallowing youth to choose their own name and pronouns is infringing on a human right, and assumes that children are the property of their parents and must abide by them in their own identity. Parents have zero say in their child's identity. Children are completely unique human beings and not extensions of their parents. Children must be listened to. Using the correct name and pronouns is suicide prevention.



8 OUT OF 10

U-Reporters agree that inviting everyone to share their pronouns makes a space feel more inclusive for 2SLGBTQ+ youth.

(JUNE 2023)

CHILD LABOUR



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The Current State of Child Labour

Child labour impacts youth worldwide. Driven by a world of capitalist-fueled greed, increasingly young people find themselves facing harsh conditions and environments out of their control.

With widespread globalization transpiring daily, the need for rapid production to satisfy the growing population feeds a culture of unethical methods to obtain cheaper labour. In order for transnational companies to lower their production cost and draw out a surplus as a result, many look to the employment of children – starting from the age of 5 and over (World Vision, 2023) – to increase these profit margins. Companies such as Nike, H&M, Shein, and many more, have each been exposed in recent years for turning to young individuals to establish a basis for their supply chain. This is not only cruel and unsafe, but these detrimental working conditions take away youth innocence and livelihoods.

In accordance with World Vision (2023) and UNICEF (2023), statistics emphasize that over one hundred and sixty million children have been previously or are still “engaged in dirty, dangerous, and degrading work” (World Vision, 2023).

The majority are in lower- and middle-income countries that suffer from strife in economic contexts. Submerged in already vulnerable conditions, these children are more susceptible to participating in intense labour in hopes to supply essential goods and necessities for the survival of their families.

Since the Industrial Revolution, child labour has been a (growing) measure used to achieve cheaper production of goods for over a century (Social Welfare History Project, 2020). Today, in almost every sphere of the market, there are goods produced with child labour (many you will recognize from your own purchases) such as cocoa, fruits, vegetables, bricks, rubber, granite, textiles, cotton garments, diamonds, and matches (U.S Department of Labor, 2022). Ignoring the continuous use of exploitative measures on children leads to a perpetual cycle of poverty that puts families involved at fatal risks.

How Child Labour Is Impacting Young People's Lives

The impact of child labour on young people varies depending on social, political and economic contexts.

In lower-income countries, children are more likely to be exploited by child labour. To support their families, many leave school and start working at young ages, often in unsafe environments where the risk of being abused and mistreated is statistically high. Currently, one in three children engaged in child labour are not in school (World Vision, 2022). This speaks to the importance a priority on education reform can have in breaking the intergenerational poverty cycle many of these families find themselves in; education gives these children the tools they need to break the cycle.

Education in lower-income countries can help reduce the prevalence of child labour, offering learning, safety, and recognition of rights. Many youth in these situations have not been clearly explained the rights they have or the options they face, and as such are not equipped to truly address the hardships in which they find themselves.

In higher-income countries, young people often unintentionally aggravate the issue. Capitalistic values lead many youth to “buy first, think later”; without realizing they are fueling the harmful consumer economy. The West knows all too well. Education in higher-income countries is equally useful to its lower-income counterparts, as we must be careful not to unknowingly fuel the very issues we seek to solve.

“ [If all children’s rights were respected and protected in Canada] children would have a choice. They would have some sort of control over their formative years along with guidance. But they would be able to have an opinion in things that matter to them.”

– U-Reporter, February 2022



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CHILD LABOUR RECOMMENDATIONS

YOUNG PEOPLE

For young people worldwide, child labour abuses our peers by stealing their fundamental rights and childhood. In solidarity with our youth, we must work hand in hand to support children and do our best to promote what is rightfully theirs.

- Be aware and appreciative of the opportunities of youth in the Global North, and how we can use those to uplift others.
- Actively educate ourselves on the current state of child labour as well as other violations of children's rights around the world.
- Contribute to spreading awareness, and bring other young people to this movement; we are stronger together.
- Be a responsible consumer: opt for second-hand items, durable and quality products, consume moderately, research brands and stores before purchasing from them, boycott unethical companies.
- Do not be afraid to speak up to advocate for the changes of policies and laws that contribute to this issue and share your suggestions to decision-makers.

ADULT ALLIES

Adult allies are the people younger generations look up to, just as they once did themselves. We ask that you help us to create a safe and promising future for children worldwide, and set a positive example for all of humanity.

- Offer direct help to children in need of humanitarian assistance by supporting organizations and aid workers in the field.
- Assist in the development of education curricula, specifically if you have a background in this field through your own work or past experience.
- Be a whistleblower: report child-labour violations you encounter in your workplace, daily life, or other settings to prompt action.
- Support children's education and rights in your local community by volunteering in schools and engaging in initiatives that promote children's well-being and awareness.
- Participate in decision-making and discussions to combat child labour: play an active role in the durable development of a society free of youth exploitation.

DECISION-MAKERS

Decision-makers have the power to modify the current system in which we find ourselves. This atmosphere of exploitation cannot change without your help. We urge you to honour the commitments you have made publicly to eradicate child labour and quickly initiate the changes to save children globally.

- Provide local businesses with incentives to encourage sale of their products, as these often align with higher ethical standards.
- Implement thorough measures to ensure all items found in the market are free from child labour and show transparency (such as those seen in Canada's recent supply chain legislation).
- Enhance laws and policies against child labour in the form of harsher penalties towards exploitive companies.
- Develop and expand social safety nets to support vulnerable families, ensuring they have access to essential services like healthcare, nutrition, and education and are thus not forced to turn to child labour for further financial means.



95%

of U-Reporters agree that Parliament should review all new laws and policies to make sure that they protect and promote children's rights.

(FEBRUARY 2022)

EDUCATION



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The Current State of Education

In Canada, young people have the right to education, the right to learn, and the right to become whatever they wish to be. Children around the world are equal, but not every child gets equal rights. Many don't have access to education, which is why this issue needs to be addressed. We Canadians are very lucky to have access to education. It may not be perfect, but we still have the resources to become what we desire to be. When we look outside of Canada, there are children who walk kilometers from home just to go to school, while we have easier access to schools due to close proximity.

In 2018, UNESCO said that there were around 258 million children and youth out of school. However on September 1, 2022, UNESCO reported that there were 224 million children who were still out of school. These 224 million children could make a big change in the world if they were given equal rights to education. Some regions with the most children and youth out of school are sub-Saharan Africa with a total of 98 million children. In second place is central and southern Asia, with 85 million.

If these children and youth were in school, it would prevent child labour, and child trafficking. It would prevent children being involved in illegal activities. In today's date, Malala Funds came out with a report saying that nearly 120 million girls are out of school. Which is also an issue regarding gender inequality. Another issue in today's society, addressed by the organization Teach For All, is the shortage of teachers. Because of this, classes are packed with more than 50 students in each classroom, making it hard for children to learn, concentrate and get individual help.

Education is at the core of children's lives. It improves your quality of life and changes your livelihood for the better. This is why we need to take action if we want the world to evolve.

How Young People Are Experiencing Issues Surrounding Education

As young Canadians, we are very lucky to have such a strong education system. While it might not be perfect, all children have a chance to learn multiple useful skills and information that will help them in life, which is a lot more than youth in other countries. Canada is recognized for having quality education at all levels, (EduCanada, 2023) and we believe we should be doing more to help other countries implement a stronger education system for their children.

By working together, countries can ensure that the next generations will be able to face global issues. Some of the reasons why children might not be able to go to school include: their gender, they live in a low-income country or their country is in a state of war/conflict, their disabilities, they are affected by natural disasters/climate change, or simply because they don't have access to a school or teachers (Reliefweb, 2020).

Even after the start of the 3rd year of the pandemic, in March 2022, 405 million school children in 23 countries continued to be affected by full or partial school closures. Many of them also did not return to school after the pandemic, especially young girls. By not returning to school, those children are more exposed to harmful practices such as child labour, child trafficking and child marriage. If children are not in schools, they will not be able to learn and acquire the skills they need for upward mobility, which might lead to the risk of intergenerational poverty (UNICEF, 2022).

Education is the key to our future; every child needs to have access to quality education to learn and to become who they want to be.

“ I think that school should be more about teaching students on how to be successful adults and not only successful workers.”

– U-Reporter, July 2023



EDUCATION RECOMMENDATIONS

YOUNG PEOPLE

At school, in the community, abroad, or online, young people have the potential to address children's education on a global scale. This can be done in a number of ways, whether it be five minutes of one's time or several hours a week. It is essential for every youth to participate, as a little change will always have a large cumulative effect.

- **Volunteer:** this can be done in person or online. There are a number of networks and organizations that offer opportunities to take the initiative in helping children. Some examples include online tutoring, advocacy programs, a local library, involving oneself with educational NGOs, and many others.
- **Promote awareness on social media:** youth are oftentimes the most active online. Using popular platforms such as Twitter/X, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook to share articles, stories, data, and resources, can inform a broader audience about the educational challenges in developing countries.
- **Organize a club:** gathering friends and classmates at school to join a club based on preventing educational inequalities, will not only help expand one's network but also give a sense of leadership in order to gain the necessary advocacy skills.
- **Start a fundraiser or donate:** local stores may ask for a donation to help kids who cannot afford school supplies. Also, youth could gather donations by engaging in the community with bake sales, by selling old items or starting a fundraising contest at school.
- **Support youth-led initiatives:** attend workshops, seminars, and events to help amplify their message. Collaborating with like-minded individuals can help provide the necessary expertise to reduce education issues, come up with action plans, and effectively deliver a message with a group willing to support.

ADULT ALLIES

The efforts are concentrated on bringing attention to the inequalities in access to education around the world and encouraging funding for those organizations. They promote gender equality in education and emphasize the serious negative effects of depriving children of an education, such as child labour and trafficking. There is also a call for more funding to address the teacher shortage.

Advocacy:

- Plan fundraising events and campaigns to help increase access to education for underprivileged kids around the world.
- Develop a lobbying campaign that encourages decision-makers to provide more funding and resources for global education.

Awareness:

- Create and share educational information to spread awareness of global education inequities in public events, social media, and through workshops.
- Work together with experts and influencers to give the cause greater credibility and exposure and to ensure that the urgent need for educational equality is widely recognized.

Gender Equality:

- Advocate for laws that support gender equality in the classroom, ensuring that everybody has equal access to educational opportunities.

Teacher Recruitment and Training:

- Encourage the development of strategies to solve the teacher shortage in areas with crowded classrooms.
- Work with foreign partners to train and assist teachers in underserved areas, raising the quality of education in the process.

Partnerships and Investments:

- Support partnerships and cooperation between national and international organizations to exchange resources, knowledge, and best practices for expanding access to education.
- Advocate the concept that funding education is essential for achieving social and economic progress.



57%

of U-Reporters do not agree that all students have an equal chance to succeed at their school.

(JULY 2023)

DECISION-MAKERS

Decision-makers have the most direct ability to create change in the education sphere and promote equal access to education for all. They can do this by:

- Increasing the quality of existing educational structures to promote a willingness to obtain education for those who can access it.
 - By promoting a positive attitude around education in current students, it will push them to partake in advocacy work in increasing access to education globally.
 - Investing in and building a strong teacher pipeline through targeted recruitment, preparation, and retention programs.
 - One of the issues faced by many students globally in the modern education system is a lack of motivated teachers that can cater to their needs to provide a high quality of education. This helps to resolve that by bringing in strong and motivated educators.
 - Attending to educators’ physical and mental needs to ensure that they remain motivated and continue to provide a high quality of education.
 - Providing strong student supports and work to build skills that students find positively impact them in the real world.
- Pushing, but also cooperating with, policy makers in places with less accessible education to increase access to education.
 - Policymakers can exert influence on those in areas with less accessible education to increase accessibility.
 - External pressure often creates more demand for an issue to be addressed.
 - Must also understand the needs of the decision-makers in those areas, and assist them if there is an external factor preventing increased accessibility.
- Supporting and listening to advocates and advocacy groups and their demands.
 - Those involved in advocacy often voice the concerns of the public in a more direct way than the public often does themselves; listening to their demands can provide a clearer perspective on the issue at the ground level as well as its solutions.
 - Feel free to push back if you feel there are some insights missing; the goal is for decision-makers and advocacy groups to have meaningful discussion that lead both groups towards solutions, which is what pushback does.

- Provide support for people who have not completed their education to do so.
 - Often, disparities in education are an outcome of many previous generations not completing their education and/or not emphasizing its importance on the next generation.
 - Encouraging these generations to finish their education can create a deep-rooted impact on their children and future generations to create a greater emphasis on education, thus reducing disparities and inaccessibility.



HEALTHCARE



The Current State of Healthcare

Equitable access to healthcare is crucial for all Canadians to lead fulfilling lives. Despite Canada's publicly funded healthcare system, there remain stark disparities in healthcare access and outcomes. In 2022, nearly 30% of Canadians reported chronic difficulties accessing healthcare, with 80% of this group describing their healthcare quality as poor or very poor (Angus Reid Institute, 2022). These statistics emphasize the urgent need for systemic changes to promote a healthier future.

Currently, Canada's healthcare coverage is not entirely universal. Twenty-five percent of Canadian households are unable to afford prescription medications (Martin et al., 2018). Mental health services, home care, dental and vision services, and rehabilitation often require out-of-pocket payments or private insurance (Martin et al., 2018). As the cost of living continues to rise, healthcare expenses are diverting funds from stable housing and nutritious foods. Some services, such as diagnostics and abortions, have recently secured public coverage (Health Canada, 2023), but more progress in this area is essential.

Even for publicly insured services, unacceptably long wait times and medical provider shortages pose a significant barrier to access. In 2022, Canada's median wait time for medical treatment was 27.4 weeks (Fraser Institute, 2022).

Furthermore, nearly 1 million patients were forced to leave emergency rooms without treatment (Favaro, 2023). Due to stringent licensing policies, Canadian medical providers face obstacles practicing across provinces, and internationally-trained medical providers have limited opportunities to practice in Canada (Pawar, 2023). Rural and remote regions, which house only 8% of Canada's practicing physicians, have been especially impacted by a lack of healthcare resources and personnel (Wilson et al., 2020). These challenges have had dire consequences, leading to adverse health outcomes and tragic deaths. It is evident that our healthcare system is in crisis, with profound impacts on the lives of many Canadians.

Moreover, Canada's health equity challenges disproportionately affect marginalized communities. The care of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of colour) individuals is hindered by language and cultural barriers, racism, and the legacies of colonialism, slavery, and segregation (Bryan et al., 2022). Additionally, 2SLGBTQ+ patients face pervasive stigma and discrimination, with many medical providers lacking the expertise to meet the needs of trans and non-binary patients (Comeau et al., 2023). As such, there is a clear need for comprehensive, intersectional reforms in healthcare delivery.

How Young People Are Experiencing Issues Surrounding Healthcare

Young people in Canada are struggling to access high-quality healthcare due to financial barriers, long wait times, stigma, and discrimination. The troubling impacts of these health inequities are exemplified by the issues of adolescent mental health, sexual behaviours, and substance use.

1.2 million Canadian children and youth have a mental illness, but only 20% are receiving treatment (Youth Mental Health Canada, 2019). With wait times averaging six months to one year and counselling services not being publicly insured, young people are feeling hopeless and isolated – effects that were compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. Our youth are increasingly turning to substance use, unsafe sex, and other unhealthy or risky coping mechanisms. Youth aged 15-24 have the highest substance use rate of any age bracket in Canada, and account for nearly 20% of preventable opioid overdose deaths (Drug Free Kids Canada, n.d.). Young Canadians are also engaging in alarming rates of unsafe sex – for example, the syphilis rate in female youth increased by 1768% between 2009 and 2018 (Tam, 2021). Tragically, many youth are choosing to take their own lives, with Canada's youth suicide rate being the third-highest among developed nations (Youth Mental Health Canada, 2019).

Young people should never be forced to cope alone. Adults, decision-makers, and the healthcare system need to better meet youth and their families where they are. Treatments and health infrastructure must take into account the unique voices, health needs, and contexts of children and youth. In particular, youth from marginalized backgrounds – BIPOC, 2SLGBTQ+, disabled, and homeless/street-involved – can no longer be left behind.

We call for greater investment in accessible mental health supports, harm reduction programs, and health literacy initiatives that can be delivered in schools and community settings.

The Summit: Marian and Jim Sinneave Centre for Youth Resilience in Calgary, Alberta is one example of a successful initiative that has spearheaded progress in this area. Among its many programs, The Summit provides free, walk-in mental health services for youth and their families, as well as youth-specific sexual and reproductive care (Alberta Health Services, n.d.).

Every young person deserves to have a positive healthcare experience that meets their needs and ensures they feel seen, heard, and respected. As the world evolves and shapes the future of generations to come, our healthcare system must evolve with it.



HEALTHCARE RECOMMENDATIONS

YOUNG PEOPLE

Just because we are young, it does not mean that we should not have a say in how our healthcare system is handled. We will inherit the outcomes of today's decisions in a decade's time. It is our responsibility to step forward now and advocate for a healthy future for all Canadians.

- Learn more about patient rights and health equity challenges in Canada and the factors that underlie them.
- Create awareness in your networks and schools about inclusivity and health inequity. Organize peer support groups, campaigns, or presentations to spread knowledge and empathy.
- Take advantage of resources and opportunities to advocate for change. Plan where you can go, who you can talk to, and specific steps that you can take to make your voice heard.
- Be aware of health-promoting choices you can make to protect yourself and your peers in daily life. Normalize and destigmatize reaching out for help early on.
- Volunteer with organizations that work to improve healthcare access for marginalized communities.

ADULT ALLIES

Young people have powerful voices that deserve respect. We bring unique worldviews and innovative solutions that can help shape the future of healthcare in Canada. With the support of our adult allies, we can work hand-in-hand to create meaningful change.

- Stand with and listen to youth advocates in advocating for the healthcare rights of all Canadians.
- Help amplify the voices of young people in conversations with other adults and decision-makers. Create a seat for them at the table.
- Connect youth with the necessary information, resources, and platforms for them to be healthy and succeed in their advocacy efforts.
- Create awareness of health inequities and promote inclusivity in your own networks and communities.
- To our medical provider allies: strive to deliver patient-centred care that meets all Canadians where they are. Ensure that the medical education system reflects this commitment.

DECISION-MAKERS

Health inequities are deeply ingrained in systematic social, political, and economic factors. Decision-makers have the power to mend these inequities and ensure that all Canadians have access to high-quality healthcare whenever and wherever they need it.

- Empower youth and marginalized communities to be actively involved in decision-making surrounding healthcare policies and services.
- Expand access to essential healthcare services that are not publicly insured.
- Invest in health technologies and innovations (e.g. telehealth and artificial intelligence) that will streamline healthcare delivery.
- Allocate resources to preventative healthcare programs, focusing on upstream health promotion and addressing the social determinants of health.
- Strengthen initiatives to train, hire, and retain more medical providers in underserved communities. Develop a nationwide licensing framework that will make it easier for medical providers to practice wherever they are needed.



“ Besides providing services or improving current services, provide different ways that youth might need to navigate both health care systems (mental health, physical health).”

– U-Reporter, April 2023

MENTAL HEALTH



The Current State of Mental Health

In Canada, the mental health system faces several pressing issues that hinder people's ability to receive the help they need. Although conversations surrounding mental health have become less stigmatized in recent years, there have not been many measurable changes in policy. A significant concern is the unequal access to mental health services across provinces and territories, resulting in disparities with rural and remote areas often having limited access to mental health professionals.

There is a need for increased investment in mental health resources. The inadequacy of funding has led to a shortage of mental health professionals and limited access to specialized services, with the majority of people having to wait weeks, or even months for even basic treatment. A substantial increase in funding can help reduce wait times and ensure that people receive timely and appropriate care. This investment should also extend to mental health education and awareness programs to promote early intervention and prevention.

The system is over-reliant on crisis intervention rather than preventative approaches to reduce the amount of crises. Additionally, the system struggles with a lack of coordination between mental health services and other healthcare sectors, meaning that there is a disconnect between the information you receive from different services. The government has fallen short of introducing a dedicated mental health transfer, leaving a gap in the healthcare system between physical and mental health.

In a country that values universal healthcare for everyone, it is unacceptable that mental healthcare is a paid service and not seen as a priority. Addressing these issues is essential to achieving quality mental health services and the broader healthcare system in Canada.

Mental Health Challenges Young People Are Facing Today

Young Canadians are fortunate to have access to various support systems in their lives. From family and friends to educational institutions and community organizations, there are networks in place to help navigate the challenges of youth. Despite this invaluable support, it becomes increasingly evident that, in certain critical aspects, it's simply not enough.

Many young people across the country struggle to access mental health services, due to the lack of accessibility to affordable resources and the shortage of professionals able to help. Youth are facing lengthy waitlists and expensive bills for mental healthcare. These can be huge burdens when they're already dealing with mental health challenges.

Youth also carry a heavy load of stress due to factors like school pressure, hormonal changes, social expectations and the many challenges of growing up. Without accessible resources, and easy access to mental health support, many struggle to cope with this stress. Not only that, but youth today deal with additional issues related to social media, like self-image and the constant comparison to others.

We believe it's important to talk about these issues and make sure there are better mental health resources for young people. Our generation faces unique challenges, and we need the right support to navigate them successfully. By addressing these challenges, we can help more young people get the help they need and have a better overall mental health.

We must take action. By advocating for improved mental health resources tailored to the unique needs of youth, we can turn the tide. We can ensure that more young individuals can access the help they require, overcome their challenges, and ultimately enjoy better mental health.

“ [Young people should be taught about mental health, mental health issues, self care, etc. That way children are equipped with this knowledge as they go through difficulties in their childhood and into adulthood. it's just as important as learning the physical aspect of health.”

– U-Reporter, April 2023



MENTAL HEALTH RECOMMENDATIONS

YOUNG PEOPLE

As young people, we have the power to address the lack of mental health resources. We can take steps to make a real difference and improve mental health support for ourselves, our friends, peers and everyone around.

- **Peer support networks:** young people can create peer support networks where they openly discuss mental health challenges and provide emotional support to one another. They can even explain how the lack of resources has affected them personally or someone they know.
- **Raise awareness:** youth have a unique opportunity to raise awareness about mental health. They can create, share and engage in awareness campaigns on social media and in their communities. This not only educates others about the basics of mental health but also reduces stigma and encourages open conversations, all while emphasizing the importance of increasing resources for everyone’s benefit.
- **Advocate for education:** as mental health is such an integral part of our health, advocating for education in schools can help students understand the basics like healthy coping methods and inform them of existing resources to make sure each student can get the help they need. Youth can advocate for mental health education in schools to ensure that all students have access to essential knowledge and resources.
- **Share information and personal experiences of using existing resources:** youth can spread awareness about existing mental health resources and share their own experiences with them. This can look like discussing how these resources have helped them and others in managing mental health challenges. By sharing information and personal stories, youth can guide peers toward valuable support systems that may make a positive difference in their lives.
- **Community involvement and supporting youth-led initiatives:** youth can take an active role in their community by getting involved in local organizations or initiatives that aim to enhance mental health services and resources. Attending workshops, seminars, and events organized by these groups helps to amplify their message.

ADULT ALLIES

As allies for youth in the fight against the inadequate mental health resources, adults play a crucial role in advocating for change. Their unwavering support ensures that young voices are not only heard but also leads to significant enhancements in mental health resources.

- **Mentorship programs:** establishing mentorship programs for youth that help them connect with mental health professionals or experienced individuals. These individuals can provide guidance, support, and mentorship in navigating mental health challenges.
 - It can be an invaluable opportunity for youth to have someone alongside them in their journey, providing guidance and support to navigate challenges related to their mental health. It is a way of having a service and support system for youth amidst the shortage of other mental health resources.
- **Collaborate with youth:** work together with youth in sharing their opinions in shaping and advocating for mental health policies, programs, and use of resources. Respect their input, ask for it, and actively involve them in finding solutions.
 - When adult allies work together with young people to shape mental health policies and programs, respecting their input and involving them in solutions, it fosters a very supportive environment that can lead to innovative and effective outcomes for youth mental well-being, and even allows them to feel more positive and encouraged. This allows youth to have an input in advocating for more and better resources.
- **Foster safe spaces:** create spaces in homes, schools, and communities where young people feel comfortable discussing their mental health. This means having open and non-judgmental conversations where they can express their feelings and concerns without being criticized.
 - It’s about making sure they know they can talk about their mental health just like they talk about physical health, without any stigma. This is a means of having safe spaces amidst the shortage of other services and resources.



76%

of U-Reporters strongly agree that increased cost of living has affected their mental health.

(MARCH 2023)

MENTAL HEALTH RECOMMENDATIONS

- Support youth-led initiatives: show strong support and mentor youth-led initiatives that focus on mental health advocacy and resource development. Encourage their leadership by actively participating in their projects and offering expertise when needed.
 - Focusing on promoting youth-led initiatives is a way for adult allies to address issues surrounding the lack of mental health resources. This can go a long way and even demonstrates how the collaboration of adults and youth towards the same goal can result in a more comprehensive and effective approach to improving mental health resources and support for young people.
- Promote mental health education and awareness: advocate for more awareness on the topic of mental health. Empower young people to understand key concepts in mental health. Adult allies should also aim to educate their own generation, breaking the stigma surrounding mental health and normalizing open discussions about it. Work towards making mental health awareness a common and accepted part of everyday life.
 - Promoting mental health awareness is a good strategy for adult allies to address issues related to the lack of mental health resources. It really highlights how collaboration across generations can make talking about mental health normal and lead to better resources and support for youth.
- Collaborate with the education sector to incorporate mental health education into school curriculum, starting from an early age, so future generations are equipped with better skills.
- Engage with mental health advocates and organizations to gather insights and feedback from those directly impacted by the lack of resources.

DECISION-MAKERS

Mental health care can no longer be a secondary concern. Especially after the rise in mental health issues during COVID-19, it demands the utmost attention from decision-makers to create a comprehensive plan that actively caters to the growing needs of those seeking mental health support.

- Allocate a higher percentage of the healthcare budget to mental health services, allowing them to become cheaper and eventually free.
- Create more online/phone/in-person services for remote areas in Canada.
- Create more mobile/more frequent mental health clinics for underserved communities.
- Develop community-based prevention programs targeting at-risk populations and demographics.
- Allocate funding for mental health research to better understand the evolving landscape of mental health and identify innovative solutions.



A MESSAGE FROM THE NATIONAL CHILD DAY PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

In Canada, we are fortunate to be home to diverse landscapes, cultures, and opportunities, including those of Indigenous Peoples who called this land home long before Canada existed. However, our true wealth lies in our children and youth—the current and future leaders, innovators, and dreamers who are currently shaping and will shape Canada’s destiny. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that they have the best possible environment to thrive, grow, and meaningfully contribute to our society.

In a world that is constantly evolving, the insights and experiences of children and youth are invaluable. They offer unique viewpoints that can help us navigate complex challenges and discover new opportunities. Therefore, we urge everyone to take the time to meaningfully engage with and truly listen to what young people are saying through this Reimagine Playbook.

To make Canada the best place for all children and youth to thrive, it will take the dedication and commitment of all Canadians. Let us work together, transcending political, regional, and cultural differences, to ensure that every child in our country has the opportunity to dream big and achieve their aspirations.

By investing in our children and youth today, we are investing in a brighter, more prosperous Canada tomorrow. Together, we can build a nation where every child’s potential is nurtured and the right of every young person to have their voice heard is celebrated—from coast to coast to coast.

Sincerely,



Owen Charters
President and CEO
BGC Canada



Peter Dinsdale
President and CEO
YMCA Canada



Lindsay Glassco
President and CEO
Plan International Canada



Danny Glenwright
President and CEO
Save the Children Canada



Sharif Mahdy
Chief Executive Officer
The Students Commission of
Canada, Centre of Excellence
for Youth Engagement



Odette McCarthy
Executive Director
Equitas Center for International
Human Rights Education



Sevaun Palvetzian
President and CEO
UNICEF Canada



About UNICEF Canada

UNICEF is the world's leading organization for children and adolescents. Created by the United Nations, UNICEF is one of the few organizations that works in Canada and internationally. UNICEF Canada is the face of UNICEF in Canada. We secure young people's rights and well-being by mobilizing resources for children and youth, advocating forever-improving policies and practices and engaging diverse young people as rights-holders and advocates. We are calling on Canadians to take action and do better for children and youth.

UNICEF is supported entirely by voluntary donations.

For more information about UNICEF Canada, please visit www.unicef.ca

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