



# OUR COMMITMENT TO **TODAY** AND **TOMORROW**

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Report on Recommendations from  
the Young Canadians' Parliament  
2023-2024



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## LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Children First Canada (CFC) is a national organization with staff located in Ottawa and Calgary. Members of the YCP live in communities from coast to coast to coast. In the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge that we live, work and play on the traditional, ancestral, unceded territories of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people, working alongside children and youth. CFC affirms the spirit that we are all Treaty people, honouring the sovereignty and self-determination of Indigenous Nations. We believe that learning about the traditional territories of Indigenous people is an important first step toward Reconciliation.

## ABOUT CHILDREN FIRST CANADA

CFC is a national charitable organization that serves as a strong, effective, and independent voice for all 8 million children in Canada. One of CFC's core values is that we are a child and youth-centred organization, and we are guided by the primary principle: nothing for children without children. This value and principle are at the heart of the YCP and this report. It is integral to the report that it portrays youth voices accurately and unapologetically. This is why everything in the report comes from the work of our Young Canadians' Parliament (YCP) members. It is also written in simple language so people of all ages can understand the report. Young people have been involved in every step of this report from its conception to the drafting, design, and publication. That is exactly what nothing for children without children means.

Visit [childrenfirstcanada.org](http://childrenfirstcanada.org) for more information.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF SPONSORS, PARTNERS & SUPPORTERS

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

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



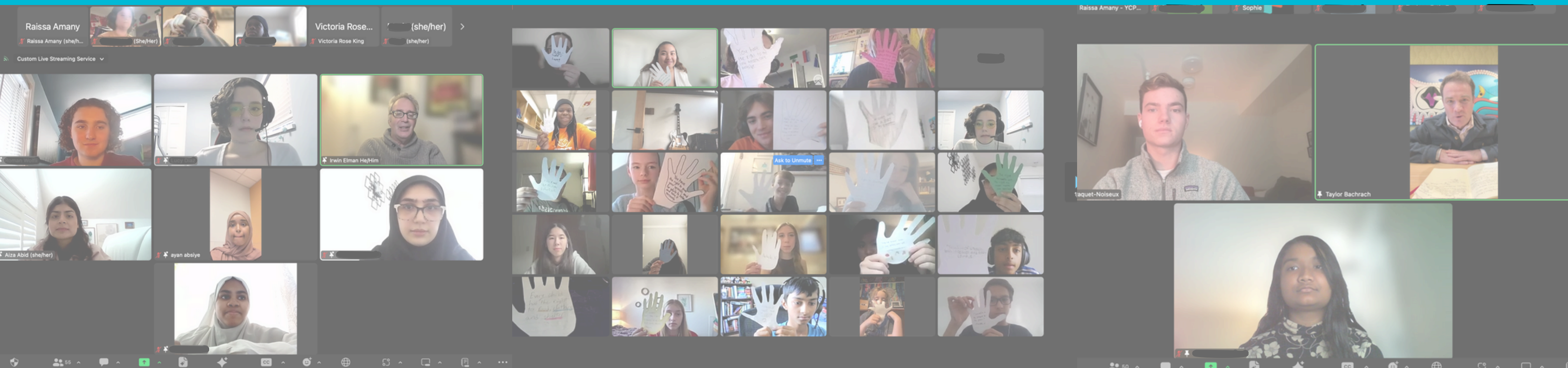
## WHY IS THIS REPORT IMPORTANT TO YOUTH?

As young people, we view the world in a unique way and provide creative insights that are often overlooked by adults. This report shares our ideas in an accessible way and showcases our recommendations concerning issues affecting all Canadians, especially youth. Through this report, members of the YCP are exercising our right to be heard as per Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. According to the Convention, children and youth have the right to participate and freely express their views “in all matters” affecting them. The issues at the heart of this report – mental health, climate change, poverty, housing and food insecurity, systemic racism and discrimination, and violence against children – heavily affect us. From our right to be heard stems an obligation of adults and institutions like our government to listen. Our concerns and suggestions on how to best respond to the issues should be considered and acted upon. Only then can our government claim to uphold the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

## HISTORY AND STORY OF THE YCP

Launched in 2020, the YCP is a growing movement of kids who want to talk about the issues that matter most to our generation and take action. Through national online forums, children and youth share their views and speak up for their rights with Parliamentarians, policymakers, influencers, and each other. The program provides us, with resources and education on the political system, our rights and freedoms, and how to advocate for ourselves and our peers.

For more information on the Young Canadians’ Parliament, please go to:  
[www.youngcanadiansparliament.com/](http://www.youngcanadiansparliament.com/)





The YCP is rooted in the Canadian Children’s Charter, which was created in 2017 with input from thousands of young Canadians and finalized on National Child Day 2018. One of the Charter’s central calls to action was the right to “Child Participation and Youth Engagement,” as it was obvious that young leaders had a lot to say but very few places to voice our concerns. The idea emerged at Children First Canada to establish a Young Canadians’ Parliament.

An important contributor to the shaping of both Children First Canada and the Young Canadians’ Parliament is the United Nations’ ‘A World Fit for Children’ document created by 500 youth who attended the UN Special Session for Children in 2002. It has also notably provided a launching pad for Canada’s last national plan of action, ‘A Canada Fit for Children,’ in 2004.

As the document states:

“We pledge an equal partnership in this fight for children’s rights. And while we promise to support the actions you take on behalf of children, we also ask for your commitment and support in the actions we are taking – because the children of the world are misunderstood. We are not the sources of problems; we are the resources that are needed to solve them.” This very notion is reflected throughout CFC, YCP, and this report.

The YCP engages children and youth below the age of 18, and is specifically designed to fill a gap in engagement of younger children and youth in policy making that affects them. As you know, children don’t have the right to vote yet. Additionally, while there are forums for youth, such as the Prime Minister’s Youth Council and the many youth councils for Ministers, MPs and Senators, the majority require that you be at least 16 to participate. The YCP affirms the rights of all children to participate and directly influence decision making at the highest levels of government no matter how young.

Many other countries in the world use children’s parliaments as a tool to encourage active participation of youth in the decision-making process. The YCP was adapted during the COVID-19 pandemic, to a strictly online platform. During the lockdown, many people felt isolated, alone, and confused. The YCP provided an outlet for young people to share their ideas, experience and stories with other kids across Canada, learn from each other and experts, and connect with parliamentarians in this time of uncertainty. How the YCP came together shows that, during these hard times, many of us felt motivated and inspired to create change on the issues we faced.

## CONNECTING TO THE UNCRC and SDGs

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

The convention is based on four main principles:

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

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

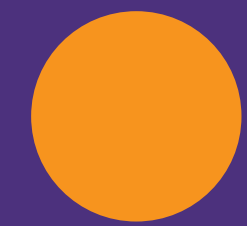
### Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

In 2015, Canada, along with all other United Nations member states, adopted the SDGs agenda. The aim is to globally call for “action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030.” Every recommendation in this report directly aligns with multiple SDGs, demonstrating that young people's suggestions are crucial for achieving these global goals. To secure a sustainable future for Canadians, the government must take action to implement these solutions.

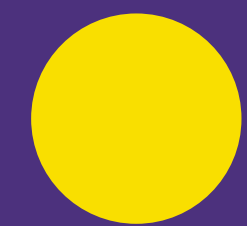


# THE TOPICS DISCUSSED BY YOUNG PEOPLE

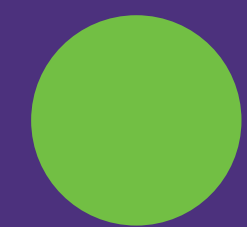
Violence Against Children



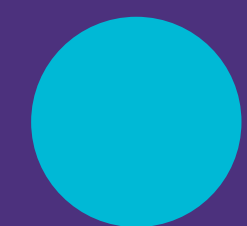
Mental Health



Climate Change



Systemic Discrimination and Racism



Poverty, Housing, and Food Insecurity





# VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

YCP members identified violence against children as a top priority, particularly regarding the abuse of Indigenous youth. Statistics Canada data indicates that 69,900 cases of child harm and abuse were reported to law enforcement in 2019.

In 1985, Canada's parliament enacted section 43 of the Criminal Code, which stipulates that any parent, teacher, or person who is standing in the place of a parent has the right to use "reasonable force" as a means of correcting a child's behaviour. Corporal/physical punishment is not only harmful to a young person but may also undermine the established norms/acceptable behaviours within Canadian society.

Physical punishment may impose negative impediments on children and their well-being, thus harming a child's mental health, impairing their overall development, and increasing aggressiveness. The child may experience a lack of self-confidence, low self-esteem, anxiety, depressive behaviors, and a desire to resist their parents' position.

## YCP RECOMMENDATIONS

### Repeal Section 43 of the Criminal Code

- a. This would mean it would be considered against the law for teachers, parents, and any other adult figures standing in the place of parents to use corporal punishment towards the children under their care as a method of discipline, or in any other circumstances where they would deem it necessary.
- b. Given the law states that it is only acceptable "if the force does not exceed what is reasonable," the interpretation of this law can be subjected to bias and bent to fit one's malicious intent.
- c. Removing section 43 altogether would ensure that physical violence is not used to discipline children, under any circumstances. This would benefit Canadian society as it would allow more children to feel safe at the hands of their parents and any other adult.
- d. For the protection of the child, the law should not permit acts of violence including any physical contact with the child in retaliation and all contact that appears violent.



## MENTAL HEALTH

For young people, social stigma around mental health is one of the biggest challenges they are facing today. There are several misinformed views on mental health that “dramatize the process of receiving treatment.” As a result, children feel significantly less inclined to reach out for help. Furthermore, the portrayal of mental health in the media shows how Canadians are “not willing to acknowledge that they [or their children] have mental health issues,” thus shifting responsibility to the young people. The COVID-19 pandemic furthered the severity of mental health issues as the uncertainty and precarious nature of the environment led to intensified stress and isolation in young people. For many of us, “we don’t think the topic of mental health has a beginning, middle or end, we think it has already had an impact” and will likely continue to affect many young people.

Mental health is a leading concern for children and youth in Canada and an issue that many face on a day-to-day basis. Especially today, it includes several mental health disorders that children and youth experience, both pre-pandemic and beyond, with increasing rates of anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and substance use disorders.

A 2023 study revealed that from 2018-2019 there was a significant 78% jump in self-harm injuries in youth aged 11 to 18, compared to 2020.<sup>7</sup> Results from a global systematic review, which also included data from Canada, revealed that COVID-19 resulted in more hospital visits and hospitalizations for self-harm, suicidal ideation and suicide attempts in children and youth.

The government needs to ensure that equitable, culturally appropriate and specific services are being provided to address mental health issues within marginalized and oppressed populations. Given the high prevalence of mental health concerns among equity-deserving young people and the lack of culturally sensitive and safe care, cultural safety training needs to be provided for staff as well as increased efforts made to hire a diversity of mental health professionals. Reducing systemic inequalities should also be a target as upstream investments (such as social determinants of health) play a large role in affecting young people’s mental health.

### WHAT YOUTH ARE SAYING

“...mental health is a topic which has been overlooked by many. This generation is our future and its well-being is our utmost priority.”

# YCP RECOMMENDATIONS

## 1. Establish an Affordable Mental Health Committee

In order to examine the possibility of providing universal, government-funded therapy and psychological services, to determine the potential benefits, costs, and barriers associated with creating such a program.

The YCP recommends that the federal government in cooperation with provinces and territories establish a committee made up of 25 members. The Minister of Mental Health and Addictions shall be the head of the committee. The committee should have at least ten psychologists, and five psychotherapists from every province and territory. One member from an Indigenous or metis community, two youth advocates under the age of 18 and representation from marginalized communities.

The purpose of the committee is to investigate the methods of making access to mental health services more affordable for Canadians. By considering the state of mental health in Canada. While also evaluating the cost of universal coverage for therapy and other services. Where we can find funding for this program and to find opportunities for cooperation between provincial and territorial departments of education to provide better mental health services

## 2. Upstream investment in the mental health system

Mental Health is intersectional and does not exist in a silo. Complex social issues are drivers for poor mental health such as bullying, racism, climate change, and many more. Combating the youth mental health crisis—and factors that contribute to poor mental health like climate change, racism & poverty—requires multifaceted solutions. One of the keys is realizing that the voices of children have not been part of this conversation and how the voices of youth need to be integrated into every step of the process. It is also not sustainable to just continue to fund clinical services (while it is important), without solving complex intersectional issues as this would be seen as reactive vs preventive action. The youth from the Young Canadian Parliament welcome the \$500 million investment towards a youth mental health fund from the federal government in Budget 2024. We hope that the government will continue investing positively in youth.

## WHAT YOUTH ARE SAYING

“...we need to make sure [that young] people don't lose faith in the [mental health] system through experiences like [participant]'s where she felt like she was the one educating the [crisis line] volunteers and pretending their resources were helpful”



# CLIMATE CHANGE


In Canada, more than 9 in 10 young people reported that they are either feeling concerned about climate change. Climate change is one of the biggest threats to young people's well-being, as progress in Canada's climate change policies and commitments are not consistent with the Paris Agreement of the 1.5-degree Celsius temperature limit. In 2020, Canada ranked as the 11th largest GHG emitting country/region and despite some reductions, Canada's emissions are still above 1990 levels, falling short of international climate commitments.

As GHG emissions continue to exacerbate Canada's climate, there will be an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme heat events. Exposure to extreme heat events is a direct consequence of climate change, significantly impacting the health and safety of young people. According to Environment Canada, "In 12 large Canadian cities (with population sizes of at least 500,000), daily mortality risk was 2% to 8% higher than average during extreme heat events from 2000 to 2020."


Rising temperatures within Canada's climate are causing more frequent and intense heatwaves, wildfires, droughts, and floods. These extreme weather events are causing economic damage, displacing communities, and putting pressure on infrastructure. Sea level also continues to rise, threatening coastal communities and fragile ecosystems.

Climate change also creates significant disparities within marginalized communities. For instance, communities in Nunavut are experiencing warming at an average rate twice that of the rest of the country and are witnessing some of the most severe effects (Bush & Lemmen, 2019), despite having the lowest per capita household greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (Statistics Canada, 2016).

## OUR END GOAL AND KEY MESSAGES



Our desired end goal is for corporations to be required to provide financial aid to climate action efforts and/or pay a climate tax in exchange for how much they negatively contribute to climate change while not taking positive action.

- 
1. What Canadian citizens experience due to climate change and what they contribute to it aren't equal.
  2. A massive negative impact requires massive positive action.
  3. Climate change keeps getting worse, but large companies don't pay their share.



# YCP RECOMMENDATIONS

## 1. Increase Funding for Public Transportation

- a. The Canadian government should allocate funds to public transportation. This will ensure that all citizens have access to sustainable and efficient modes of transport. This can be achieved by increasing subsidies for public transit to make it financially accessible to everyone.
- b. By providing more accessible public transit for communities across Canada, it will also fulfill other recommendations from young people regarding global warming and climate change
- c. It's important that all levels of government invest in public transit. Not only in improving existing systems in metropolitan areas. But to ensure accessible public transit in suburban and rural areas

## 2. Consideration for suburban and rural communities

- a. A proportional amount of funding should be allocated to rural and metropolitan communities. Considering the national percentage of the population. The percentage of funding allocated to rural or suburban cities should be within 5 percent of the population that lives within them.

## 3. Planet over Profit

- a. Implementing comprehensive measures that prioritize the health, safety, and environmental well-being of our citizens, while fostering sustainable and responsible agricultural practices.
- b. Corporations are not paying their dues when it comes to climate change and pollution.
- c. The wealthiest 1% are the biggest contributors to worsening climate change and affecting our goal to reach the 1.5 degree Celsius Paris agreement.

## WHAT YOUTH ARE SAYING

“There is **no future** for Canada with climate change proceeding at the current rate”



## SYSTEMIC RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

The recommendations in this section are to address the change young people hope to see within several institutions and locations where they spend the majority of their time, such as school. YCP members brought up concerns about discrimination and bullying within schools. An Angus Reid and University of British Columbia survey in 2021 showed that over half of Canadian high schoolers had seen bullying or exclusion based on race/ethnicity at school, with 14% experiencing it themselves. Young people from diverse communities were three times more likely to experience bullying than white young people, and Indigenous young people were two times more likely to experience bullying than their peers.

YCP members have also brought up issues about pay equity in workplaces. Despite existing legislation requiring pay equity, youth are not only worried about their present moment but also a future in which systemic racism and discrimination will prevent them from accessing the full range of opportunities that Canada has to offer. In three consecutive censuses by Statistics Canada (2006, 2011, 2016), it was reported that racialized Canadians between the ages of 24-65 were half as likely as other Canadians to hold senior management positions. Youth are particularly worried about biases in the hiring process and pay equity. Discrimination affects many in the workplace, yet large corporate companies – especially their most powerful leaders -- continue to thrive while systemic racism and discrimination remain rampant in workplaces across Canada. The YCP members expressed concern about the repercussions of speaking up in the workplace, and believe that pay equity laws are not universally respected in Canada. Our youth therefore hope for a future in which the labour rights of all equity-deserving groups, including the right to a workplace free of discrimination, are respected fully.



**Racism ; Systematic discrimination**



# YCP RECOMMENDATIONS

## 1. Transparency in education funding

- a. The YCP recommends that the federal government prepare and publish annual reports comparing funding for the education of Indigenous children on and off reserves, as well as educational and income attainments of Indigenous peoples in comparison with non-Indigenous people.

## 2. Consultations with groups facing marginalization, discrimination, and oppression

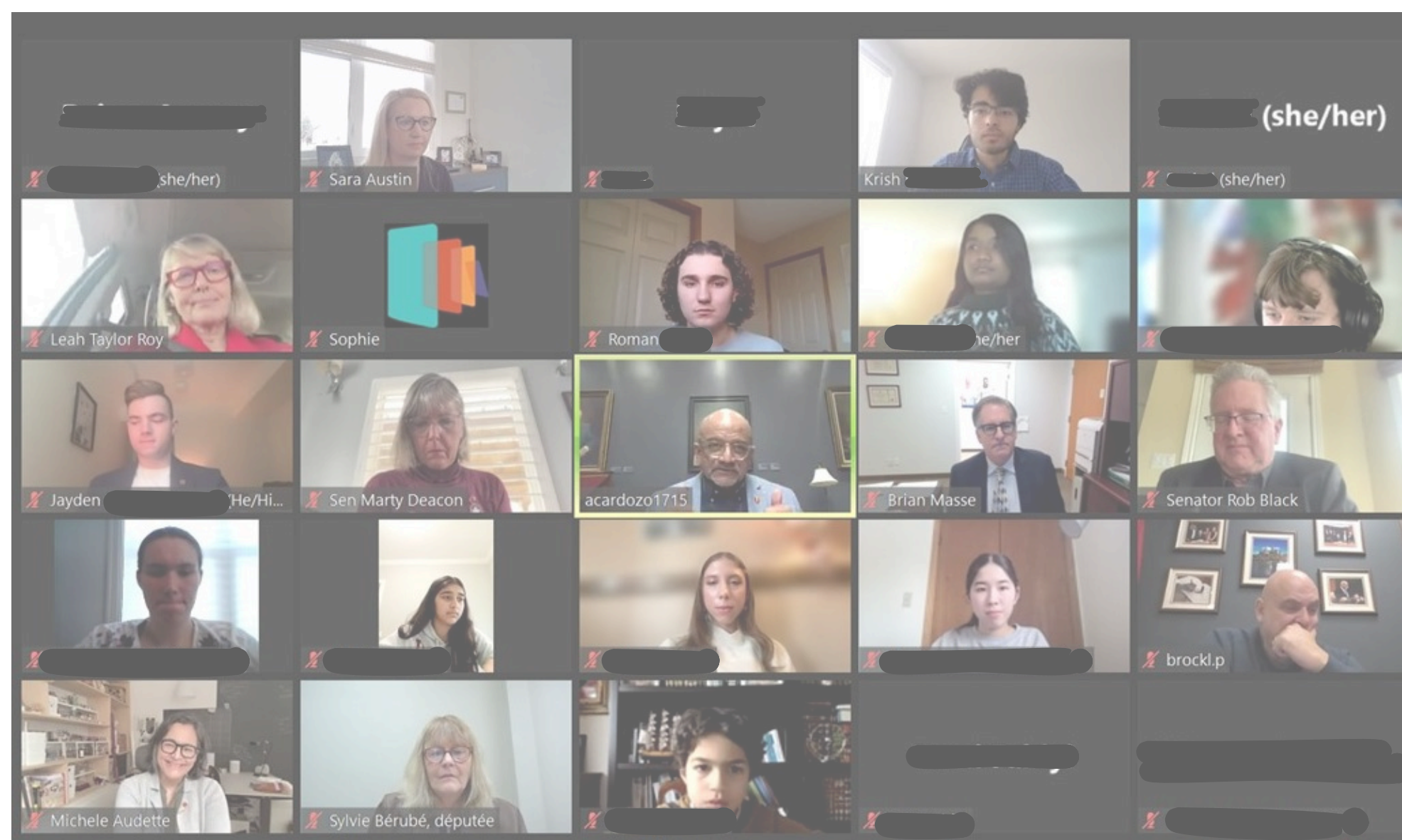
- a. The federal government should lead consultations with groups facing socioeconomic discrimination to ensure their perspectives inform the decision-making process and continue to raise awareness of the struggles they continue to face (such as socioeconomic discrimination and disparities).

## 3. Legal Services to file a complaint of racism and discrimination

- a. Akin to the federal government's Legal Aid Program, our provincial governments should make legal services available to people experiencing socioeconomic disparities by seeking to file a complaint of racism or discrimination in the workplace.

- b. Beyond the provision of information and advice, legal representation would be provided.

- c. Representation would be provided in cases of workplace sexual harassment as well as workplace racism and discrimination. Sexual harassment in and of itself has already been recognized as a form of discrimination. For us, expanding access to representation in dealing with other forms of discrimination is the next obvious step





# POVERTY, HOUSING, AND FOOD INSECURITY

As one of the most developed countries in the world, poverty, housing, and food insecurity should not exist in Canada. As a developed country, we have the means and ability to eradicate poverty and its associated impacts, but these insecurities continue to flourish. Additionally, Canada has made a commitment to several charters, declarations, and conventions such as the UNCRC, that state specifically under articles 26 and 27 that children have the right to social and economic security, food, clothing, and safe home[s]. Children have rights, and the Government must ensure all Canadian children have a decent standard of living and social services that will, in turn, alleviate poverty. Despite promising to protect these rights, Canada continuously allows millions of people, many of whom are young people, to live below the poverty line. This topic is especially important as we transition into young adults. The realities of our lives – struggling to find employment, finding support for those who do not have educational degrees or have degrees from outside of Canada that are not recognized, and struggling to become financially independent while dealing with student debt – are of rising concern.

## FOOD INSECURITY

As inflation continues to increase, the cost of food is rising even faster at double the current rate. Understanding that food is a necessity, people must purchase groceries despite the high prices, and action by the Federal Government is needed to address this inequity. Around 1.8 million children under the age of 18 were affected by food insecurity in 2022, a marked increase from the 1.4 million in 2021.

### What are we trying to achieve?

Outcome:

- Expansion of zoning laws to increase the amount of affordable housing.
  - Increasing the stock of affordable houses
  - Reducing homelessness rates
- Increased Provincial and Federal budgeting for housing
- Rent controls in provinces that currently do not have these policies.
  - Reduces the amount of people entering homelessness in the first place.
- Using empty land for the purposes of building affordable housing (without damaging the environment)



## HOUSING

It is evident that poverty, housing, and food insecurity are a growing concern for young people. Their concerns about housing go beyond the crisis of homelessness. The YCP team members were also concerned about general housing affordability. They hear the news and the experts who project that many kids today will never be able to afford to buy a home and that rents in major Canadian cities are already unaffordable. Our federal government has already committed to ending poverty, housing, and food insecurity in international human rights commitments, but is failing to do so. However, the YCP members have shown that there are many potential solutions. Any solution requires the work and commitment of all three levels of government. These solutions benefit Canadian society and lift the barriers experienced by too many to living a safe, healthy, and prosperous life.

## POVERTY

According to UNICEF, poverty is symptomized by a low standard of living, including low incomes, lower levels of health, welfare dependency, and unemployment. While most of the consequences of poverty listed are borne by adults, we make the case that children suffer most. Indeed, among the 5 million Canadians affected by poverty, 1.3 million children are affected by poverty.

According to the most recent (2021) data from the Census Family Low Income Measure After- Raising Canada 2023 10 Tax (CFLIM-AT), 15.6% of children and youth aged 0-17—or over 1.1 million children across Canadian provinces and territories—live in low-income households, a significant increase from 13.5% in 2020. However, this may not accurately reflect current numbers as a number of supports implemented during COVID-19 have been scaled back.

### WHAT YOUTH ARE SAYING

“Canada prides itself on being a first-world country, but the reality is that **many Canadians are suffering, especially children** who need adequate nutrition to grow into healthy adults. **However, if we can come together, we can make change.**”



# YCP RECOMMENDATIONS

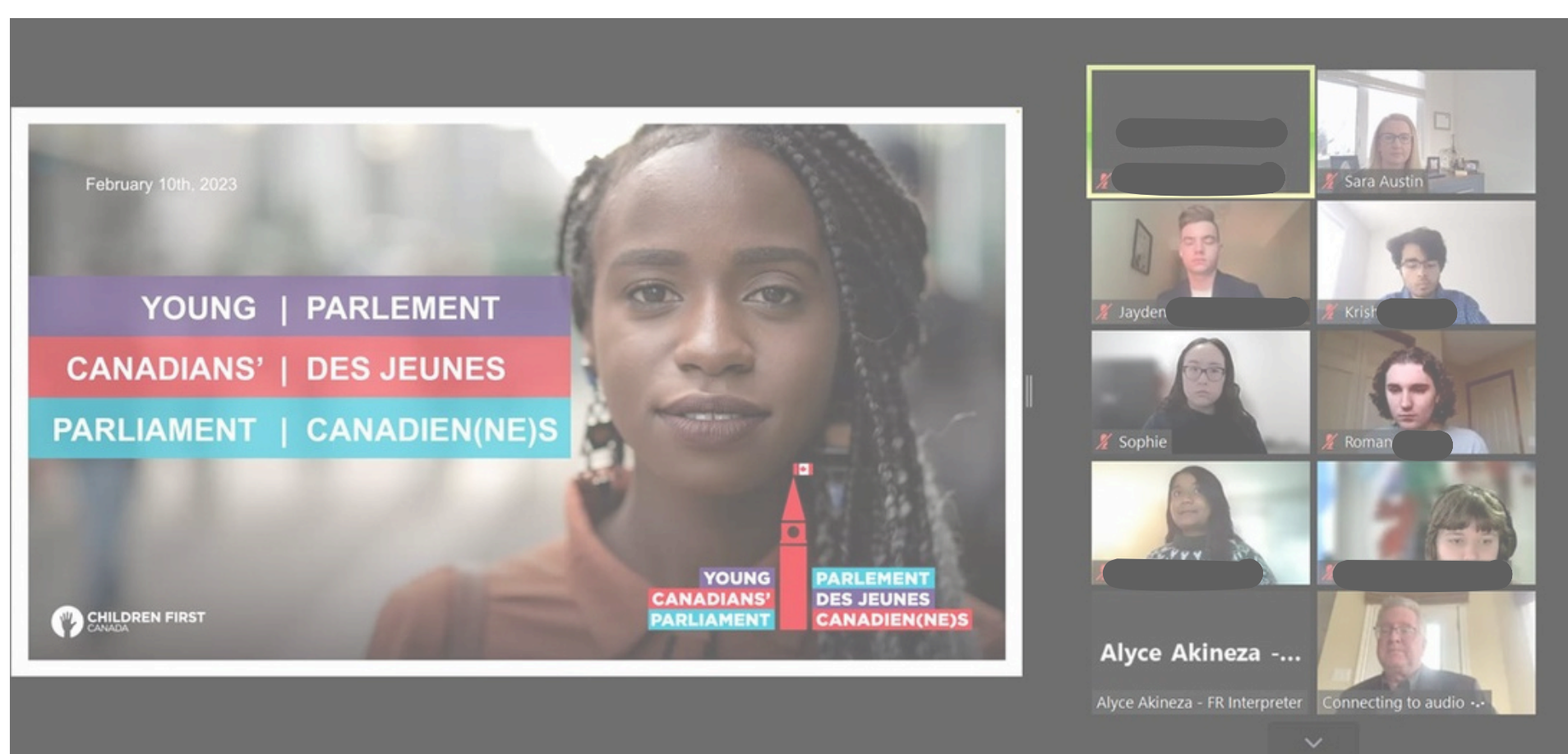
## 1. Increase homeless shelters

a. The YCP recommends that Municipal Governments implement a minimum number of homeless shelters in major cities to ensure the availability of emergency shelters. There must be support for the building of dorms/ affordable housing, like the federally funded Modular Housing projects in Toronto and Vancouver. This includes small hotels with employees that can assist homeless people and implement restitutive care programs. Much of the housing that low-income people can afford is in poor repair or fails to meet safety and housing standards and health codes. Recognizing that it is a landlord's obligation to ensure the safety of their tenants, further inspection and stricter supervision of these safety codes by the Municipal Governments is necessary. The Federal Government must regulate housing prices. People purchasing their first home should take priority over those who own multiple properties.

## 2. Continuous investment in the new national school food program

a. YCP members welcome with open arms the government's plan to invest in and build a National School Food Program. YCP members recommend that the government continue to listen to and engage with youth at every step of the process.

Our recommendations align with much of the government's current work. Notably, our recommendations correspond with the listed Sustainable Development Goals, Canada's poverty reduction strategy S-233: National Framework for a Guaranteed Livable Basic Income Act, and C-212: School Food Program for Children Act, are all examples of current bills that align with our recommendations.





## CONCLUDING REMARKS AND NEXT STEPS

The recommendations from YCP members highlight the significant struggles children and youth are facing. Amidst the mental health crisis and the looming threat of climate change, young people across Canada are undoubtedly confronting immense challenges. However, in adversity, we not only rise but also uplift our peers, advocating for fellow young people within our communities.

The face of modern social change and a brighter future is embodied by Canadian children. Young people are eager to engage meaningfully, participate in decision-making processes, and influence the policies that impact our lives. The report demonstrates that youth have a keen awareness of the issues at hand and have formulated recommendations. We offer a fresh, bold, and unapologetic perspective that differs from that of adults. It is crucial for adults to recognize that we, the young people, are the experts of our own experiences in addressing child and youth-centred issues. Therefore, children and youth need to contribute to the solutions.

Young people, like all individuals, should have a voice in decisions that directly impact our lives. The report clearly shows that young people are ready and willing to contribute. Although we cannot vote (for now), our inability to directly participate in democracy should not result in our exclusion from political discussions. For far too long, the voices of young people have been sidelined and not taken seriously.

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**For more information:**

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