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NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS
IN ADVANCE OF THE
FEDERAL BUDGET 2026



NACY

National Alliance for
Children and Youth



ANEJ

L'alliance nationale pour
l'enfance et la jeunesse

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Preamble

The current state of children and youth in Canada demands immediate attention. As we navigate the 21st century, various factors have converged to shape the lives of younger generations in unprecedented ways.

The child and youth sector significantly impacts Canada's social and economic landscape by shaping the future workforce, influencing social policies, and providing essential services in education, healthcare, mental health, safety, and development. This sector supports over 1.2 million young Canadians annually, contributing to a healthier and more prosperous society.

Nearly one-fifth (19%) of Canada's population is under 18. This group has faced disproportionate challenges, cost of living increases, live in food-insecure households, instability with mental health and addictions issues, health concerns, living in poverty.

As part of the nonprofit sector, contributing \$192 billion annually to Canada's GDP and employing 2.5 million people, children and youth serving organizations play a crucial role. Increasing and stabilizing funding for the child and youth sector is essential to address common challenges and ensure program stability and capacity to meet the rising, complex needs of our young people.

Funding disparities across regions can limit access to vital services. Investing in children and youth is not only a moral imperative but also a crucial step towards strengthening Canada's economy and building a healthier, prosperous Canada.

Summary of Recommendations

- 1. Enhance Access to Mental Health Services and Promote Health and Wellbeing:** Require accountability through the Canada Health Transfer to provinces and territories bilateral health agreements to spend 12% of their respective healthcare budgets on mental health and addiction services vs the average 6.3% currently spent.
 - a. To expand mental health and addiction services for children and youth.
 - b. To reduce wait times and improve services availability for all with a focus on those that are underserved.
 - c. To ensure culturally competent and trauma-informed care will better serve these populations.
- 2. Invest in Equity and Prosperity:** Double the spending in federal programs such as the Canada Summer Jobs Program and the Canadian Service Corps, leveraging existing employer relationships and access to technology programs. Invest in multi-year funding agreements with youth-serving organizations and allow for sub-programs specifically targeting equity-deserving communities, particularly in rural, remote, and northern regions, to mitigate systemic barriers and address the lack of representation. Integrate youth perspectives by involving young people in the planning and decision-making processes of these programs to ensure their voices are heard and their needs are met.
- 3. Investing federal funds in a non-profit system dedicated to the wellbeing of children and youth:** Crucial for fostering a healthier, more equitable society. These organizations provide essential services such as education, employment, mental health, childcare, support, and recreational activities, which are vital for the holistic development of young individuals. By strengthening non-profit infrastructure, we ensure that children and youth, especially those from underserved communities, have access to the resources and opportunities they need to thrive. This investment not only supports immediate needs but also builds a foundation for a prosperous future, reducing long-term social and economic disparities.

Call to Action

The National Alliance for Children and Youth call on an urgent cross ministerial mandate to address the state of our young people. Young people are NOT okay and impact Canada's economic wellbeing now. Together, we can create a brighter, more equitable future for Canada.

Background

The National Alliance for Children and Youth (NACY) is a network of children and youth serving and supporting organizations from across Canada. As a member driven organization, we work to ensure the voice of the children and youth sector is represented nationally. We come together to highlight the needs and actions for children and youth in this country and we are poised to support the federal government in delivering these priorities.

Enhance Access to Mental Health Services and Promote Health and Wellbeing: When young people are in good physical, mental, and emotional health, they are better prepared to face life's challenges and seize opportunities. Having access to nutritious food, safe environments, and quality health and education services significantly increases their overall wellbeing, our recommendations include:

- **Increase Funding:** Allocate more resources to expand mental health and addiction services for children and youth, reducing wait times and improving service availability for equity-deserving groups.
- **Culturally Competent Care:** Ensure mental health services are culturally competent and trauma-informed to better serve the needs of children and youth populations.
- **Early Intervention and Prevention:** Implement early identification and intervention community programs to address mental health challenges before they escalate. Invest in preventive care and public health initiatives to reduce the burden of diseases and improve overall health outcomes for children and youth.
- **Physical Activity and Nutrition:** Invest in physical activity and healthy nutrition programs and community initiatives to combat obesity and related health issues.
- **Social Inclusion and Wellbeing:** Fund programs and projects aimed at increasing the social inclusion and wellbeing of vulnerable children and youth, particularly those at risk of or experiencing negative impacts on their physical and mental health due to social isolation.

Systemic Barriers and Lack of Representation: The lack of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) perpetuates inequality and limits the potential of marginalized communities, while fostering DEI can lead to a more just and innovative society. To address systemic barriers and lack of representation, the federal budget must prioritize funding for programs that support marginalized populations, ensuring equitable access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities.

- **Innovation, Skills, and Learning:** Employment and skills training address the challenge of youth unemployment and underemployment, while fostering a culture of innovation, experimentation, and entrepreneurial thinking that empowers young people to thrive in a dynamic job market.
 - **Future Job Market Preparation:** Enhance investments in education and training programs that align with current and future job market trends, such as automation and the gig economy, to ensure youth are prepared for emerging opportunities.
 - **Education, Employment and Skills Development:** Enhance and remove barriers to educational, skill development to transition successfully into the workforce and employment opportunities for marginalized youth to break the cycle of poverty.

- **Address Systemic Barriers and Inequities:** Together, we must work to dismantle systemic barriers and inequities that prevent children and youth from reaching their full potential, ensuring every young person has equal opportunities to thrive and succeed.
 - **Combat Systemic Inequalities and Targeted Interventions:** Develop comprehensive strategies to address systemic inequalities, including targeted programs for marginalized communities and continuous monitoring of diversity and inclusion efforts.
 - **Cross-Sector Partnerships:** Foster partnerships across and between government, private sector, and non-profits leveraging their expertise and infrastructure to conduct a comprehensive mapping of the child and youth service sector to establish a foundation for child-friendly budget reporting, federal child wellbeing strategies, and other decision-making processes concerning children and youth.
 - **Create Safe Spaces and Combat Misinformation:** Invest in programs that equip young people with the tools to identify and analyze misinformation. Support initiatives that create safe spaces for dialogue on controversial and polarizing topics.
- **Impact of Affordability Crisis:** Addressing affordability directly impacts the quality of life for individuals and communities, ensuring that everyone has access to basic needs such as housing and food, which in turn fosters a more equitable and prosperous society.
 - **Housing and Food Security:** Formulate strategies to address housing insecurity and food insecurity among children and youth.
 - **Income Inequality:** Implement measures to reduce income inequality, such as increasing universal basic income and providing targeted financial support to low-income families.
- **Integrate Youth Perspectives:** Involve the input of marginalized young people on economic policymaking, ensuring policies reflect the needs and perspectives of young people design and delivery of programs and services to ensure their needs are met. To create a more inclusive and fair society where everyone has the opportunity to succeed and thrive.
 - **Youth Leadership:** Invest in youth-led initiatives and research projects to empower young people and inform policymakers.
 - **Education and Training Programs:** Implement programs to educate young people about economic policies and encourage their participation in policy discussions.
 - **Digital Engagement Platforms:** Utilize digital tools to gather input from youth, making it easier for them to share their perspectives and ideas.
 - **Inclusive Policy Design:** Involve young people in policy design and implementation through participatory budgeting, public consultations, and intergenerational dialogue.
 - **Intergenerational Dialogue:** Promote intergenerational dialogue to bridge the gap between young people and older generations. This can help ensure that economic policies are forward-looking and take into account the needs and aspirations of young people.
- **Impact on Future Generations:** Investing in sustainable development and inclusive policies today will ensure a more equitable and prosperous future for all generations, fostering long-term economic stability and growth.
- **Shaping the Future Job Market:** Investing in youth is crucial as it not only empowers the next generation with the skills and knowledge needed for future job markets but also drives innovation and economic growth.

- **Invest in Emerging Industries:** Focus on sectors like technology, renewable energy, and healthcare to create new job opportunities for youth.
- **Enhance Education and Training:** Align educational programs with future job market needs, emphasizing STEM education, vocational training, and apprenticeships.
- **Support Entrepreneurship and Digital Literacy:** Provide resources for young entrepreneurs and ensure access to digital tools and training.

Conclusion

Investing in the wellbeing and development of our children and youth is crucial for Canada's future and ensuring no one is left behind. By enhancing mental health services, addressing systemic barriers, and preparing young people for the future job market, we can ensure they thrive.

Policies must be adaptive and forward-thinking, fostering innovation and supporting emerging industries. Addressing income inequality, housing, and food security will create a more equitable society. Involving young people in policy design ensures their voices are heard and their needs are met.

The investments we make today will yield significant returns, building a healthier, more inclusive, and prosperous Canada for generations to come. Let us seize this opportunity to shape a brighter future for all.

Reference:

Imagine Canada [Homepage | Imagine Canada](#)
Kids Help Phone [Get support with these mental health resources - Kids Help Phone](#)
Children First Canada [Children First Canada](#)
UNICEF Canada [UNICEF Canada: Children's Charity - For Every Child](#)
Statistics Canada <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/230920/dq230920a-eng.htm>
CMHA [State-of-Mental-Health-in-Canada-Pockets-of-Funding-factsheet.pdf](#)