



PREVENTING A LOCKDOWN GENERATION

A plan to support Canada's youth in post-pandemic recovery



August 2021



Land

Acknowledgement



YWCA Canada and YMCA Canada would like to express their gratitude and respect for the privilege to work, organize, and live on the traditional territory of many diverse Indigenous Nations. Our offices are located in Tkaronto. This area has been taken care of by the Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Huron-Wendat. It is now home to many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities. YMCA Canada and YWCA Canada acknowledge the current treaty holders, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. This territory is the subject of the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant.

Traditional Elders and Knowledge keepers have educated us: during pre-contact times, gender equality was both practiced and respected on this land for generations. Post-contact, European colonizers noted in their diaries their discomfort with the Indigenous cultural norms of gender equality, and matriarchal governance among specific Indigenous nations. Thus, with the implementation of systemic and colonial anti-Indigenous racism, YMCA Canada and YWCA Canada would be remiss in not emphasizing how colonization has perpetuated gender-based violence for Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit peoples.

We cannot address gender-based violence, without naming the 231 Calls to Action that must be implemented, as reported by the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry, as well as 2021 Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People National Action Plan: Ending Violence Against Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People.^{1,2}

With clear policy recommendations that centre the voices of diverse urban Indigenous, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities – the framework for change is clearly articulated. All recommendations must be implemented to eliminate gender-based violence on this land. Even when it is eliminated, the harm must always be acknowledged and never forgotten.

Furthermore, colonization, systemic racism, and intentional practices of genocide have exacerbated the impact and repercussions of gender-based violence on Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit peoples. At the time of writing this report, the recent discovery of the remains of 215 children at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School, as well as the 751 unmarked graves at a cemetery at the former Marieval Indian Residential School brings into sharp relief the ongoing and historical perpetuation of colonization and systemic racism.^{3,4}

For Indigenous communities such as Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation and Cowessess First Nation, these heartbreaking discoveries are not surprising but rather tragic confirmation of what generations of residential school survivors have known. Dr. Scott Hamilton's report for the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 'Where are the Children buried?' describes in painstaking detail about the deceased Indian Residential School (IRS) students.⁵ This history is not old. It is very much present with ongoing ripple effects. The last federally-run residential school closed down in 1996.⁶

YMCA Canada and YWCA Canada are legacy institutions that have benefited from colonial policy and practices of systemic anti-Indigenous racism. As guests on this land, we continue to reflect on the impact of colonization on our work. We are thinking intentionally on how our organizations can call attention to and act on the 94 Calls to Action in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report.⁷





About Us

YWCA Canada

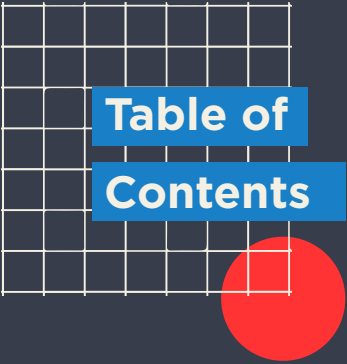
YWCA Canada is a leading voice for women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse people. For 150 years, we've been at the forefront of a movement: to fight gender-based violence, build affordable housing and advocate for workplace equity. We work to advance gender equity by responding to urgent needs in communities, through national advocacy and grassroots initiatives. 31 local YWCAs invest over \$258 million annually to support over 330,000 individuals across the nation. Today, we engage young leaders, diverse communities, and corporate partners to achieve our vision of a safe and equitable Canada for all.

ywcacanada.ca

YMCA Canada

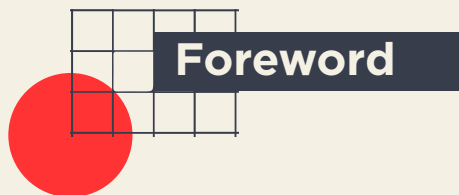
The YMCA is a powerful association of people joined together by a shared passion to foster a sense of belonging for all. In an age of complex social challenges, the YMCA is steadfastly dedicated to building healthy communities by inviting and encouraging Canadians to join in, give back, and gain the connections, skills, and confidence they need to thrive. As one of Canada's largest and longest-standing charities, the YMCA is at the heart of communities serving over 2.39 million people, including over 716,000 young people, through 39 Member Associations across the country. Together, we are unwavering in our dedication to achieving meaningful outcomes that matter to the communities we serve.

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Turning points. Every generation faces them, and the direction taken shapes their trajectory for decades to come.

For Millennials and Gen Z, that moment is now — and the challenges have never been greater. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, young people were finding it difficult to secure stable employment, enter the housing market, and access mental health care services that met their needs. It has only worsened during this present crisis. Add to that the existential threat of climate change and young people are facing a future that seems far from their vision of a fair society where everyone can succeed.

Now in the face of a public health crisis unlike the world has ever seen, the challenges seem even more insurmountable. Yet despite it all, young people have stepped up in remarkable ways to support people across Canada. Young people are not just the leaders of tomorrow; they are leading right now. By being on the cutting edge of scientific research, volunteering to increase equitable access to COVID-19 testing kits and vaccines, and serving on the frontlines as essential workers, young people have shown us not only how critical they are to our response but our recovery as well.

We must recognize any recovery will be incomplete without addressing the needs of young people. As advocates working at two of Canada's leading youth-focused organizations, we hope this publication starts a conversation about how we can invest in and support young people in Canada for post-pandemic recovery. We also hope it sparks a movement and pushes all pillars of society to consider how they may support and advance generational equity by ensuring young people reach their full potential and no longer experience the disproportionate impact of this crisis.

Given the unprecedented threat to young people's prospects and potential, the time to act is now. We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to catalyze a better way forward and everyone can play a role.

We want young people to thrive and reach their full potential. Let's work together to advance a post-pandemic future that makes that happen.

In solidarity,
Anjum Sultana & Jessica Stepic Lue



Executive Summary

The economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have had a swift and severe impact on young people. So much so, that the International Labour Organization began to raise alarms in May 2020 of the potential emergence of a “lockdown generation” if immediate action was not taken to respond to the needs of young people.

Young people in Canada experienced multiple shocks since the onset of the pandemic, including employment and income loss, lack of access to safe and stable housing, social isolation, and rising mental health challenges.

While all young people have been affected, Black, Indigenous, and racialized youth, young women and gender diverse youth, youth living with disabilities, 2SLGBTQIAA+ youth, and other marginalized young people who experience significant barriers to services and opportunities prior to the pandemic have been disproportionately impacted during the crisis.

For many, the effects of the pandemic are compounded by recent violence against racialized communities stemming from systemic racism, xenophobia, and discrimination.

YWCA Canada and YMCA Canada have embarked on this project with a strong sense of urgency to respond to these impacts of the pandemic on youth. This publication outlines challenges faced by youth, ages 18 to 30 years old, in light of the pandemic, and proposes policy responses to ensure youth recover and are resilient in the face of future crises. The publication examines and provides recommendations in six areas of focus vital to supporting young people.

Building an Inclusive Society

A focus on inclusion and equity is a fundamental component to post-pandemic recovery that prevents a lockdown generation and invests in young people. To have a truly inclusive society that keeps generational equity at the forefront, we must simultaneously tackle systemic racism in all its forms, commit to Indigenous reconciliation, address discrimination experienced by 2SLGBTQIAA+ communities, address ableism and inequities experienced by people living with disabilities, uproot systemic sexism, and rectify the digital divide to ensure that anyone in the country, despite where they live, can reach their full potential.

Promoting Meaningful Employment for Young People

Employment losses since the onset of the pandemic have disproportionately impacted young people who are more likely to hold low-wage, temporary, and less secure jobs in severely affected industries, such as accommodation, food services, and retail. While some progress has been made to restore the workforce, young people continue to be affected — with Black, Indigenous, and racialized youth, young women, and youth living with a disability experiencing increased barriers and higher rates of unemployment today. Canada must provide immediate solutions that help all young workers re-enter the labour force today, such as job programs and skills development services targeting young people, as well as long-term policies that promote resiliency in youth employment.

Ensuring Housing for All

A safe place to stay at home during lockdowns was not an option for the approximately 40,000 young people experiencing homelessness across Canada. The rise in gender-based violence during the pandemic also increased demands on shelters which were already stretched thin. Finally, income loss caused by the pandemic posed significant challenges for young people who already faced unaffordable rental costs across Canada. Canada needs a range of approaches to address the complexities of housing unaffordability and homelessness such as tackling unaffordable rents, increasing housing supply, and supporting housing initiatives targeting the needs of youth — particularly diverse and equity-deserving young people.





Supporting Mental Health and Wellbeing

Young people today face job loss and loss of income, isolation, illness or loss of loved ones, and uncertainty about the future, as well as systemic racism and discrimination. Increasing stress, anxiety, loneliness, and depression among youth in Canada negatively impacts their emotional wellbeing and overall health. Poorer perceptions of mental health and lower life satisfaction has been seen among young people who are marginalized such as Indigenous youth and 2SLGBTQIAA+ youth who face additional structural and individual barriers to services. Young people are looking for support to cope with the challenges they are experiencing, and mental health services must be available when and where they need it.

Investing in Youth Leadership

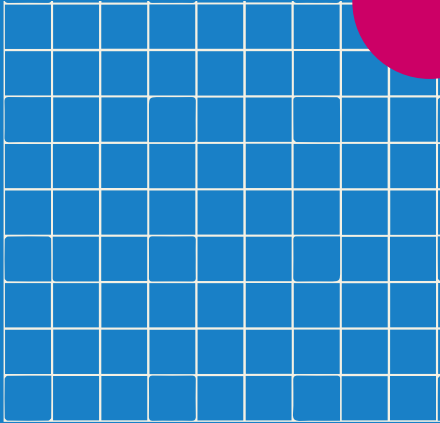
Young people have demonstrated significant leadership and have been on the forefront of pandemic relief, response, and recovery initiatives, despite their economic and social challenges. Young people should be authentically and meaningfully engaged in decision-making and public policy, and consulted at the design phase of programs, services, and strategies. This is especially the case for reaching young people who are both the furthest from opportunity and experiencing the greatest form of marginalization.

Supporting the Youth-Serving Sector

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant revenue reductions and capacity constraints which have made community-based youth-serving charities and non-profits vulnerable. It has affected service delivery at a time when young people need support the most. For some community or culturally led and serving organizations, the COVID-19 pandemic has compounded pre-existing challenges caused by chronic underfunding. Youth-serving organizations will play an essential role in helping young people cope, connect, and recover. They must be supported over the next 18 months.

This publication is an important step in raising awareness of the issues impacting young people and actioning on critical solutions, to support their recovery and resilience post-pandemic. Through foresight, collaboration, innovation, and further research we can work together to prevent a lockdown generation.

About this Publication



In May 2020, the International Labour Organization's (ILO) research showed young people were disproportionately affected by the economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and facing multiple shocks such as income loss, barriers to services, and isolation.⁸ In response, the ILO started to raise the alarm of the potential emergence of a “lockdown generation” if immediate action is not taken to respond to the needs of young people.⁹

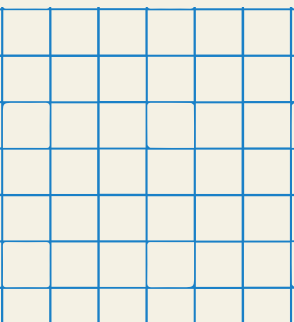




With this strong sense of urgency and having witnessed the consequences of the pandemic on youth, YWCA Canada and YMCA Canada undertook this project to raise awareness about the challenges facing young people in Canada in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. We propose federal policy responses with an emphasis on an intersectional approach that supports their recovery and resiliency. Furthermore, we need a generational equity approach that ensures young people can achieve their full potential.

For the purposes of this project, the content and recommendations focus on young people between the ages of 18 to 30 years old today, spanning two specific generations: Millennials (1991-1996) and Gen Z (1997-2003).¹⁰ Data presented aims to tell the story for this specific age group. However, where data was not available, the age of the youth cohort examined is specified.

This publication was approached from the basic assumption that all young people in Canada should have access to the opportunities, places, support, and services they need to recover from the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and become more resilient to future crises. The content and recommendations within this report were developed based on a national and international environmental scan, available data at time of development, existing publications and positioning developed by YMCA Canada and YWCA Canada, and reviews and consultations with subject matter experts within the YMCA, YWCA, and the broader youth-serving sector. Throughout the publication, examples of services and programs provided by the YWCA, YMCA, and other national and international youth-serving organizations have been provided to illustrate promising practices. Proposed solutions are targeted at the Government of Canada, however, actions that other sectors or orders of government can take to support Canada's youth and prevent a lockdown generation have also been considered and presented.

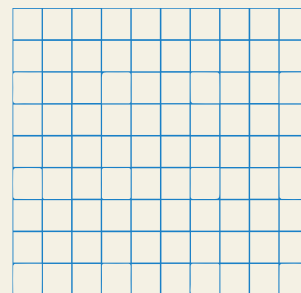




These solutions have also been identified and echoed by many youth advocates and sector colleagues further demonstrating the need for action in these areas.

Each section within this publication focuses on six areas of focus that will be vital for supporting young people’s recovery and resilience and were determined based on YWCA Canada and YMCA Canada’s expertise and experience. These areas also aim to align with the pillars included in the Young People Championing Post-Pandemic Futures position paper produced by the Big 6: the world’s six largest youth organizations including the World YMCA, World YWCA, World Organization of the Scout Movement, World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, Duke of Edinburgh International Award, and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.¹¹ Finally, these pillars also aim to align with the priorities identified in Canada’s Youth Policy.¹² While these areas are examined independently, it is critical to note the interconnectedness and compounding effects of the issues described.

Every effort was made to provide a comprehensive overview of the impact and challenges facing young people, however, not all of the issues or realities have been captured. This paper is intended to be a starting point and recognizes the need for further work and research on each of these areas. Other issues not covered in this report that have affected young people, include disruptions to education and the climate emergency.

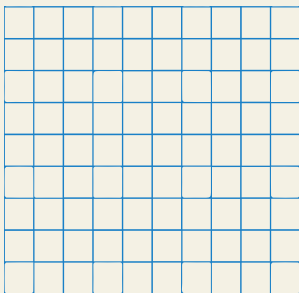


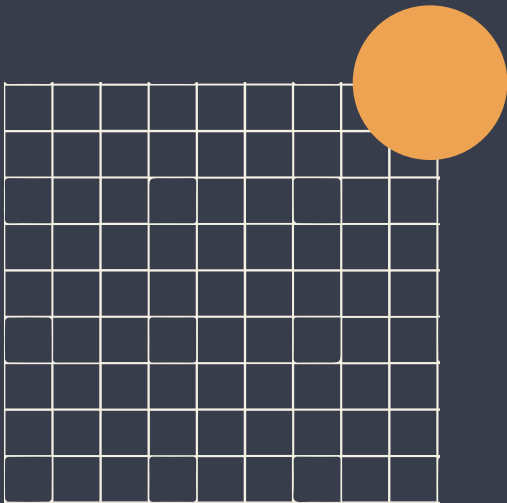


Furthermore, the impact has not been equal across all youth. Young people are diverse in who they are, how they identify and where they live. Throughout the publication, an intersectional and equity lens has been applied to examine and present the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on diverse equity-deserving youth. While every effort was made to reflect realities of many diverse equity-deserving youth in each of the areas examined, this paper will not be exhaustive of all experiences and perspectives. Additional and dedicated work should be undertaken to raise awareness of the unique challenges and solutions to support youth who are marginalized and face chronic systemic barriers, such as Black, Indigenous, and racialized youth, youth out of care, young women, youth living with a mental illness, youth living in rural and remote communities, immigrant youth, youth experiencing homelessness, 2SLGBTQIAA+ youth, youth with disabilities, and youth involved with the justice system.

Where available, disaggregated data has been provided though there continues to be key gaps. It is also important to reiterate the need to move beyond binaries for gender disaggregated data, which continues to be a gap within the Canadian data landscape. The collection of and access to disaggregated data should be supported to better understand unique challenges faced by different communities and to develop good public policy that works for the young people it is intended for. Better and more accessible data, as well as national research, also plays a critical role in accountability, supporting best practices, and strengthening youth programs and policies in Canada.

The hope is that this work will serve as an inspiration and a direction for solutions that promote positive outcomes for young people in Canada. We encourage all aspects of society to consider how they are contributing to generational equity.





Introduction

The impact of the economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people has been swift and severe. Since the onset of the global crisis, young people have experienced multiple significant shocks including employment and income loss, loss of essential services, disruptions to their education and training, and isolation. While all young people have been affected, young people who are marginalized and faced systemic barriers prior to the pandemic have been disproportionately impacted during the crisis.



The rate of young people not in employment, education, or training (NEET) rose to 24% in April 2020, the highest measured in the past two decades, with the NEET rate more significant for some populations including young Black men.^{13,14} Large losses in employment for youth in Canada are attributed to the sectors they work in and the nature of these jobs: part-time, contract, and low-wage positions.¹⁵ Young people, especially young women, have historically made up a large cohort of employees in the retail and food service sector, both of which have been highly affected by government restrictions and closures to reduce the spread of COVID-19.^{16,17}

Lockdown measures and stay-at-home orders assumed that all people living in Canada had access to a safe place to live, which was not the case for youth experiencing homelessness. Furthermore, income loss caused by the pandemic posed additional challenges for young people facing unaffordable rental costs across Canada.

The impact of these events and others, as well as uncertainty of the future, have negatively impacted levels of stress, anxiety, and the overall mental health and wellbeing of young people. Comparing data before and during the pandemic, youth reported the lowest life satisfaction out of all age groups.¹⁸ Additionally, 2SLGBTQIAA+ youth have experienced declining mental health during the pandemic. Data shows approximately 70% of gender diverse people experience fair to poor mental health, with over half of respondents being under the age of 30.¹⁹

Amidst the pandemic, shadow pandemics have also emerged including the rise of gender-based violence. Additionally, several violent and deadly attacks on Black, Indigenous, and other racialized communities and marginalized populations in Canada and around the world have occurred or been uncovered over the last year, stemming from systemic racism, xenophobia, and discrimination.^{20,21}

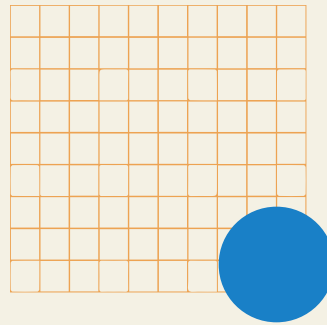
In recent months, we have witnessed the discovery of remains of 215 children buried on the grounds of the Kamloops Residential School and 715 remains uncovered at the former site of the Marieval Indian Residential School in Cowessess, Saskatchewan.^{22,23} We have also seen a rise in targeted attacks against religious minorities including Muslim communities, particularly Black Muslim women in Alberta.^{24,25} In June 2021, a family of Muslim Canadians were killed in London, Ontario in a suspected terrorist attack fuelled by Islamophobia.²⁶ These events have also compounded the mental health challenges and negatively affected the wellbeing of Canada's diverse youth.^{27,28}

What will happen to a generation of young people living through a pandemic during their formative years? The conclusion to this question is still pending as short- and long-term data continue to be collected and analyzed to fully understand the pandemic's fallout. However, if the impact to date and the influence of comparable economic or social crises are any indications, young people will likely continue to struggle in the pandemic's wake.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic is not the first major global shock young people today have experienced during the first 18-30 years of their lives. The 2008 financial crisis also impacted youth directly through job losses or challenges finding a job, as well as loss of household income or negative outcomes for their families.^{29,30} Exposure to such shocks have long-lasting consequences. More than a decade after the financial crisis of 2008, youth unemployment rates across OECD countries remained above pre-crisis levels.³¹



Examining the impact of today’s global crisis, the ILO warns that a “lockdown generation” is imminent if urgent measures are not taken to support young people.³² The consequences of inaction are dire — young people could potentially feel the economic and social fallout for the next 10 years, and experience lifelong ‘scarring’ as a result of permanent income loss, poorer mental health, and future likelihood of unemployment.^{33,34,35} Finally, there will be a population-wide toll paid if young people are not able to achieve their aspirations such as securing long-term stable employment with good benefits and decent pay. Not only will young people experience diminishing lifetime earnings on an individual basis, but there will also be repercussions and barriers for country-wide economic growth. For instance, it is predicted that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, youth unemployment in the United Kingdom, a G7 nation like Canada, will cost the economy nearly \$12 billion in Canadian dollars in 2022 due to reduced productivity and output.³⁶



In light of this, we must focus immediately on the recovery and resiliency of Canada’s youth to change the course of a potential “lockdown generation” to the emergence of a “generation thrive.”

Canada’s young people will feel the impact of the recession caused by the pandemic for decades to come and will be responsible for managing much of the long-term economic and social consequences. Therefore, it is imperative that immediate action be taken to support their recovery and resiliency from COVID-19 and ensure that solutions support the unique needs of all young people, including those who are marginalized. Additionally, today’s youth are tomorrow’s decision makers. We must continue to help young people reach their full potential and invest in youth leadership. Young people are already demonstrating their commitment to a more inclusive and sustainable society and are at the forefront of priority issues including gender equity, anti-racism, the climate emergency, destigmatizing mental health challenges, and addressing the gig economy. The significant cultural, political, or social changes that have arisen from the actions or influence of young people has been dubbed a *youthquake*.³⁷ It is critical that young people are engaged in a meaningful way and have the opportunity to present their unique perspectives and experiences in public policy decisions.

In the pages that follow, we present an overview of some of the current challenges facing young people in Canada in six areas and propose federal policy recommendations and next steps to address them. Throughout the report we apply an intersectional and equity lens and provide disaggregated data on the impact of diverse equity-deserving youth, as well as specific national and international examples of initiatives that lead to meaningful change. This publication is an important tool in raising awareness of issues and opportunities. However, further and ongoing efforts to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on all young people and how best to support their recovery should be identified and pursued.

1

Building an Inclusive Society

Building an inclusive society is an ongoing project and something all sectors can contribute towards advancing. If this pandemic has taught us anything, it is that life before COVID-19 did not serve diverse, marginalized, and structurally vulnerable populations. In fact, the pandemic has laid bare many of the challenges and concerns equity-deserving communities have been calling attention to for decades. Many have argued that if the pre-existing action plans, recommendations and strategies civil society has advocated for had been implemented, we would have had a more equitable pandemic response.





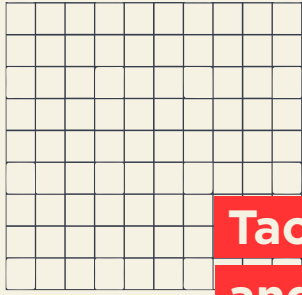
Building an Inclusive Society



Focusing on inclusion and equity is a fundamental component to post-pandemic recovery that prevents a lockdown generation and invests in young people. This is why it is at the forefront of this publication to reiterate that this is the foundation for which every other action for economic and social recovery should rest on. Addressing systemic barriers for marginalized communities will not only help Canada and communities recover faster but also make us more resilient and able to act equitably in the face of future crises.

When focusing on the experiences of young people, we must do so in an intersectional manner. Intersectionality, a term coined by American legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, is the phenomenon of how one's identities produce intersecting systems of advantage and disadvantage.^{38,39} To have a truly inclusive society that keeps generational equity at the forefront through supporting young people, we must simultaneously tackle systemic racism in all its forms, commit to Indigenous reconciliation, address discrimination experienced by 2SLGBTQIAA+ communities, address ableism and inequities experienced by people living with disabilities, uproot systemic sexism, and rectify the digital divide to ensure that anyone in the country, despite where they live, can reach their full potential. These are ambitious goals and the full breadth of what needs to be done cannot be covered in this publication. However, the starting points we outline provide a direction for how we should be approaching the recovery for younger generations and beyond.





Tackling systemic racism and advancing Indigenous reconciliation

The past year and a half has forced a reckoning for Canada. Systemic anti-Black racism, the ongoing legacies of colonization experienced by Indigenous communities, and the treatment of diverse, racialized communities has been at the forefront of public discourse. Discussion on meaningful actions that should be taken to address these issues has been increasing.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action offer concrete steps forward, as do the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls 231 Calls to Justice.^{40,41} Immediate steps forward on these recommendations should be pursued and prioritized as part of Canada's efforts to support young people and recovery more broadly.

Furthermore, we need to understand if actions to address systemic racism are truly making a difference. This can be achieved through the collection and monitoring of disaggregated data that illuminates inequities and galvanizes institutions to act. This was the case in the City of Toronto, where Toronto Public Health reported that racialized communities were disproportionately infected with the COVID-19 virus.⁴² Furthermore, it was found that the COVID-19 infection rate was six to 11 times higher for Black and Latinx communities.⁴³ The evidence guided equitable approaches to the public health response and spurred the development of initiatives such as the Black Community COVID-19 Response Plan.⁴⁴

Black health leaders from the Alliance for Healthier Communities in Ontario also called for recommendations such as: declaring anti-Black racism a public health crisis, a strengthened Anti-Racism Directorate with a clearly articulated strategy to address systemic anti-Black racism, and provincial allocation of funds for culturally appropriate health and wellbeing support of Black communities.⁴⁵

Adopting recommendations that diverse Black, Indigenous and racialized communities have called for decades, tracking our collective progress, and reporting back to the broader society for ongoing refinement and course correction is critical to uprooting systemic racism and achieving reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

Another essential component to addressing systemic racism is to ensure our spaces of leadership and governance are inclusive and striving towards an anti-racism practice. Towards this aim, the recently announced 50-30 Challenge by the Government of Canada is welcome in its efforts to accelerate diversity in decision making.⁴⁶ In addition to its very specific goals of gender parity of 50% on boards and in senior management teams, as well as at least 30% representation of people from diverse equity-deserving communities on boards and senior management, we cannot forget generational equity.



**Supporting
2SLGBTQIAA+
Youth**

During the pandemic, we have seen 2SLGBTQIAA+ communities suffer disproportionately when it comes to their mental health. In a report by Egale Canada, they found that early on in the pandemic, 60% of 2SLGBTQIAA+ people faced decreased mental health and wellbeing compared to 42% of the general public.⁴⁷ This was compounded by negative economic experiences with 52% of Canada's 2SLGBTQIAA+ households experiencing layoffs and reduced employment compared to 39% of the general population.⁴⁸ Locked away from their social services and communities of support, and locked in with potentially unsupportive families, 2SLGBTQIAA+ youth have had alarming negative experiences.

Community groups and researchers such as members of the Canadian Coalition Against LGBTQ+ Poverty have been calling for recognition and actions to prevent 2SLGBTQIAA+ communities from experiencing poverty, including changes to the Canada's Employment Equity Act and targeted measures in the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy.⁴⁹

Right now, the Government of Canada is seeking input for the LGBTQ+ Action Plan. This is an important step forward to ensuring our communities and broader society is inclusive of the needs and experiences of 2SLGBTQIAA+ communities, especially 2SLGBTQIAA+ youth. Organizations such as the Enchanté Network and Wisdom2Action have been calling for robust funding and support for the 2SLGBTQIAA+ community serving sector.⁵⁰ In particular, they highlight the importance of core funding for community and social services and addressing chronic underfunding and limited access to financial support in the sector.



Ensuring Dignified Lives for People Living with Disabilities

People living with disabilities, who make up over one-fifth of the population in Canada, experience unique systemic barriers to accessing critical services and participating equally in society.⁵¹ This has been heightened during the pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, more than 50% of human rights complaints across levels of government have been related to disabilities highlighting pre-existing systemic barriers for people with disabilities.^{52,53}

Disability justice advocates and population health data sets have noted the increased risk of contracting COVID-19 for people living with disabilities, as well as the spillover effects from the pandemic on other economic, health, and social outcomes.^{54,55} More than 33% of people with disabilities or long-term conditions have experienced temporary or permanent job loss or reduced hours during the pandemic.⁵⁶ During the pandemic, people with disabilities with lower levels of education experienced greater rates of unemployment during the pandemic.⁵⁷ With respect to income, 45% of people with disabilities or long-term conditions reported only receiving non-employment sources of income and over half reported a decline in household income.⁵⁸

In addition, there has been a rise in gender-based violence, and women with disabilities are at further risk of experiencing this in their homes.^{59,60} Furthermore, women with disabilities are more likely to experience violent victimization compared to women without disabilities and this increases for women with disabilities who are racialized, younger, Indigenous, 2SLGBTQIAA+, migrant workers, immigrants, non-status migrants, and women living in rural communities.^{61,62}

Targeted support for income security, housing and employment is needed to ensure people living with disabilities, especially young people, are not left behind. The Canada Disability Benefit Act (Bill C-35) introduced in June 2021 is a positive step forward in building a disability-inclusive Canada.⁶³ This Act would contribute to reducing poverty and creating more quality jobs for persons with disabilities in Canada.



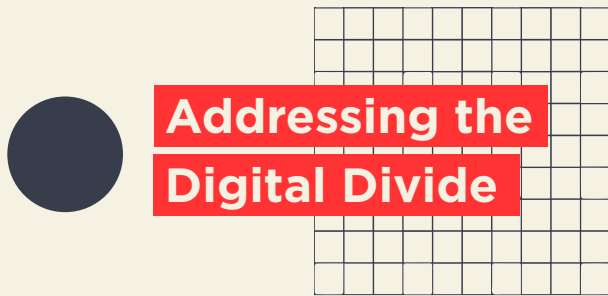
Uprooting

Systemic

Sexism

All the progress made over the last few decades to advance gender equity and inclusion in Canada's labour market and society risk being undone due to the gendered economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. We have seen women's labour market participation drop to the lowest levels since the 1980s, an increased demand for unpaid care work, and a devastating rise in gender-based violence.^{64,65,66,67} This has greatly impacted young women as well. For example, between February 2020 to January 2021, Gen Z women made up 2.5% of Canada's labour force but represented 17% of the total job losses.⁶⁸ YWCA Canada's work in partnership with the Institute for Gender and the Economy at the University of Toronto highlighted many approaches that could be taken to ensure an intersectional, feminist approach to pandemic response and recovery efforts.⁶⁹

In recent months, we have seen promising initiatives at the federal level through Budget 2021. These initiatives include a commitment to building a nation-wide early learning and child care system, a Taskforce on Women in the Economy, and funding for reskilling and training programs for women and other underrepresented communities.⁷⁰ Addressing gender-based violence requires systemic responses and a whole-of-government approach. Gender equity organizations such as Women's Shelters Canada and YWCA Canada have played an important role informing the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence.^{71,72} We look forward to seeing all these interventions implemented. We highlight the importance of adopting a robust intersectional generational equity lens to ensure that diverse communities and young people are not left behind.



Addressing the Digital Divide

Being connected online has now become a non-negotiable component of our COVID-19 era life. It is where we work, socialize, go to school, and spend much of our leisure time. However, the ability to access high quality, reliable, high-speed internet is inconsistent. Currently, 6% of Canadians do not have access to the internet, with two out of five people sharing that cost was the main barrier to access.⁷³ In rural communities, only approximately 45% have access to high-speed broadband internet.⁷⁴ Urgent action to address the digital divide is necessary to ensure harder to reach youth have access to the public services they need and deserve, as well as access to opportunities to grow, learn, and increase their capacity to contribute to Canadian society.

At the same time, the expanded reliance on web-based spaces for nearly every domain of our lives has also increased exposure to online harms like cyberbullying and hate speech online. Globally, the United Nations is reporting that online hate against minorities has increased, with women disproportionately bearing the brunt of these attacks.⁷⁵ Hate online is connected to and contributes to the skyrocketing rates of hate crimes in-person.⁷⁶ Economic recovery cannot thrive in a climate of hate, fear, and violence. Creating safer online spaces must be an integral component of our policy discussions on building a more inclusive post-pandemic society.⁷⁷ For example, a 2012 federal study found that the combined cost of domestic and sexual violence to Canada's GDP is \$8.4 billion per year.⁷⁸

To ensure safer spaces online, increased action needs to be taken by the federal government and social media companies to reduce, remove, and rectify hate online. A poll conducted by the Canadian Race Relations Foundation and Abacus Data earlier this year found that at least 60% of Canadians agree that the Government of Canada should put forward regulation to curb the spread of hateful speech online and 80% wanted social media companies to take down hate within 24 hours.⁷⁹





These issues and others not discussed in the scope of this report, should be examined further in pursuit of a more inclusive Canada that addresses the issues affecting young people in an intersectional manner. As a meaningful starting point to building an inclusive and equitable society, we have identified the following recommendations:

1.1

Make meaningful progress towards reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. This would require immediate action to implement the 94 Calls to Action in the Truth and Reconciliation Report and the 231 Calls to Justice in the Report for the National Inquiry Report into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. All sectors in society can contribute to this goal by identifying which of the Calls to Action and Calls to Justice could be addressed in their organizations, developing implementation plans, taking actions, and reporting on progress.

1.2

Create an Anti-Racism Act for Canada that gives a legislative foundation for the Anti-Racism Secretariat, which will receive ongoing, sustainable funding and resourcing. Ensure the Anti-Racism Act will name and address all forms of racism including anti-Arab racism, anti-Asian racism, anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism, Islamophobia, anti-Latinx racism, and antisemitism. Furthermore, develop and implement a National Action Plan Against Racism to accompany the national Anti-Racism Strategy, ensuring concrete strategies with actionable goals, expansion of disaggregated data that transitions away from the use of visible minorities to racialized identities with measurable targets, and timetables, and appropriate budgetary allocations.

1.3

Ensure community-based grassroots, non-profits, and charitable organizations that serve and represent marginalized communities can survive the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes providing predictable, stable and core funding for organizations led by and providing services to the 2SLGBTQIAA+ community, on reserve and urban Indigenous communities, people with disabilities, Black communities and other racialized groups, as well as women and gender-diverse people. Funding should also be made available to support ongoing efforts to support diversity, equity, and social inclusion on an organizational and structural level.

1.4

Advance public policy for recovery benefits for people living with disabilities and disability-related income support, such as the Canada Disability Benefit, which is grounded in the experiences of people living with or have lived with disability-related income supports.

1.5

Strengthen the federal Employment Equity Act by including protection on the basis of racialized identity, noting the specific impacts on Black and Indigenous communities. Ensure protection on the basis of gender expression, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

1.6

Attach employment equity measures through community benefits agreements on all federal investment and recovery programs, to ensure Black, Indigenous, racialized communities, 2SLGBTQIAA+ communities, people with disabilities, and other underrepresented groups have equitable access to any new jobs created.

1.6

Secure universal access to high speed, high quality internet across Canada. The focus should be on improving access in rural, Northern and remote communities by 2025.

2

Promoting Meaningful Employment for Young People

Stable and meaningful employment fosters independence, encourages community contribution, leads to financial stability, and improves other health and wellbeing outcomes for young people. The COVID-19 pandemic and changing restrictions, however, have dramatically disrupted Canada's labour market. In March 2020, Canada lost over one million jobs.⁸⁰ While all Canadians were impacted, the concentration of these losses disproportionately impacted young people who are more likely to hold low-wage, temporary, and less secure jobs in severely affected industries, such as accommodation, food services, and retail.⁸¹



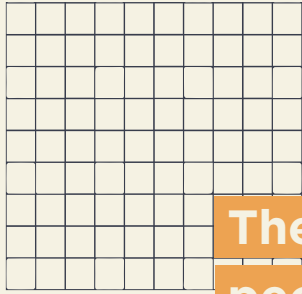


Promoting Meaningful Employment for Young People

Youth are the most vulnerable to economic shocks like COVID-19 because they are often the “last in and first out.”⁸² At the start of the pandemic, the employment rate of young people, ages 20 to 24, fell by over 22%, compared to 9.2% nationally.⁸³ Furthermore, the rate of young people (ages 15 to 29) not in employment, education, and training (NEET) in Canada rose to 24% in March and April 2020 compared to 12% before the pandemic hit, representing the highest rate measured in the past 20 years.⁸⁴ Statistics Canada reported that among Canadians ages 20 to 29, the increase in NEET rates during the first few months of the pandemic was mostly caused by a decline in employment.⁸⁵

While some progress has been made to restore the workforce, young people continue to be affected. Statistics Canada’s Labour Force Survey from May 2021 showed that the number of young people ages 15 to 24 participating in the labour force that are either employed or unemployed, fell by 1.3%.⁸⁶ One explanation for this phenomenon could be that fewer students are entering the summer job market — between the school year from May to August — compared to a typical month of May, pre-pandemic.⁸⁷ Although youth work in every sector of the Canadian economy, young people are more likely to be working in retail, food services, culture and recreation, and accommodation sectors.⁸⁸ These sectors were among the hardest hit during the pandemic due to lockdown and stay-at-home orders which have restricted or prohibited in-person experiences, creating challenging labour market conditions and contributing to a lag in employment gains for young people today.

The challenges with finding and maintaining meaningful employment are not new to Canada’s youth. Before the health crisis, young people were faced with a changing job market, an increase in casual, part-time, and temporary work. These jobs often lacked benefits, income stability, and job security.⁸⁹ Furthermore, young people have faced a decrease in real wages and an increase in employment precarity at a time when the labour market requires that they have higher levels of education. Previous crises, such as the 2008 recession, have also contributed to the increased competition for jobs, often requiring challenging minimum qualifications such as advanced degrees for entry-level jobs.⁹⁰ These difficulties have only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.



The experience of all young people during the pandemic has not been equal

The COVID-19 pandemic has also compounded inequalities between young people. For instance, a Statistics Canada survey from June 2020 highlighted that over half of young participants with a long-term condition or disability reported being employed prior to the pandemic, compared to 39% who reported being employed at the time of the survey.⁹¹ People with certain disabilities are more likely to have an underlying medical condition that may put them at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19 and unable to work outside their home.⁹² Wearing a mask was acknowledged in a recent Canadian Council for Youth Prosperity publication as one example of a barrier to employment during the pandemic for young people with disabilities, a group that historically faces lower rates of employment than those without disabilities.⁹³

The unemployment rate for racialized youth reached 25% in May 2021, compared to 15% for young Canadians who are not members of a visible minority group.⁹⁴ Additionally, young Black men were nearly twice as likely to not be in employment, education, and training compared to other young men during the onset of the pandemic.⁹⁵ This can be understood as part of the ongoing experiences of anti-Black racism and discrimination in the workplace.⁹⁶ The unemployment rate among Indigenous youth living off reserves was 26% in the three months ending in August 2020, and up 11% compared to the same period in 2019.⁹⁷ This is troubling as 25% of Indigenous peoples in Canada are youth.⁹⁸

Finally, the labour force participation for young women fell by 4.7% in May 2021, compared to 1.6% for young men.⁹⁹ As reported by RBC Economics, Gen Z women make up just 2.5% of the labour market force in Canada yet represent 17% of total job losses.¹⁰⁰ This discrepancy could be due to the fact that women, especially young women, work in the sectors most disrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic coupled with the increase of unpaid care responsibilities such as child care, care for siblings, and care for elderly parents.^{101,102}

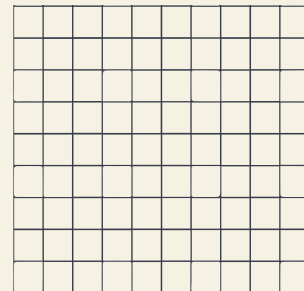
Marginalized youth have experienced heightened impacts to their employment and require targeted solutions during post-pandemic recovery in order to meet their unique needs and circumstances.



Spotlight on disruptions to education and training caused by COVID-19

While this section is focused on labour force participation for young people, it is important to note the significant disruptions in education and training opportunities for young people caused by COVID-19. The pandemic shuttered schools in spring 2020, and many students experienced a disconnected and disjointed school year in 2021 with several abrupt pivots back and forth between in-person and online learning. In Canada, this was especially disruptive and had mental health implications for international students.¹⁰³ According to the ILO, half of young students reported a likely delay in the completion of their current studies, while 10% expect to be unable to complete them at all.¹⁰⁴ Recent immigrant youth, Indigenous youth, youth with disabilities, and youth in rural and remote communities faced additional barriers.¹⁰⁵ For instance, YMCA program leads have shared that the transition to online training and employment service and training delivery during COVID-19 has posed a significant barrier for immigrant youth, neurodiverse and differently abled youth, and youth living in rural and remote communities. For example, they face barriers such as not having access to reliable internet, technology or have limited literacy skills or additional challenges with navigating digital platforms.

The impact of the disruption in education will have an impact on employment readiness and access to meaningful work for young people. This issue should be closely monitored, studied, and immediately addressed. Furthermore, supports that address barriers to education and training opportunities, such as financial barriers which have been exacerbated by unemployment in the pandemic, should also be implemented. This is essential to ensuring young people have opportunities to develop their skills and secure meaningful employment opportunities in the field of their choice.





Supporting young people through past, present, and future economic shocks

Due to job losses and the resulting loss of income, as well as disruptions in education and training, young people are more likely to face delays on their path to financial independence, fall into poverty, have negative mental health outcomes, and experience enduring effects on their employment and job prospects. For many young people, this is the second major economic crisis that has occurred in their lifetime. More than a decade after the 2008 financial crisis, youth unemployment rates across OECD countries remain above pre-crisis levels.¹⁰⁶ This demonstrates the long-lasting impact that economic shocks have not only on the current youth cohort but also future generations.¹⁰⁷ Lastly, periods of inactivity and unemployment in early adulthood have also been shown to have lasting negative effects on future employment prospects and earnings.¹⁰⁸

Young people have disproportionately experienced recent disruptions to Canada's labour market and will also shoulder much of the pandemic's long-term economic and social consequences. Therefore, we must help young people gain the skills and experiences they need to secure meaningful employment and build careers as part of our groundwork for Canada's economic recovery. Canada must provide comprehensive policy solutions that help to prevent long-lasting harm on employment, skills development, and earnings for young people following COVID-19. This should include both immediate solutions that help young workers re-enter the labour force today, such as job programs and skills development services targeting young people, as well as long-term policies that promote resiliency in youth employment.

Initiatives launched in response to COVID-19 including greater flexibility to the Canada Summer Jobs Program and increased funding under the Youth Employment and Skills

Strategy implemented by the Government of Canada have been positive.¹⁰⁹ A promising example of this is the YWCA Launch Atlantic program, a virtual 19-week paid placement and employment skills training program for young women and non-binary youth under 30 which also comes complete with access to digital devices.¹¹⁰ There is an emphasis on supporting young people experiencing different barriers such as youth who did not complete high school, living with disability, identify as Indigenous or racialized, single parents, living in a remote area, experiencing language barriers or are recent immigrants.

Internationally, the European Union's Youth Guarantee commitment helps bring young people into employment and training by ensuring they receive a good quality offer of employment, education and training, or apprenticeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving education.¹¹¹ This has also shown to be a comprehensive and prompt intervention to protect young people from long-term labour market exclusion and promote employment recovery.^{112,113}

For young people facing multiple barriers, including young women with children, Indigenous youth, youth with disabilities, and racialized young people, and youth living in rural and remote communities, access to wrap-around supports would have a positive impact on their ability to secure quality employment or pursue skills training opportunities. The YMCA, YWCA, and other youth-serving organizations offer youth employment programming as part of a larger suite of wrap-around services and a 'no wrong door' approach. By removing the need to travel to multiple service providers, young people increase their trust, their skills, and their connections which leads to positive outcomes.



All young people in Canada should have access to the experiences, skills, and support they need to secure meaningful employment and fulfill their career aspirations. To support this, we have identified the following recommendations:

2.1

Evolve the Canada Summer Jobs Program to a Canada Youth Jobs Program. This could be achieved by making the program flexibilities implemented in response to COVID-19 permanent, including offering job placements with adequate compensation for young people ages 15 to 30, year-round.

2.2

Increase funding for the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy and ensure youth have access to high-quality jobs and are prepared for jobs of the future. As part of this, support initiatives and innovative pilots that provide young people with on-the-job experience, as well as pre-employment and training supports, and access to wrap-around services (i.e., access to mental health support, transportation, and child care). This should also include targeted funding and dedicated programs to support youth experiencing additional, and unique barriers and marginalization in the labour market, such as: young women and gender-diverse youth; Black, Indigenous, and racialized youth; youth living with disabilities; and newcomer youth.

2.3

Incorporate youth recruitment initiatives in national and sub-national workforce strategies. For instance, for sectors experiencing a significant labour shortage such as the early learning and child care sector, initiatives to recruit and retain young people in these critical jobs, such as Early Childhood Educators, should be included and funded as part of comprehensive workforce strategies.

2.4

Explore establishing an employment and training Youth Guarantee policy for Canada. This would include a guarantee that all young people in Canada 30 years old and under are provided with a quality offer of employment or education and training within 16 weeks of leaving their job or schooling.

2.5

Lower the uniform national eligibility requirement of Employment Insurance to 360 hours and increase the benefit rate from 55% to 85% of earnings for low-income earners.

3

Ensuring Housing for All

Access to a safe and secure place to live is a key determinant of health and central to the foundation every young person needs to be able to grow and thrive. At the onset of the pandemic, when lockdown measures were first introduced, the most common refrain was, to remain safe from COVID-19, we must 'stay at home.' This made the assumption that everyone had access to a safe and affordable place to live. Sadly, that is not the case for everyone.





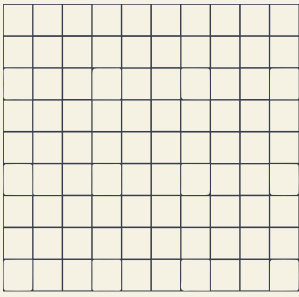
Ensuring Housing for All

In Canada, more than 235,000 people experience homelessness every year with upwards of 35,000 people experiencing homelessness on any given night.^{114,115} These numbers are likely an underestimation as measures to track homelessness do not fully capture the more hidden forms of homelessness such as ‘couch surfing’ — switching between temporary housing arrangements — something 2SLGBTQIAA+ communities, Black, Indigenous and racialized communities, newcomers, people living with disabilities, cis and trans women and gender diverse people, and young people may have to resort to more often for a whole host of reasons.¹¹⁶

When it comes to young people, there are between 35,000 to 40,000 youth who experience homelessness every year.¹¹⁷ Over one third of young people experiencing homelessness in Canada are from Ontario.¹¹⁸ Youth homelessness is also not just an urban issue, rural young people experience it as well.¹¹⁹ Homelessness also creates additional vulnerabilities. For instance, recent reports highlighted that 37% of homeless young women and over 35% of homeless 2SLGBTQIAA+ youth have experienced sexual assault.¹²⁰

Housing and shelter service providers, such as the YMCA and YWCA, have also reported that complex needs among those seeking their services were increasing prior to the pandemic. This included clients requiring mental health challenges and addiction services, post-trauma support, and skills development in order to secure and maintain housing.

With the economic situation looking bleak for Canadians with many missing rent and mortgage payments, as well as a rise in gender-based violence, more people were likely pushed into homelessness adding to increased demands on shelters that were already stretched thin before the pandemic.^{121,122} Within this context, we have seen an increase in encampments in communities around the country, as well as soaring ‘hidden homelessness.’^{123,124,125,126} While homelessness has worsened as the COVID-19 pandemic continues — so has the housing unaffordability crisis in Canada.



Housing insecurity top of mind with little relief in sight

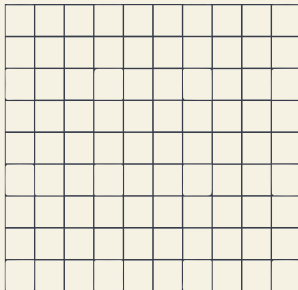
Before the pandemic, rising rents, a ballooning housing market, and the increasing likelihood of young people employed in precarious working conditions with modest pay, limited benefits, and a lack of job security made having an affordable place to live a very real anxiety and cause for concern.¹²⁷ With the onset of the pandemic, young people faced blows to their earnings with many likely to be the first ones to lose pay or be laid-off.¹²⁸ Estimates show that 1.5 million Canadian residents moved back into their parents' home during the pandemic in the face of untenable economic realities.¹²⁹

Despite the recognition of how crucial housing is to stay safe from COVID-19, there was limited support to keep people housed with some short-lived measures in some provinces like rent relief, mortgage deferrals, and eviction moratoriums.¹³⁰ Renters and homeowners are finding it increasingly difficult to keep up with rent and mortgage payments contributing to fears of COVID-19-related evictions.^{131,132,133} Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives researcher Ricardo Tranjan found that almost half of Canada's 3.5 million renting households have less than a month's worth of rent saved up.¹³⁴ Recent data from the Canadian Housing and Mortgage Corporation confirms as much — it revealed that 6% of rental units accumulated arrears between October 2019 to October 2020.¹³⁵





Home ownership becoming more and more unlikely for young people



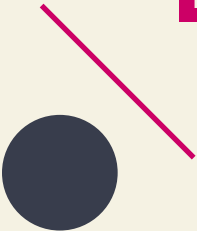
Paul Kershaw, a University of British Columbia professor and founder of Generation Squeeze, has talked about how housing appears to be at the ‘epicentre of generational tensions.’¹³⁶ That is likely due to home ownership increasingly becoming further out of reach for young people, with the pandemic placing an even darker cloud on this dream. According to a recent poll by RBC, over a third of non-home owners under 40 have said they have given up on ever owning a home.¹³⁷

Even before the pandemic, young people were feeling the brunt of the housing unaffordability crisis in Canada. In 2016, only 44% of residents 34 and under were homeowners compared to 63% of Canadian households.¹³⁸ In some respects, this is to be expected given that household income typically increases as people get older, gain more work experience, and attain more senior roles in their industry. However, a recent study found that the rate of ownership for Millennials is much lower compared to Boomers at their age several decades ago. Specifically, the analysis found that in 2016, only approximately 50% of Millennials were homeowners at 30 compared to Boomers in 1981, who had home ownership closer to 55%.¹³⁹ While a modest gap, it does point to a downward trend of home ownership for younger generations.

House prices are escalating at an alarming rate due to limited supply, surging demand, and the rise of speculative investment in the housing market. At the same time, salaries have stagnated and are not climbing as quickly. This is making saving for a down payment nearly impossible. Analysis from Generation Squeeze found that it takes an average young person 13 years to save for a 20% down payment compared to five years back for a young person in 1976.¹⁴⁰

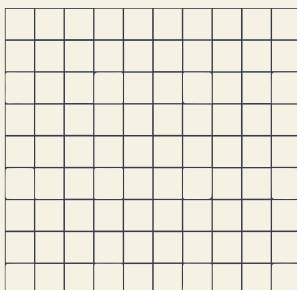
Accessible stable housing

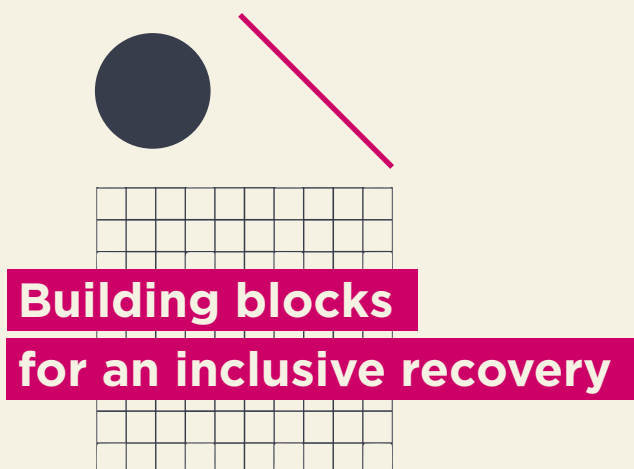
is fundamental for Canada's recovery



Homelessness, especially youth homelessness, and the housing unaffordability crisis are complex issues influenced by a range of factors such as systemic oppression, mental health challenges, unemployment, intergenerational trauma, adverse childhood experiences, limited housing supply, weak tenant protections, and the financialization of the housing market just to name a few. Within this brief discussion, we cannot adequately describe all of these issues in their full complexity; however, it is clear that for Canadian youth to recover from this pandemic, ensuring stable housing for all must be of paramount concern. Furthermore, for young people with complex needs living in homelessness or precarious housing, further wrap-around supports — such as mental health and addiction services — must be made available to adequately support their transition into stable housing.

There is no silver bullet. A multi-pronged strategy that addresses housing unaffordability and homelessness with short-term and long-term solutions is necessary. Canada needs a range of approaches simultaneously like tackling unaffordable rents, increasing housing supply, especially non-profit and co-op stock, reducing speculative demand and the financialization of housing, making it easier for first-time home-buyers to enter the market, and ensuring the recognition and enforcement of housing as a human right.





While the rise in homelessness and housing unaffordability is of great concern, there have been some promising approaches advocated for in Canada and internationally that provide promising steps forwards.

First, there must be a recognition that housing is a fundamental human right. In the Government of Canada's 2017 National Housing Strategy, it asserts that is the case. The strategy commits to the progressive implementation of the right to housing. The 10-year plan is backed with over \$40 billion dollars in investments aims to end chronic homelessness and increase the affordability, availability, and quality of housing in Canada.¹⁴¹

Across the country, dedicated housing programs help youth transition from temporary housing into stable secure housing. For example, the YMCA of Greater Toronto's Sprott House is Toronto's first and Canada's largest housing program for 2SLGBTQIAA+ youth ages 16 to 24, opened in 2016 in response to urgent community needs.¹⁴² YWCA St. Thomas Elgin provides supportive housing for young people who are paired with youth living in the community along with a case manager.

The goal is to improve their housing stability and create opportunities for education, employment, positive social relationships, family reunification, and improved health and wellbeing.¹⁴³ A recent evaluation found that their tailored youth homelessness protocol was successful and 82% of youth were able to transition to stable housing post-programming.¹⁴⁴

Given the success of such targeted initiatives, it is critical that housing investments also expand, maintain, and repair existing supply of supportive and transitional housing — especially dedicated housing for Black, Indigenous, and racialized young people, young people with disabilities, young women, and 2SLGBTQIAA+ and gender diverse youth.

Rising rents in an economy that has been devastated by pandemic-induced lockdown means that rent relief is an urgent and necessary need. That is why measures like rent forgiveness and a national moratorium on evictions would provide immediate aid.^{145,146} In the long-term, we need to cool the housing market by addressing its commodification by taking speculative investments out of the equation. That addresses the demand side that has been driving the skyrocketing prices of homes.

At the same time, we need to build housing stock in this country at a level not seen since the 1970s. This means supporting the creation of non-market housing such as non-profit and co-op housing. We shouldn't ignore the very real need to repair the social housing backlog and upgrade existing stock through housing retrofits. This is also an opportunity to create co-benefits through the creation of new jobs to hire workers who were affected by the economic shutdown. It also means exploring new and interesting ways of increasing access to affordable housing such as intergenerational co-housing models, like the initiative out of McMaster University which connects seniors and students in a mutually beneficial housing relationship.¹⁴⁷

With the post-pandemic recovery, we have the opportunity to finally realize the right to housing for all, which will benefit not only younger generations but ultimately serve the whole of society.



To ensure housing for all and ensure young people aren't locked away from accessing safe and affordable housing, we recommend the following:

3.1

Commit to eliminating chronic homelessness in Canada and provide appropriate resourcing to support community-based organizations and other entities delivering prevention, rehabilitation, and transitional housing programming, services, and supports.

3.2

Ensure the 33% carve out for gender-responsive investments in the National Housing Strategy is fully rolled out and there is a public accounting of how funds were allocated, as well as provide local housing authorities directions and a mandate on investing through a gender-responsive lens.

3.3

Rapidly update existing and build new safe and secure housing for young people across the continuum. This includes high-quality transitional, permanent, supportive, and affordable housing (such as non-profit and co-operative) units which includes building at least 100,000 units of social housing and 500,000 units of non-market, co-op, and non-profit housing within 10 years. For young people with complex needs, wrap-around services should be accessible and adequately resourced as part of housing.

3.4

Implement an urban, rural, and Northern Indigenous housing strategy. The strategy should contain both dedicated investments and an Indigenous-led governance structure. It should also have an explicit focus on the housing needs of Indigenous youth.

3.5

Expand the temporary rental assistance for low-income households with a dedicated carve out for young people experiencing a core housing need with an explicit focus on young cis and trans women, and gender diverse youth.

3.6

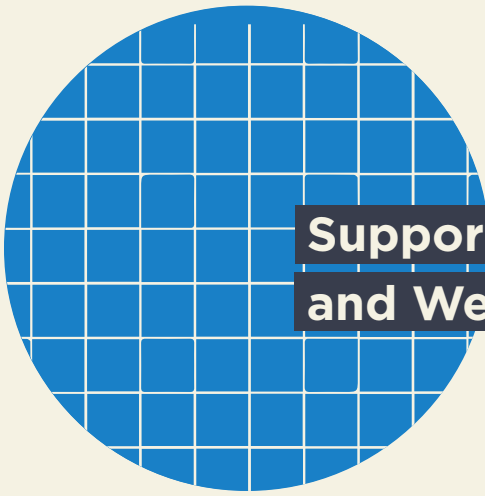
Explore co-benefit programs that pair improvements and expansions of the non-market and market housing stock in Canada alongside measures to increase youth employment and reduce greenhouse gas emissions from housing through the implementation of energy efficiency retrofits.

4

Supporting Mental Health and Wellbeing

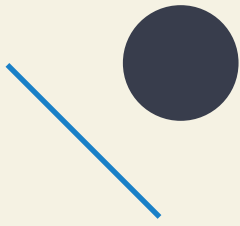
As Canada's Youth Policy clearly puts it, when young people are physically, mentally, and emotionally well, they are better equipped to handle life's challenges and opportunities.¹⁴⁸ Overall health is important to young people in Canada. However, mental health has long been one of their top priorities. A 2019 national public opinion survey of youth (ages 15 to 30) conducted by Abacus Data found that mental health was among the top three priority issues for young people, out of a list of 22.¹⁴⁹ Young people have been leading the charge to destigmatize mental illness, prioritize positive mental health in their lives and in society, and advocate for accessible, high-quality services close to home.





Supporting Mental Health and Wellbeing

Today, amid a global pandemic, Canada's youth are sounding these calls for action given the toll of COVID-19 on their mental health. Youth are facing job loss and loss of income, disruptions in their education, isolation, loss of recreational opportunities, illness or loss of loved ones, and uncertainty about the future.¹⁵⁰ Young people employed as frontline workers are also affected by the potential exposure to COVID-19 and the threat of catching the virus. This is especially true for young people living in multi-generational households. In addition to COVID-19, systemic racism and discrimination against racialized communities, including Black, Indigenous, and Asian communities in Canada and around the world, have negatively impacted young people's mental health. Stress, anxiety, loneliness, and depression have increased among youth in Canada, negatively impacting their emotional wellbeing and overall health.



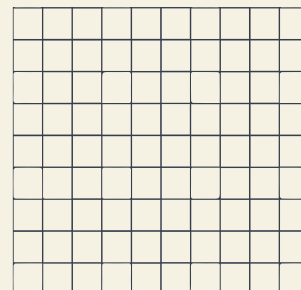
Young people are experiencing high rates of anxiety and negative effects on their wellbeing

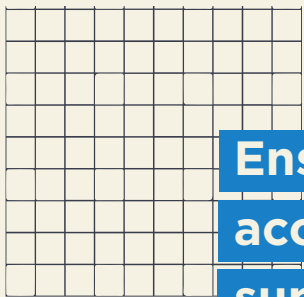
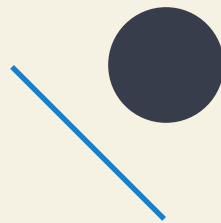
According to the most recent report card from UNICEF Innocenti, Canada ranked 28th out of 38 peer countries in life satisfaction for youth under 18 before the pandemic.¹⁵¹ Between 2018 and June 2020, young people in Canada, ages 15 to 30, reported the lowest average life satisfaction of all the age groups.¹⁵² More recently it was found that two in five (40%) of young people between ages 18 and 29 say their mental health is fair or poor.¹⁵³

The situation among young women is even more concerning. One in two (51%) of young women say their mental health is fair or poor, compared to 27% of young men.¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, as a research report produced by The Trevor Project strongly puts, for many 2SLGBTQIAA+ youth, their future may burn brighter than their present; however, COVID-19 can make the future less certain and more distant.¹⁵⁵

Indigenous youth are at increased risk of poor mental health with approximately 11% of off-reserve First Nations youth and approximately 8% of Métis youth disclosing experiencing a mood disorder.¹⁵⁶ Statistics Canada is also reporting that Indigenous youth experience higher rates of suicide compared to non-Indigenous youth.¹⁵⁷ Legacies of colonization, intergenerational trauma, ongoing marginalization, and systemic racism contribute to mental health challenges faced by Indigenous youth.

Lockdowns and stay-at-home orders have also exacerbated instances of hate and violence in many communities. In April 2020, federal government officials reported a 20% to 30% increase in domestic violence rates in regions across the country.¹⁵⁸ Referred to as the “shadow pandemic” by the United Nations, those living in rural and remote areas, Indigenous women, Black women, women with disabilities, women of colour, gender non-binary, and 2SLGBTQIAA+ people are at the highest risk of gender-based violence.¹⁵⁹ According to a report by the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice & Accountability, 160 women were killed in Canada in 2020.¹⁶⁰ In Quebec, there has been a tragic rapid increase in gender-based violence since January 2021 and reports of survivors increasingly being younger women. There has been a rapid increase in the number of women killed by their partners and latest numbers point to at least 10 femicides in Quebec this year.¹⁶¹ Online hate and cyberviolence have also emerged as an extension of violence against women during the pandemic that is rooted in inequality.¹⁶²





Ensuring youth have access to mental health supports, when and where they need it

Young people are looking for support in order to cope with the challenges they are experiencing. Last year alone, the Kids Help Phone 24/7 hotline experienced a 100% increase in usage, with 4 million calls and texts made by young Canadians compared to 1.9 million in 2019.¹⁶³ Furthermore, young people also reported that since the onset of the pandemic it is harder to access mental health support, especially in-person services.¹⁶⁴ This is especially true for young people who have limited access to the necessary technology in order to access virtual services when in-person services have been restricted.

Challenges with access to mental health support are not new or due to the pandemic alone. Children’s Mental Health Ontario released wait time data that showed 28,000 youth (18 years and younger) in Ontario were waiting for mental health and addiction services in January 2020 and wait time dramatically differed from region to region.¹⁶⁵ Some youth are able to access same-day or walk-in services, while others wait between two-months and 2.5 years for services, with youth that require intensive treatment programs to support severe or complex mental health issues often waiting the longest.¹⁶⁶ For young people to recover and become more resilient, we must protect their wellbeing and promote positive mental health. To achieve this, increased access to programs and services that support young people experiencing mental health challenges, both when and where they need it, is critical. This is especially true among vulnerable populations such as Indigenous youth and youth experiencing homelessness who are more likely to have a pre-existing mental health challenge and are less likely to access services due to multiple barriers.

Data from the United States shows that racialized youth are approximately 50% less likely to seek mental health support due to structural barriers such as service shortages close to home or culturally-specific reluctance.¹⁶⁷ Black Canadians experience similar structural and individual barriers to accessing mental health services including lack of mental health services in predominantly Black neighborhoods, lack of trust in the health system based on previous experiences of racism, financial barriers, and limited culturally appropriate health services.¹⁶⁸

Investments to support and expand vital services such as the Kids Help Phone hotline, and to support the mental health of those most affected by COVID-19 are applauded. It is essential that we build upon these investments and put in place a mental health solution that works for young people, especially youth from diverse backgrounds. It is also key to maintain existing services in communities facing increased demand and fewer resources during COVID-19. This includes greater investments in community-based prevention and early intervention programs and services that support positive mental health outcomes.

For example, the Y Mind program was created by the YMCA of Greater Vancouver in response to strong community demand for mental health support for young people. Y Mind is a free seven-week mental wellness program led by trained mental health professionals that supports young people ages 18 to 30 who are experiencing symptoms of anxiety to learn and practice evidence-based strategies for coping.¹⁶⁹ Through the program, participants also receive a YMCA membership and are able to access other programs and services that promote positive health and wellness. In 2017, this program was expanded to Mind Medicine, a culturally-adaptive iteration of the program delivered to better support Indigenous youth. This was developed in partnership with Indigenous communities in British Columbia.

Another resource is the mental health hotline organized by Naseeha, a culturally relevant resource that is responsive to the needs of Muslim youth and racialized communities.¹⁷⁰ The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health's Substance Abuse Program for African Canadian and Caribbean Youth offers culturally competent care to youth and their families experiencing mental health and substance use challenges.¹⁷¹ Finally, the Grand Prairie Friendship Centre's Pikiskwetan Let's Talk program launched during the pandemic is a free, virtual mental health program designed to help members of the community to stay connected and address potential mental health and addictions challenges.¹⁷²

The OECD acknowledges youth centres are well-placed to provide integrated mental health support for young people, and adequately address problems with access and system fragmentation given their reach and ability to deliver wrap-around support.¹⁷³ For example, in Australia, headspace centres provide integrated support to 100,000 young people ages 12 to 25 each year with an emphasis on mental health interventions.¹⁷⁴ Additionally, the Government of Finland is expanding its programming to provide low-threshold psychosocial support through one-stop youth centres.¹⁷⁵

Access to training that helps employers, managers, and program leaders provide the initial support to a young person who may be developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis should be identified and supported. The Mental Health First Aid program offered by the Mental Health Commission of Canada is an example of an effective program that has trained more than 400,000 Canadians since 2007 and is active in 25 countries.¹⁷⁶

Lastly, the mental health benefits of physical activity, adequate sleep, a healthy diet, supportive relationships, and feelings of belonging are extensive and well established. A recent study out of McMaster University highlights the importance of physical activity in mental health during COVID-19. The study found that individuals who were able to maintain their physical activity levels during the pandemic experienced stress relief and anxiety reductions, compared to those whose physical activity declined the most during the pandemic who experienced worse mental health outcomes.¹⁷⁷ Investments to support Canada's active recovery and removing barriers to physical activity and participation in sport programming in the federal Budget 2021 will play a critical role in supporting positive mental health for young people. This opportunity and others that aim to integrate mental health strategies in recovery, sustainability, and resiliency initiatives should also be identified and pursued.



To ensure all young people have access to the support they need to be mentally well, we have identified the following recommendations:

4.1

Establish and invest in a Youth Mental Health Recovery Plan with clearly defined goals. Design the strategy with input from young people and focus on targeted investments and interventions that promote positive mental health and wellbeing for young people in Canada as part of Canada's COVID-19 recovery.

4.2

Expand mental health funding and increase capacity for community organizations to provide mental health and wellness programs and services to young people. This includes increased funding to allow youth-serving community organizations to innovate and expand existing programs that support positive mental health outcomes for young people. Provide dedicated funding to increase availability of community or culturally specific mental health supports for young people that recognizes historical and systemic oppression faced by Black, Indigenous, 2SLGBTQIAA+, and marginalized communities.

4.3

Integrate mental health service funding in other programs and services. Eliminate siloed grants and invest in mental health as a wrap-around service in areas such as housing programs, employment services, and settlement services. This would better support the complex needs and challenges of all young people.

4.4

Provide access to funding to support the delivery of mental health first aid training for Canadian employers and service providers that work with young people.

5

Investing in Youth Leadership

Prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, young people have demonstrated significant leadership and have been on the forefront of pandemic relief, response, and recovery initiatives — despite their economic and social challenges. Young people have organized mutual aid networks to provide marginalized communities with essential supplies, created compelling social media content to raise awareness and understanding about COVID-19 symptoms and physical distancing measures, volunteered for community outreach efforts to support equitable access to life-saving vaccines, and engaged in policy advocacy to ensure no one gets left behind in pandemic recovery efforts. Young people are sometimes seen as passive beneficiaries of programs and services, but the COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced the incredible ability of young people to lead, advocate, and be active agents of systemic change. We must prioritize, support, and foster youth leadership.





Investing in Youth Leadership

When provided the support and environment they need to succeed, young people can accelerate their contributions and maximize their impact. During the pandemic we saw promising initiatives to invest in youth leadership such as the Big 6 Initiative by the World Health Organization and the United Nations Foundation.¹⁷⁸ One of the activities of the Big 6 Initiative is to directly fund young people's efforts to advance an inclusive post-pandemic recovery with youth leading funding decisions. Similar initiatives should be explored and implemented in Canada.

Beyond public policy, young people should also be involved in decisions about their lives and be consulted at the design phase of programs, services, and strategies. This is especially the case for reaching young people who are furthest from opportunity and experiencing the greatest form of marginalization.

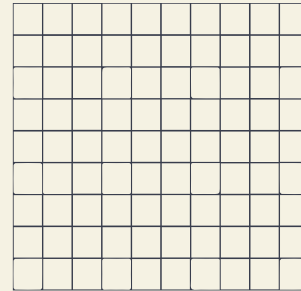
A recent report from Statistics Canada found that Gen Z had one of the highest rates of formal volunteering engagement coming into the pandemic at 54%.¹⁷⁹ Young people ages 15 to 30 contribute nearly one-fourth of the volunteer hours in Canada.¹⁸⁰ Furthermore, Gen Z and Millennials have the two highest rates of informal volunteering coming into the pandemic as well.¹⁸¹ We have seen similar reporting coming from other G7 nations such as the United Kingdom which found that young people have participated in mass volunteering during the pandemic (e.g., in mutual aid network and supporting vaccine clinics), and much more so when compared to other generations.¹⁸² We have even seen young people put themselves on the line by volunteering for COVID-19 clinical research trials to support vaccine development.¹⁸³

Emerging solutions and promising practices



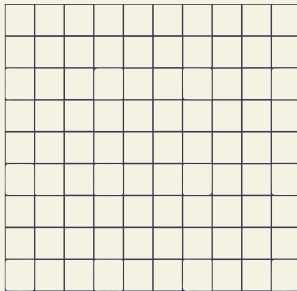
Young people under the age of 30 represent over half of the world's population.¹⁸⁴ However, they are not often seen in positions of leadership or hold limited influence over matters that affect their lives directly. This is a missed opportunity to empower young people, and include their unique experiences into decision making, which would support better public policy, program delivery, and organizational practices. Similar to other forms of diversity, generational diversity in decision-making and leadership can unlock new ways of addressing long-standing challenges and can contribute to team performance.¹⁸⁵ Researchers from the University of Waterloo have published compelling analysis demonstrating that organizations that can effectively engage young people can become more innovative.¹⁸⁶

Furthermore, organizations have introduced policies and advisory committees to ensure youth influence at the highest levels of decision making. For example, YWCA Canada has a policy that at least 25% of its board members must be 30 years old or younger as outlined in its requirements to be part of the World YWCA federation.¹⁸⁷ YMCA Canada's by-laws include provisions for youth representation at the National Council of YMCAs. Each YMCA Member Association has three members on its voting delegation at National Council which includes an appointed young leader, between the age of majority and 30 years old.



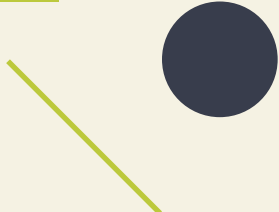
U-Report is a platform developed by UNICEF to gather youth voices and perspectives on issues they care about, understand how different groups of youth are affected by decisions, and include youth in decision-making to influence positive change. In Canada, U-Report engages youth between the ages of 13 and 24, and continues to evolve to reach youth further from opportunities.¹⁸⁸ Other innovative examples of supporting youth leadership includes empowering young women to participate in governance through G(irls)20's Girls on Boards initiative and Young Diplomats of Canada's efforts to ensure youth participation in global policy making by providing opportunities for youth delegations to participate in international forums such as in G7 and G20.^{189,190} The Assembly of Seven Generations is an Indigenous-owned and youth-led non-profit that provides culturally-responsive emergency relief services and capacity building programming, as well as engages in policy advocacy among other activities.¹⁹¹

The Urban Alliance for Race Relations has been pivotal in training the next generation of municipal politics and policy leaders by creating a municipal civic engagement Diverse Youth Fellowship program that involves comprehensive training and paid job placement in a City Councillor's office. To date, the organization has established fellowship programs for Muslim youth, Black youth, Tamil youth, and Filipino youth.¹⁹²



We need to also invest in young people's leadership beyond traditional arenas of leadership such as in diplomacy and public policy. For example, CivicAction's Emerging Leaders Network facilitates professional development opportunities and networking events for young people to develop their skills and capacity to contribute to city-building and social development initiatives in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Region. Additionally, CivicAction's DiverseCity Fellowship is another example of building the leadership capacities of high-potential change agents and opportunities to bridge youth to new opportunities and experiences.¹⁹³

Post-pandemic recovery through a generational equity lens



Canada has a strong foundation with which to work with to ensure a generational equity lens on all pandemic relief, response, and recovery measures. In 2020, the Government of Canada established a National Youth Policy.¹⁹⁴ As a result of this policy, the Government is expected to release a report every four years tracking progress on six priority areas contained in the policy such as Leadership and Impact; Health and Wellness; Innovation, Skills and Learning; Employment; Truth and Reconciliation; and Environment and Climate Action. Given the dramatic changes that are taking place in the economy and broader society due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other pressing challenges, reduce the reporting to every two years. Furthermore, leveraging examples such as UNICEF Canada's Index on Child and Youth Wellbeing.¹⁹⁵

On a last note, we need to ensure that any measures to centre youth in decision making does not result in tokenism. We need the authentic, meaningful, and genuine participation of young people in the discussion and decisions that affect their lives. The importance of youth leadership in public policy matters have been articulated above, but this generational equity lens should extend to every domain where young people's lives can be impacted. It should be incorporated into decision making practices today and tomorrow. To build back better, we cannot forget the needs and diverse experiences of youth in Canada's post-pandemic recovery efforts.



To that end, we outline the following recommendations:

5.1

Expand the leadership role of the Prime Minister's Youth Council to support a youth pandemic recovery response for Canada. These efforts would include providing public perspectives and recommendations to the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister and ensure a generational lens is applied to decision making and promote broad awareness and government accountability. Ongoing efforts should also be made to ensure the Council is composed of youth up to the age of 30, with cross-sectoral intersectional representation from all regions of Canada and inclusive of young people with a diversity of lived experiences. Finally, the application process should be evaluated regularly to identify and address barriers for harder to reach youth.

5.2

Establish a fund to invest in youth-led initiatives for post-pandemic recovery. As part of Canadian Heritage, the fund would be accessible to grassroots groups, established youth-led and youth-serving charities and non-profits to invest in youth-led projects focused on pandemic recovery.

5.3

Ensure active engagement by the Taskforce on Women in the Economy with young cis- and trans women and gender-diverse youth between the ages of 18 to 30 to ensure their perspectives are considered in the development of recommendations.

5.4

Include a child and youth wellbeing section in the Government of Canada's Quality of Life Framework for Federal Budget with key developmental indicators to track progress and build on the foundation of existing indexes within Canada and globally. Ensure the key performance indicators are aligned with what is reported in the Government of Canada's State of Youth reports.

5.5

For Canada's Youth Policy, embed key performance indicators in future State of Youth reports that track key developmental indicators such as the NEET rate, youth employment, and the proportion of young people working in full-time stable employment that is permanent and with benefits. Furthermore, reduce the timeframe for reporting from every four years to every two years.

6

Supporting the Youth-Serving Sector

As illustrated throughout this report, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and systemic issues such as racism, sexism, and the gig economy have been significant on Canada's youth. In the face of unemployment, increased anxiety, and barriers to basic needs and supports to connect, cope, and recover, young people turn to those they trust for help. This includes community-based youth-serving organizations.

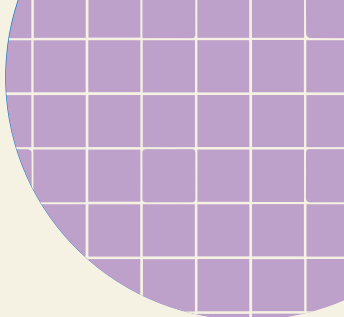




Supporting the Youth-Serving Sector


Canada's youth-serving sector is a critical entry point and a safe space for young people looking for support. The sector has stepped up and stepped in to support over the last year, just as they have in trying times before. During lockdowns or stay-at-home orders, youth-serving organizations have remained connected with young people online and by phone. They have continued to provide vital services that support positive mental health and help young people find employment. Lastly, they have provided new services to meet additional needs identified during the pandemic such as food programs and emergency child care for frontline workers. The youth sector has continued to do what it can to reach Canada's young people, and to help them recover and become more resilient. However, this has not been without challenges.

COVID-19 has made community-based youth-serving charities and non-profits vulnerable. Over the last year, these organizations have been grappling with significant revenue reductions due to cancelled fundraisers and galas, program closures and restrictions, as well as decreases in individual and corporate donations. For instance, the YMCA's revenue decreased by 40% in 2020 due to the pandemic, and Big Brothers Big Sisters had to reduce their workforce by approximately 30% due to revenue losses. The impact of this has meant capacity constraints at a time when more youth are turning to these organizations for services and support. YWCA Canada reported a 30 to 40% increase in demand for their shelters across the country last year.¹⁹⁶ Furthermore, BGC Montreal's (formerly known as the Boys and Girls Club of Montreal) food program increased by close to 500% and served over 235 individuals per week during 2020, compared to 40 pre-pandemic. For some community or culturally-led and serving organizations, the COVID-19 pandemic has compounded pre-existing challenges caused by chronic underfunding.



Several of the macroeconomic initiatives rolled out by the Government of Canada in response to COVID-19 provided organizations with vital support during the pandemic. However, the eligibility requirements and application process have also served as barriers for many youth-serving organizations. For example, Canada's Emergency Wage Subsidy provided significant support to eligible charities, however the application process was found to be time-intensive and challenging to navigate by organizations facing reduced or limited capacity.

In addition to revenue declines impacting capacity, lockdowns and COVID-19 restrictions have also affected service delivery. Centres of community where youth were welcome to drop in and connect pre-pandemic have been forced to close temporarily. Some organizations were able to manage a quick transition to digital service delivery, while others have struggled to digitize their activities. Additionally, some organizations have been confronted with new challenges caused by the inability to have face-to-face contact with young people, especially outreach programs that support youth living in homelessness.¹⁹⁷ Finally, the financial precarity and uncertainty of the future has caused some organizations to make difficult decisions, such as shutting their doors permanently. Unfortunately, the challenges impacting the youth sector are not unique to Canada. The Big 6's report highlights similar realities and vulnerabilities for youth-serving organizations around the world.¹⁹⁸



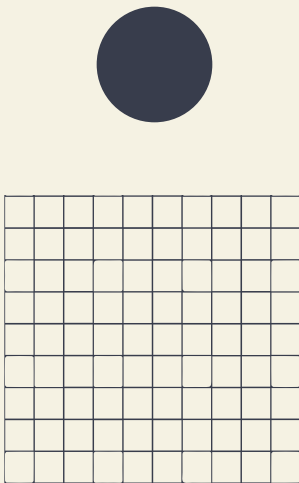


Meeting the needs of young people today and reimagining for tomorrow



Despite these challenges, youth-serving organizations have also taken the opportunity to reimagine themselves and adapt for the future. They have also come together to advocate and address complex problems. For example, YMCA Canada and YWCA Canada have been working collaboratively since the onset of the pandemic with BGC Canada, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada, National Association of Friendship Centres, United Way Centraide Canada, and Imagine Canada to advocate for the needs of community service charities and non-profits and the charitable sector more broadly.¹⁹⁹ In addition to collaboration within the sector, youth-serving organizations work closely with the post-secondary sector, certification and learning institutions, the local business sector, and others to connect young people with learning opportunities, job placements, and additional services that help them to grow and thrive. Opportunities for partnerships and collaborations should continue to advance common goals.

Furthermore, the youth sector has shown its services are essential for youth in Canada and Canada's post-pandemic recovery. Commitments in the federal 2021 Budget such as the \$400 million Community Services Recovery Fund and the \$200 million Black-led Philanthropic Endowment Fund are important initiatives to help organizations recover and become more resilient so that they can continue to support Canada's youth and other vulnerable populations.^{200,201} Resources to help organizations continue to provide vital programs and services, and to adapt for the 'new normal' should be identified and implemented.



In addition to service delivery, the youth sector is a large employer of young people in Canada. Youth have shown an interest in employment in socially responsible causes, including a strong interest in the non-profit sector, as well as in industries supporting the green economy.²⁰² Opportunities for young people to secure meaningful employment and build careers in industries that interest them should be supported. Furthermore, mentorship, professional, and leadership development opportunities should also be available to help young people prepare for future work prospects and grow in their careers. For example, the YMCA Young Ambassador Program (YYAP) is a leadership development program for full-time staff between the ages of 21 to 32 years old that focuses on building up a generation of YMCA leaders.²⁰³ In 2021, YYAP has been adapted for online delivery and is focused on developing leadership competencies that promote resilience while equipping Young Ambassadors to continue to be positive forces of change within the YMCA and for their community. Lastly, as discussed earlier in the report, young people have turned out in the highest numbers during the pandemic for formal and informal volunteer opportunities compared to other age ranges. Initiatives to actively engage and include the voice of young people on boards of directors, advisory panels, and in other volunteer positions should also be prioritized.





Given the essential role of the youth sector in connecting and supporting young people, and fostering the leaders of tomorrow, we have identified the following recommendations that should be supported:

6.1

Ensure youth-serving organizations can recover and adapt for the future. Introduce and expand financial support and stable core funding that helps organizations bridge through the next 18 months and implement modernization initiatives that promote resilience. Stable and predictable funding will address financial precarity in the sector, which has historically led to negative consequences such as time-limited programs or high turnover within the sector.

6.2

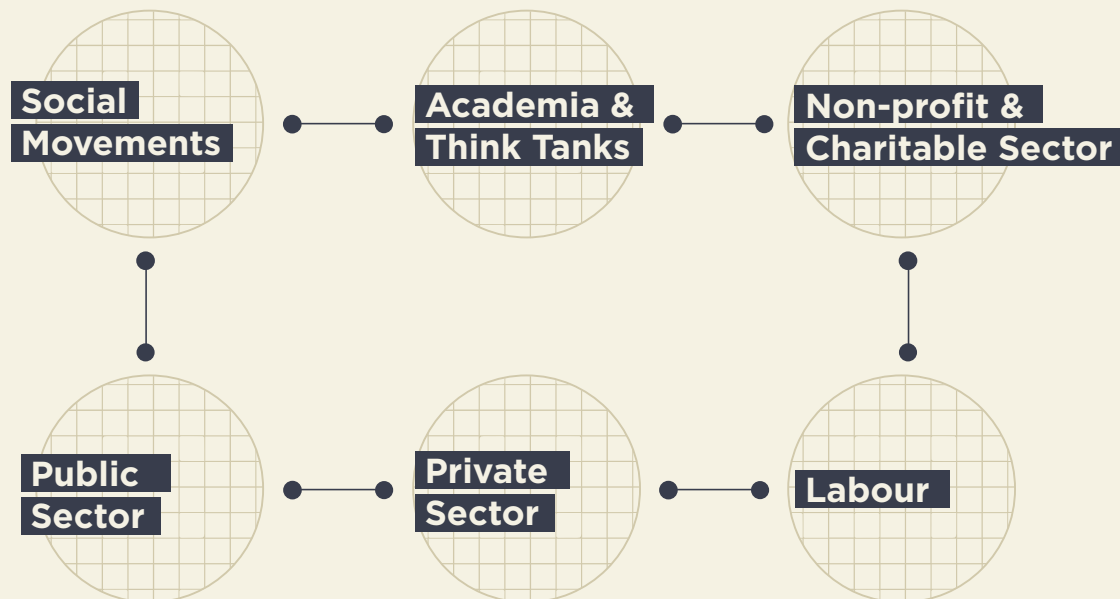
Increase synergies between government, the youth sector, and the private sector to respond to the needs of young people in a sustainable way. Engage the youth sector, which has a wide reach and understands the unique challenges and needs of young people, in decision making and program design. This will help to ensure policy and programs are accessible for youth-serving organizations and help young people recover from COVID-19.



Every Pillar in Society Can Play a Role

Our recommendations outlined above focus on what actions the federal government in partnership with other orders of government can implement. However, all aspects of society can make a difference and change the fallout and trajectory of this pandemic for the better.

In this section, we start to outline the various ways different sectors of society can play a role. Please note this is not an exhaustive list of actions or sectors but illustrate that we all must do our part to prevent a lockdown generation and invest in Canadian youth.



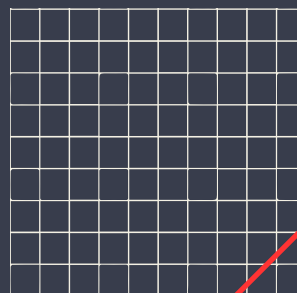


**Advancing a
generational
equity research
and public
policy agenda**

Every pillar of society must be committed to advancing generational equity, especially within research and policy communities in Canada. Often, the needs of young people are grouped together with other generations. However, the life experiences of young people between the ages of 18 to 30 have been dramatically affected by various economic, social, and crises happening simultaneously.

They are also a significant proportion of the broader Canadian population with Millennials making up the largest generation in Canada representing 27% of the country's entire population.²⁰⁴ We need to do more to ensure we have a fulsome understanding of younger generations' experiences, needs, and the impact of appropriate youth- and equity-responsive solutions. Furthermore, given that young people will feel the brunt of this crisis for decades to come, we need to consider the long-term effects, both good and bad.

Academia, research institutions, and the broader research community can also encourage research on generational equity as a requirement for research funding. A recent example of this is with the Canadian Institutes of Health Research mandating 'the integration of sex and gender into their research design and practices where appropriate.'²⁰⁵ A similar practice can be adopted for generational equity. Furthermore, we need more population-level data on the issues that truly matter. That is why we call for a generational equity lens built into Canada's Quality of Life Index for budgetary measures through the adoption of a child and youth wellbeing section.





**Disaggregated
data collection
and responsive
service delivery**



One of the challenges in Canada, across many pillars of society and across different sectors, is the scarcity of disaggregated data. Compared to other G7 nations, Canada is falling behind in having an accurate picture of the diversity of our country's residents as it maps on to diverse economic and social outcomes. We faced a racial justice reckoning over the course of the pandemic, as well as the sobering reality that we entered this public health crisis without a sound foundation in holistic data collection. We now have a real opportunity to transform our data collection practices and ensure a disaggregated data approach. This can be adopted in all sectors as employers, as service delivery agents, as researchers, and as practitioners.

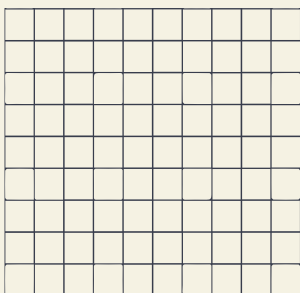
Data collection on its own is not enough to make an impact. We need to also leverage the data gathered and the insights it produces to change our policies, practices, and services so they are more responsive, especially to the needs of young people. We also need to ensure that data collected is done so in a responsible manner centering the needs of the communities affected and adopting practices that centre dignity and community ownership of data. An example of this is the First Nations principles of ownership, control, access, and possession, commonly known as OCAP, put forward by the First Nations Governance Centre.²⁰⁶



**Providing tailored
supports and
opportunities for
young people**

Young people in Canada are not a monolith. Therefore, a one-size-fits-all approach will be insufficient. We will need an intersectional approach to address the full scope and breadth of nuanced needs and opportunities. In addition, we are seeing that offering services in isolation from appropriate support does not yield high-quality outcomes.

Furthermore, we need to provide other opportunities for young people to contribute and take part in society. One of the ways is to create well-resourced high quality volunteer opportunities for young people to give back. This may be an additional consideration for employers in the non-profit, public, and private sectors as they develop new hiring and retention practices to recruit young people. For the labour movement, this may be something to reflect on further in unionized environments and collective bargaining negotiations.





Targeted workforce development programs for young people

The non-profit, private, and public sector can all contribute to mitigating the harms of this crisis on young people's careers and create opportunities for employment, professional development, and skills training including preparing young people for the future of work.

Several industries are fearing a skills-shortage due to the lack of qualified workers with the relevant skill sets. There should be targeted and collaborative workforce development programs that include a youth lens to incentivize young people to work in sectors ranging from the care economy to the cleantech sector to the skilled trades and beyond.

Another way of preventing 'economic scarring' and the negative implications of graduating in the pandemic-induced recession is by intentionally hiring young people who are students and recent grads.²⁰⁷ An example of this is a recent initiative by Ryerson University and First Policy Response, Fast Start, a hiring challenge to encourage the public policy community in the private, not-for-profit, community and labour sector to create more employment opportunities in the public affairs, policy research, advocacy, government relations, and strategic communications functions.²⁰⁸

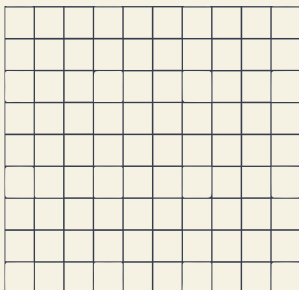
Embedding a youth-responsive lens on community benefit agreements for emerging public infrastructure projects can also be a vehicle to promote benefits such as access to high-quality employment and training programs for young people furthest from opportunity, as well as building local assets that serve young generations like recreational facilities and child care centres.²⁰⁹

Additionally, the economic and workforce landscape is rapidly changing due to several major trends including technological advancements and automation, and the aging population.²¹⁰ Equipping youth with the skills and experiences needed for success in the jobs of the future requires focused attention. Canada's non-profit, private, and public sectors have the opportunity to work together to provide young people with a broad range of technical and soft skills including digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurial thinking such as acceptance of risk, and social intelligence, as well as job experiences to help young people prosper in the future of work.²¹¹

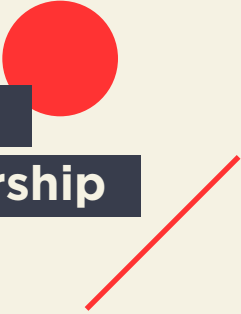
The non-profit and charitable sector may be one of the first places a young person finds a job or their first foray into leveraging the social infrastructure in a society. They can be places of comfort and trust. If the private sector and the labour movement partner with the charitable sector, they may be able to create a talent pipeline and ensure the next generation of workers have the right skills and specializations.



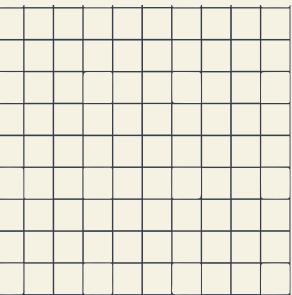
**Procurement
policy with an
intersectional
generational
equity lens**



Organizations of all types have significant purchasing power in the economy. Adopting an intersectional generational equity lens on procurement policies can play a powerful role in investing in young people, their skills, and their enterprises. Building on recent efforts to diversify organizational suppliers to encourage investment in women-led, Black-led, Indigenous-led, and newcomer-led business. Similar considerations should also be put into place for youth-led enterprises. Furthermore, organizations should encourage other organizations in their sphere of influence to do the same and amplify the work of youth-led enterprises. The G20 Young Entrepreneurs' Alliance has outlined key recommendations, especially those that can be enacted during the post-pandemic recovery period, such as diversify financing opportunities with tailored supports for young entrepreneurs, procurement programs, and incentives prioritizing young entrepreneurs, increasing entrepreneurial education, training and skills-building programs, and investing in green jobs.²¹²



Investing in youth leadership



Young people in Canada are one of the most talented and well-educated generations who are experiencing in real-time dire affronts to their generation's dignity and potential. Each sector can invest in its young people through specialized leadership training programs, fellowships, and developing advisory and governance policies to safeguard their role.

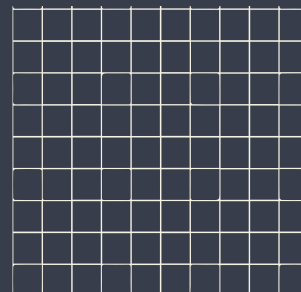
Earlier in the report, we outlined the importance of having young people in positions of leadership and shared some practices to make that happen such as having a guideline that a certain percentage of board members will be composed of youth. This can be taken further by adopting a similar practice in advisory committees and collective decision-making bodies of any type. Furthermore, resources can also be provided to develop youth and intergenerational caucuses so communities within organizations can come together to discuss generational equity and steps to take forward.

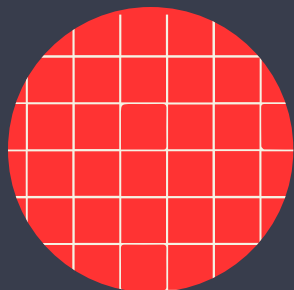


**Incentivizing
intergenerational
collaborations**



While the focus of this publication has been on the specific and nuanced needs and impacts on young people between the ages of 18 to 30, we strongly recommend an increased emphasis on intergenerational collaborations. We need to put in practices to further encourage the uptake of working across generations whether through funding requirements, program eligibility criteria, or through the development of specific-sector awards. From co-locating care services for children and elders that work hand-in-hand to developing co-habitation housing models for students and seniors to creating opportunities for shared learning from each generation in skills training programs — there is incredible potential for our society to spearhead intergenerational engagements once given the right supportive environment. It is of central importance that such collaborations be built in the spirit of reciprocity and that each generation is benefiting as much as they are contributing. Each sector can do its part by using the levers it has access to. Levers such as funding, policies, and practices to influence and facilitate intergenerational considerations and collaborations.






Conclusion

To conclude, the COVID-19 global pandemic has shone a light on the pre-existing inequities in society that have only become more exacerbated. On almost every measure, young people have faced the brunt of the crisis, especially young women, and gender-diverse youth; Black, Indigenous, and racialized youth; newcomer youth; youth living with disabilities; 2SLGBTQIAA+ youth; low-income youth and marginalized youth experiencing different forms of systemic oppression.

Given who has been impacted and how, we must address the unique needs of Canadian youth with a focus on generational equity. Good or bad, younger generations will live with the outcomes and legacies of this time. That is why our plan and set of recommendations offers a way forward that understands the realities of this time with a look to the future and how it will play out for multiple generations, especially the ones who will have inherited this current state in the decades to come.

Through foresight, collaboration, and innovation, we can work together to prevent a lockdown generation so that young people aren't locked away from economic opportunity, facing dire mental health challenges, and grappling with rising rents and housing unaffordability. The solutions lie in creating an inclusive society that works for everyone. One that concretely invests in the next generation of leaders and the organizations that support them. Together, we can truly build back better, while keeping generational equity at the forefront.



Summary of Recommendations

1

Building an Inclusive Society

1.1

Make meaningful progress towards reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. This would require immediate action to implement the 94 Calls to Action in the Truth and Reconciliation Report and the 231 Calls to Justice in the Report for the National Inquiry Report into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. All sectors in society can contribute to this goal by identifying which of the Calls to Action and Calls to Justice could be addressed in their organizations, developing implementation plans, taking actions, and reporting on progress.

1.2

Create an Anti-Racism Act for Canada that gives a legislative foundation for the Anti-Racism Secretariat, which will receive ongoing, sustainable funding and resourcing. Ensure the Anti-Racism Act will name and address all forms of racism including anti-Arab racism, anti-Asian racism, anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism, Islamophobia, anti-Latinx racism, and antisemitism. Furthermore, develop and implement a National Action Plan Against Racism to accompany the national Anti-Racism Strategy, ensuring concrete strategies with actionable goals, expansion of disaggregated data that transitions away from the use of visible minorities to racialized identities with measurable targets, and timetables, and appropriate budgetary allocations.

1.3

Ensure community-based grassroots, non-profits, and charitable organizations that serve and represent marginalized communities can survive the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes providing predictable, stable and core funding for organizations led by and providing services to the 2SLGBTQIAA+ community, on reserve and urban Indigenous communities, people with disabilities, Black communities and other racialized groups, as well as women and gender-diverse people. Funding should also be made available to support ongoing efforts to support diversity, equity, and social inclusion on an organizational and structural level.

1.4

Advance public policy for recovery benefits for people living with disabilities and disability-related income support, such as the Canada Disability Benefit, which is grounded in the experiences of people living with or have lived with disability-related income supports.

1.5

Strengthen the federal Employment Equity Act by including protection on the basis of racialized identity, noting the specific impacts on Black and Indigenous communities. Ensure protection on the basis of gender expression, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

1.6

Attach employment equity measures through community benefits agreements on all federal investment and recovery programs, to ensure Black, Indigenous, racialized communities, 2SLGBTQIAA+ communities, people with disabilities, and other underrepresented groups have equitable access to any new jobs created.

2

Promoting Meaningful Employment

2.1

Evolve the Canada Summer Jobs Program to a Canada Youth Jobs Program. This could be achieved by making the program flexibilities implemented in response to COVID-19 permanent, including offering job placements with adequate compensation for young people aged 15 to 30, year-round.

2.2

Increase funding for the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy and ensure youth have access to high-quality jobs and are prepared for jobs of the future. As part of this, support initiatives and innovative pilots that provide young people with on-the-job experience, as well as pre-employment and training supports, and access to wrap-around services (i.e., access to mental health support, transportation, and child care). This should also include targeted funding and dedicated programs to support youth experiencing additional, and unique barriers and marginalization in the labour market, such as: young women and gender-diverse youth; Black, Indigenous, and racialized youth; youth living with disabilities; and newcomer youth.

2.3

Incorporate youth recruitment initiatives in national and sub-national workforce strategies. For instance, for sectors experiencing a significant labour shortage such as the early learning and childhood sector, initiatives to recruit and retain young people in these critical jobs, such as Early Childhood Educators, should be included and funded as part of comprehensive workforce strategies.

2.4

Explore establishing an employment and training Youth Guarantee policy for Canada. This would include a guarantee that all young people in Canada 30 years old and under are provided with a quality offer of employment or education and training within 16 weeks of leaving their job or schooling.

2.5

Lower the uniform national eligibility requirement of Employment Insurance to 360 hours and increase the benefit rate from 55% to 85% of earnings for low-income earners.

3

Ensuring Housing for All

3.1

Commit to eliminating chronic homelessness in Canada and provide appropriate resourcing to support community-based organizations and other entities delivering prevention, rehabilitation, and transitional housing programming, services and supports.

3.2

Ensure the 33% carve out for gender-responsive investments in the National Housing Strategy is fully rolled out and there is a public accounting of how funds were allocated, as well as provide local housing authorities directions and a mandate on investing through a gender-responsive lens.

3.3

Rapidly update existing and build new safe and secure housing for young people across the continuum. This includes high-quality transitional, permanent, supportive, and affordable housing (such as non-profit and co-operative) units which includes building at least 100,000 units of social housing and 500,000 units of non-market, co-op, and non-profit housing within 10 years. For young people with complex needs, wrap-around services should be accessible and adequately resourced as part of housing.

3.4

Implement an urban, rural, and Northern Indigenous housing strategy. The strategy should contain both dedicated investments and an Indigenous-led governance structure. It should also have an explicit focus on the housing needs of Indigenous youth.

3.5

Expand the temporary rental assistance for low-income households with a dedicated carve out for young people experiencing a core housing need with an explicit focus on young cis- and trans women, and gender diverse youth.

3.6

Explore co-benefit programs that pair improvements and expansions of the non-market and market housing stock in Canada alongside measures to increase youth employment and reduce greenhouse gas emissions from housing through the implementation of energy efficiency retrofits.

4

Supporting Mental Health and Wellbeing

4.1

Establish and invest in a Youth Mental Health Recovery Plan with clearly defined goals. Design the strategy with input from young people and focus on targeted investments and interventions that promote positive mental health and wellbeing for young people in Canada as part of Canada's COVID-19 recovery.

4.2

Expand mental health funding and increase capacity for community organizations to provide mental health and wellness programs and services to young people. This includes increased funding to allow youth-serving community organizations to innovate and expand existing programs that support positive mental health outcomes for young people. Provide dedicated funding to increase availability of community or culturally specific mental health supports for young people that recognizes historical and systemic oppression faced by Black, Indigenous, 2SLGBTQIAA+, and marginalized communities.

4.3

Integrate mental health service funding in other programs and services. Eliminate siloed grants and invest in mental health as a wrap-around service in areas such as housing programs, employment services, and settlement services. This would better support the complex needs and challenges of all young people.

4.4

Provide access to funding to support the delivery of mental health first aid training for Canadian employers and service providers that work with young people.

5

Investing in Youth Leadership

5.1

Expand the leadership role of the Prime Minister's Youth Council to support a youth pandemic recovery response for Canada. These efforts would include providing public perspectives and recommendations to the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister and ensure a generational lens is applied to decision-making and promote broad awareness and government accountability. Ongoing efforts should also be made to ensure the Council is composed of youth up to the age of 30, with cross-sectoral intersectional representation from all regions of Canada and inclusive of young people with a diversity of lived experiences. Finally, the application process should be evaluated regularly to identify and address barriers for harder to reach youth.

5.2

Establish a fund to invest in youth-led initiatives for post-pandemic recovery. As part of Canadian Heritage, the fund would be accessible to grassroots groups, established youth-led and youth-serving charities and non-profits to invest in youth-led projects focused on pandemic recovery.

5.3

Ensure active engagement by the Taskforce on Women in the Economy with young cis- and trans women and gender-diverse youth between the ages of 18 to 30 to ensure their perspectives are considered in the development of recommendations.

5.4

Include a child and youth wellbeing section in the Government of Canada's Quality of Life Framework for Federal Budget with key developmental indicators to track progress and build on the foundation of existing indexes within Canada and globally. Ensure the key performance indicators are aligned with what is reported in the Government of Canada's State of Youth reports.

5.5

For Canada's Youth Policy, embed key performance indicators in future State of Youth reports that track key developmental indicators such as the NEET rate, youth employment, and the proportion of young people working in full-time stable employment that is permanent and with benefits. Furthermore, reduce the timeframe for reporting from every four years to every two years.

6

Supporting the Youth-Serving Sector

6.1

Ensure youth-serving organizations can recover and adapt for the future. Introduce and expand financial support and stable core funding that helps organizations bridge through the next 18 months and implement modernization initiatives that promote resilience. Stable and predictable funding will address financial precarity in the sector, which has historically led to negative consequences such as time-limited programs or high turnover within the sector.

6.2

Increase synergies between government, the youth sector, and the private sector to respond to the needs of young people in a sustainable way. Engage the youth sector, which has a wide reach and understands the unique challenges and needs of young people, in decision making and program design. This will help to ensure policy and programs are accessible for youth-serving organizations and help young people recover from COVID-19.



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