



# Where Does Canada Stand?

The Canadian Index of  
Child and Youth Well-being  
**2019 Baseline Report**

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**DIGEST**

UNICEF Canada is deeply grateful for the contributions of the children and youth, the Advisory Reference Group, the expert validators and our philanthropic partners who are guiding and shaping the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being. Special thanks to Bryan Smale, Director of the Canadian Index of Wellbeing and Linda McKessock, Program Manager, Canadian Index of Wellbeing; and to Christine Holliday, Data Analyst, for her dedication throughout the compilation of the Index. We greatly appreciate Ron Wray's insights, analysis and ongoing guidance. We thank panel authors Ann Douglas, Jayne Morrish, Valerie Steeves, Jennifer Zwicker and Keiki Shikako Thomas.

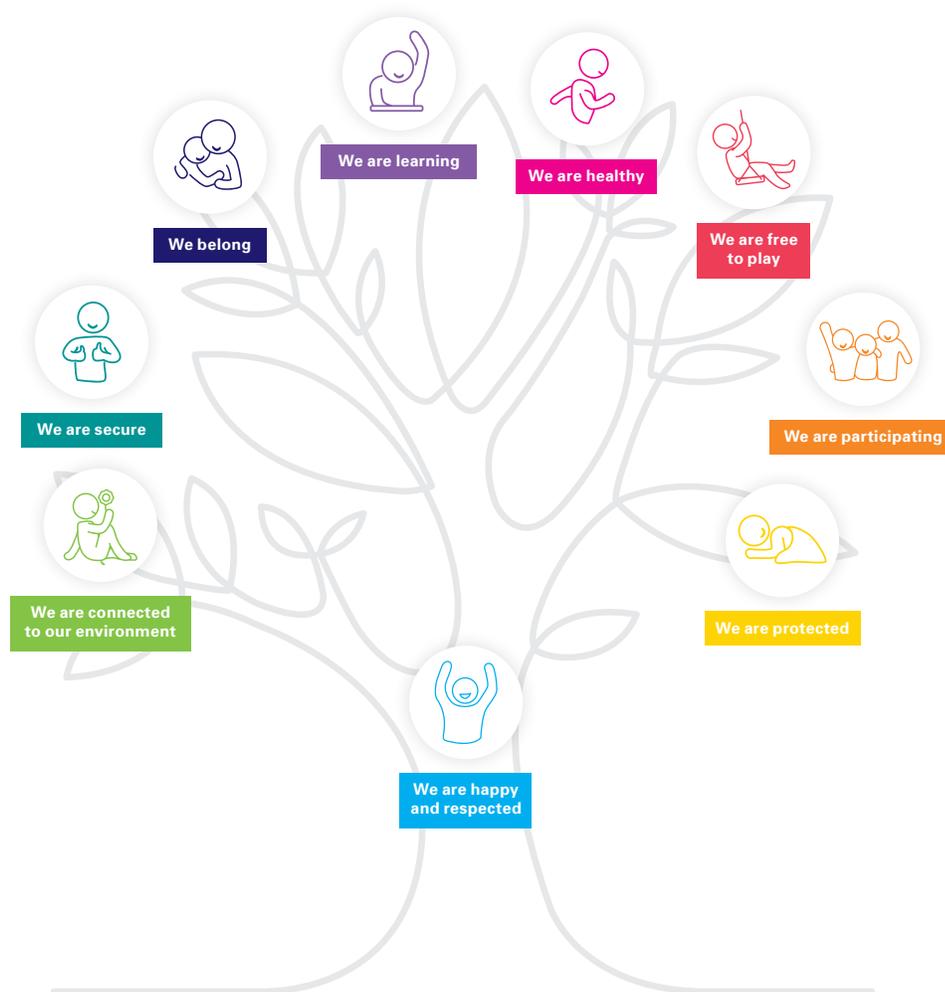
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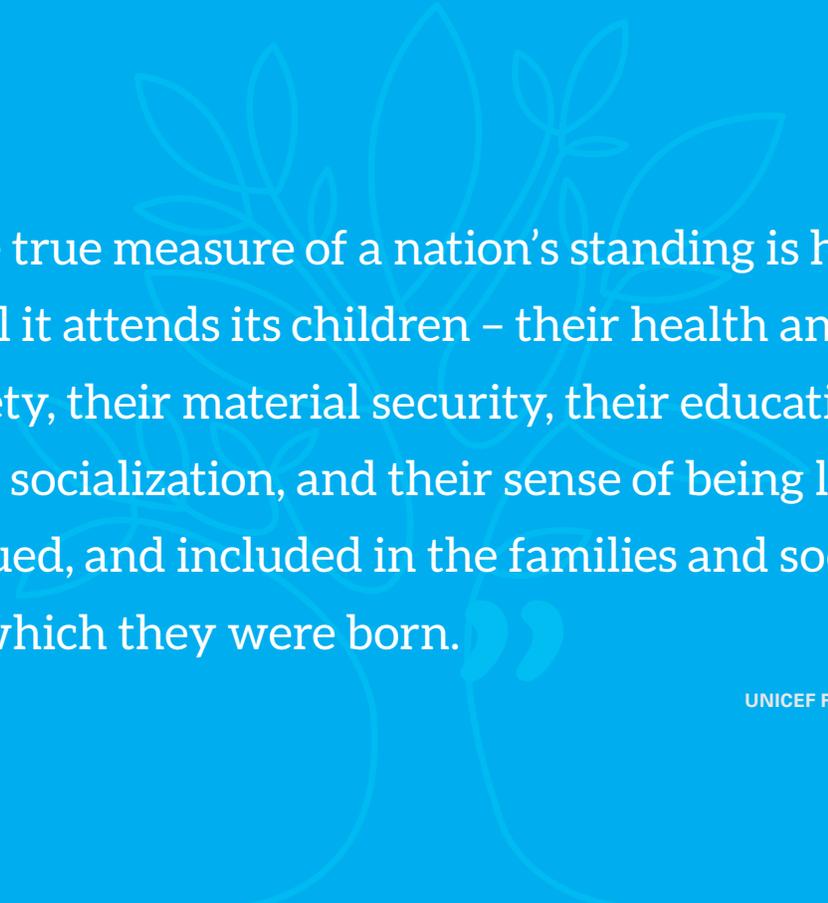
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For more information about the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being: **[www.unicef.ca](http://www.unicef.ca)**



# Where we stand

[oneyouth.unicef.ca](http://oneyouth.unicef.ca) | [@OneYouthCanada](https://twitter.com/OneYouthCanada) | [#OurBigSelfie](https://twitter.com/OneYouthCanada)



“ The true measure of a nation’s standing is how well it attends its children – their health and safety, their material security, their education and socialization, and their sense of being loved, valued, and included in the families and societies to which they were born. ”

UNICEF REPORT CARD 7

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## About the Index:

# 125 Indicators for 1 Childhood

Many Canadians believe that Canada is the best place in the world to grow up. Is it?

Canada's wealth has been steadily rising, but our overall level of child and youth well-being hasn't budged in more than a decade.<sup>1</sup> Why?

The Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being measures levels, inequalities and trends in the state of children and youth. It's a big 'selfie' of Canada, a snapshot that looks at many aspects of childhood to help Canadians understand what growing up is like for kids, focus efforts and accelerate progress where it is most needed.

The Index brings together a wide range of data into one framework to encourage a comprehensive and balanced view of how kids in Canada are faring. We are tracking 125 indicators across nine dimensions of the lives of children and youth, from birth to age 18, using the most recent, population-level, statistical data.<sup>2</sup> This report is a profile of children and youth that provides a baseline from which future reports will track progress. It complements the UNICEF Report Cards that look at life for kids in the world's rich countries.

In one of the world's wealthiest societies, we still have to measure how well Canada is meeting basic needs like nutrition and clean drinking water because we are not fulfilling these human rights for every child. Because child and youth well-being is also fundamentally determined by opportunity to participate in Canadian society and decided by how kids feel about their lives, the Index measures these as well.

The Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being was built by and for children and youth, across the country and farthest from opportunity, and provides an inspiring and challenging view of what well-being looks and feels like to them. **What we measure is important to kids from their perspectives, from their pets to their risk of poverty.** Many of the indicators,

about 60 per cent, are based on how children and youth report their own well-being. More than 90 adult experts from diverse perspectives also contributed to the development of the Index, and we also took international evidence and practice into account (please see the report, *How We Built the Index*, for more information about the development of the Index).

The Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being also tracks how Canada is delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). About one third of the indicators measure Canada's achievement of the SDG targets for children. With a decade to go until 2030, when Canada promised to deliver on the goals, we clearly must accelerate progress in key areas.

What are children and youth telling us about their lives?

### Kids of Canada have mixed feelings about their lives, but many are not very happy:

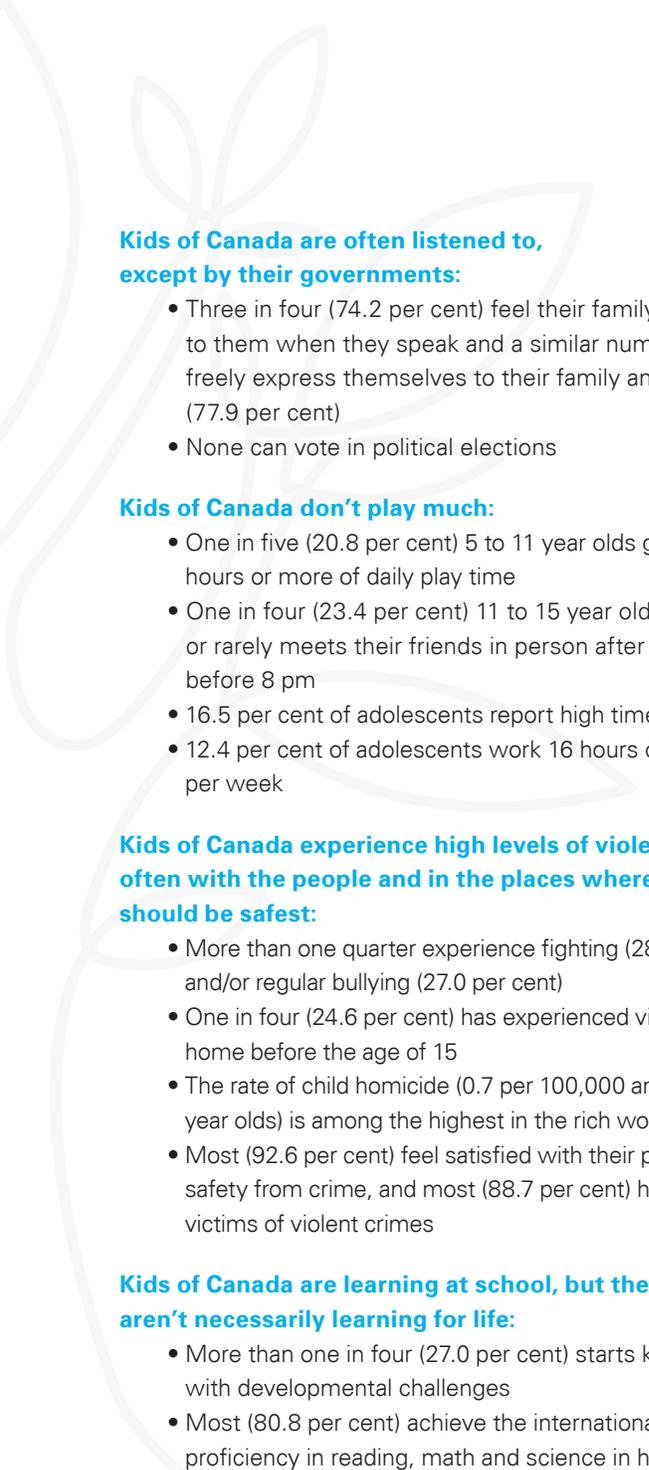
- About half (55.0 per cent) rate their lives high on the life satisfaction scale
- Around one in four (27.4 per cent) has felt sad or hopeless for a long period
- Most (84.6 per cent) feel a strong sense of belonging to their communities. Yet just over half (57.3 per cent) say they receive good support within their families, and less than half (42.9 per cent) get good support at school
- One in four (24.5 per cent) is lonely, but almost all 11 to 15 year olds (96.2 per cent) have someone they can talk to

### Kids of Canada experience poverty differently than adults do:

- One in ten (9.0 per cent) lives in families without enough income to meet their basic needs
- One in five (20.0 per cent) lives in relative poverty, without enough income to fully participate in life in Canada
- One in four (23.3 per cent) goes to bed or school hungry at least sometimes because there is not enough food at home
- About half (56.1 per cent) feel their family is well off

<sup>1</sup>UNICEF Report Cards measure overall child and youth well-being based on multiple indicators for the world's wealthiest countries.

<sup>2</sup>Some indicators have an age range above 18 such as the teen birth rate, the graduation rate and the NEET rate. The data tables provide the age range for each indicator.



### **Kids of Canada are often listened to, except by their governments:**

- Three in four (74.2 per cent) feel their family listens to them when they speak and a similar number can freely express themselves to their family and friends (77.9 per cent)
- None can vote in political elections

### **Kids of Canada don't play much:**

- One in five (20.8 per cent) 5 to 11 year olds gets 1.5 hours or more of daily play time
- One in four (23.4 per cent) 11 to 15 year olds never or rarely meets their friends in person after school/ before 8 pm
- 16.5 per cent of adolescents report high time pressure
- 12.4 per cent of adolescents work 16 hours or more per week

### **Kids of Canada experience high levels of violence, often with the people and in the places where they should be safest:**

- More than one quarter experience fighting (28.3 per cent) and/or regular bullying (27.0 per cent)
- One in four (24.6 per cent) has experienced violence at home before the age of 15
- The rate of child homicide (0.7 per 100,000 among 0 to 19 year olds) is among the highest in the rich world
- Most (92.6 per cent) feel satisfied with their personal safety from crime, and most (88.7 per cent) have not been victims of violent crimes

### **Kids of Canada are learning at school, but they aren't necessarily learning for life:**

- More than one in four (27.0 per cent) starts kindergarten with developmental challenges
- Most (80.8 per cent) achieve the international level of proficiency in reading, math and science in high school
- 93.9 per cent complete high school; 6.3 per cent of school-aged youth are not in some kind of education, employment or training
- Less than half (46.9 per cent) feel positive about school; and one in four (26.8 per cent) says they have more school work than they can handle

### **Kids of Canada aren't as healthy as we should expect, but it's not because of their choices:**

- One in three mothers (32.1 per cent) is exclusively breastfeeding for at least six months, far below the world target of 50 per cent
- 90.2 per cent have at least one dose of measles vaccine at age 2, fewer children than necessary for population protection
- One in ten (10.6 per cent age 5 to 17) is obese
- More than half of young people age 11 to 15 (59.8 per cent) go to school feeling tired
- One third (34.2 per cent) of 11 to 15 year olds experience weekly symptoms of mental distress, including headaches, stomach aches and trouble sleeping, and one in ten (10.5 per cent) 12 to 17 year olds reports living with a mood and/or anxiety disorder
- 7.2 per cent of 14 and 15 year olds are involved in frequent, higher-risk substance use

### **Kids of Canada are 'canaries' of environmental change:**

- One in ten homes with children (11.1 per cent) was informed of a boil-water advisory in the most recent year for available data
- The air they breathe in cities is just below the safe limit for fine particulate pollution
- Most (71.0 per cent) understand complex environmental issues

The kids of Canada have  
**one chance to be children.**

Canada has a chance to be a  
better country for children.

**Stand with children.**

# Who Are We?

## Kids of Canada

Canada's population includes nearly 8 million children and youth under age 18, about a fifth of our population. They are the most urbanized, diverse and educated generation Canada has ever raised. Three in four (73.0 per cent) live in urban centres. They live in more diverse families than any previous generation. And they are unequal, with wide gaps between children based on their ethnicity, legal status, gender and gender identity, disability, economic security and geographic location.

Indigenous children, including First Nations, Métis and Inuit, are 7.6 per cent of the child population, and reconciliation must overcome discrimination if the future of childhood in Canada is going to be brighter.

Close to 10 per cent of children in Canada (9.4 per cent) were born outside the country; about 40 per cent are foreign-born or have at least one foreign-born parent, a figure that is expected to rise to about 50 per cent over the next generation. While many of these children have better health and education outcomes than Canadian-born children, some struggle to belong. About 1.7 per cent of children do not speak English or French.

# 65.6%

The percentage of parents who are satisfied with the balance between their jobs and their home lives<sup>3</sup>

is smaller than the senior population. However, Indigenous communities (particularly Inuit communities) have much younger populations than other groups in Canada, and children outnumber seniors. Indigenous children are the fastest-growing child population.

Despite their relatively small population size, children face outsized challenges in some aspects of their lives. Many

The child population grew at close to 0.7 per cent from 2017 to 2018. Although the population continues to grow, this is the first generation of young people that

<sup>3</sup>Percentage of respondents to the 2016 Statistics Canada General Social Survey with at least one child 19 or under living at home who are satisfied with the balance between job and home life.

<sup>4</sup>Percentage of respondents to the 2016 Statistics Canada General Social Survey with at least one child 19 or under at home who are satisfied with life as a whole right now.

experience violence. They are more likely to be poor. As their numbers decline relative to older groups, children may be more likely to be passed over by governments focused on other priorities – an 'invisible' group of citizens.

# 66.2%

The percentage of parents who say they are satisfied with life<sup>4</sup>

## We are Canada

**The Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being is really about all of us.**

It is not an assessment of how competent or fit children are for Canadian society, but how fit Canada is for children. It is not an evaluation of children's skills, behaviour or resilience, but an assessment of the character of our nation and the kinds of childhoods our society offers its children.

The indicators of well-being in the Index focus on the 'status' of children, and they are influenced by a web of family, peers, communities, cultures, public policies, social norms and attitudes, political ideologies and environmental conditions.

**All of the indicators in the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being are sensitive to action.**

UNICEF Canada believes that reducing income and social inequality is the greatest challenge and opportunity of our time, with potentially the greatest effects on all aspects of children's lives in Canada. Income inequality affects children's relationships, material security, freedom to play, learning, health, protection and sense of belonging.

Some countries have set bold goals to be the best places in the world for children. One Youth is a campaign with a goal to see Canada join the countries at the top of UNICEF's international league tables of child and youth well-being – those countries whose children are generally healthier, safer

and happier. Everyone in Canada can take action that will change the data we are tracking with this Index, so the next

report will be a record of better young lives. We are measuring progress to make progress.

## Happier Parents, Happier Kids

ANN DOUGLAS  
AUTHOR, RADIO COLUMNIST, SPEAKER

One of the key ingredients in the recipe for a happy child is a happy parent. When parents do better, kids do better – and vice versa. And, as for the recipe for a happy parent, the key ingredient in that recipe is good public policy.

Parenting doesn't happen in a bubble. Parents can't help but be affected by what's happening in the world beyond their front door. And when it comes to policy decisions, the impact on parenting can be quite dramatic.

Research conducted by the Council on Contemporary Families has found, for example, that parental happiness levels increase in the presence of policies that make it less stressful and less costly for parents to juggle the competing demands of work and family. There is, after all, a solid body of research to demonstrate that parents who struggle with high levels of work-life conflict are more likely to be stressed, anxious and depressed. And, what's more, they're also likely to be less healthy and more dissatisfied with their relationships with their partners and their kids. When work-life conflict is prolonged or extreme, parents end up being distant, inattentive, less sensitive and less emotionally available to

their kids. That, in turn, takes a toll on the happiness of both parents and kids.

It isn't just happiness that's at stake. When parents are feeling stressed and overloaded, everything tends to fall apart on the health and wellness front – with the impact even greater if the mother is the parent who is feeling stressed. The good news is that there's a way to put the brakes on this kind of downward spiral – and to create an upward spiral that allows both parents and kids to thrive.

**It starts with family-friendly policies.** As it turns out, access to quality, affordable child care is a complete game changer on this front, helping to minimize work-life conflict, encouraging greater gender equity within couple relationships and eliminating the so-called motherhood tax (the fact that mothers are penalized in the workplace for being the ones who typically take the lead on care).

**Economic policy that helps to reduce income inequality is equally critical to help relieve the anxiety that so many parents and children experience.** As the economic stakes get higher, the pressure on parents and kids gets ever greater, and

parents are more likely to decide that harsher and more controlling parenting is the best way to respond to the challenges posed by an uncertain future.

For some parents dealing with trauma and health challenges, child care and other community supports can help them be the parents they want to be.

If we're actually serious about producing a generation of children who are happier and healthier than their parents, we need public policies that help those children's parents feel less anxious, less guilty and less overwhelmed. In order to make that happen, we need to shift from treating parenting as a problem that every family needs to solve on its own to choosing instead to embrace it as a collective opportunity to raise up the next generation of citizens together.

As it turns out, that happens to be a winning strategy. Societies that invest in children and their parents by implementing wise and forward-looking public policy also happen to be the societies that reap the greatest dividends on the happiness front. In other words, they're the best countries in the world to be a parent and to be a kid.



# The Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being: #OurBigSelfie

The Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being is a holistic and balanced picture of the rights and well-being of children and youth under age 18. The Index is guided by an ecological systems approach that recognizes the interdependence of key areas – or dimensions – of the lives of children and youth, all of which affect their well-being. It tracks 125 indicators in nine interrelated dimensions of children’s lives. Each dimension tells a story.



## Are We Happy and Respected?

- Feeling balanced physically, emotionally, spiritually and mentally
- Feeling free to set my own goals
- Feeling sad or hopeless for a long time
- Feeling satisfied with life
- Feeling self-confident
- Feeling stressed
- Feeling valued and respected
- Having a sense of purpose in life
- Managing the demands of life

## Do We Belong?

- Being charged with an offence
- Being involved in groups and group activities
- Being separated from my family
- Caring for a pet
- Feeling left out
- Feeling like I belong to my local community
- Feeling lonely
- Feeling supported by my community
- Feeling supported by my family
- Feeling supported by my friends
- Feeling supported by my siblings
- Feeling supported by my teachers
- Having emotional challenges in the early years
- Keeping family relationships

## Are We Secure?

- Being excluded from opportunities
- Feeling like my family has as much money as others
- Getting child benefits
- Getting support for disabilities
- Going hungry
- Going without things I need at home
- Having parents with insecure work
- Having safe and secure housing
- Homeless
- Living in poverty
- Living in severe poverty
- My basic needs are not affordable
- Not getting enough healthy food

### Are We Participating?

Able to register a business

---

Contributing income tax on the money I make

---

Free to be online

---

Free to choose relationships

---

Free to express ideas and opinions

---

Free to express my identity and culture

---

Having citizenship

---

Having control over my life

---

Having opportunities to engage in reconciliation

---

Indigenous children speaking an Indigenous language

---

Managing my money

---

Not getting information I need

---

Participating in decision-making

---

Voting in elections

### Are We Free to Play?

Balancing my activities and responsibilities

---

Balancing physical activity, sleep and screen time

---

Feeling time pressure

---

Getting around on my own

---

Having barriers to participating in activities

---

Not spending much time with friends

---

Playing actively or independently

---

Spending a lot of time at a job

---

Spending a lot of time on family responsibilities

---

Spending time in outdoor play

### Are We Protected?

Abuse at home

---

Abuse in an intimate relationship

---

Bullying

---

Discrimination

---

Feeling safe in my neighbourhood

---

Fighting

---

Getting injured at work

---

Having control over my reputation and privacy

---

Having someone to talk to

---

Having strategies to deal with risky situations

---

Homicide

---

Physical punishment

---

Satisfied with access to justice

---

Serious injury

---

Violent crime

### Are We Learning?

Achieving in high school

---

Being suspended from school

---

Disengaged from learning and employment

---

Feeling positive about school

---

Graduating from high school

---

Having opportunities to explore my potential, passions and interests

---

Having talk time with adults

---

Having too much homework to manage

---

Knowing my human rights

---

Not ready for school with the skills I need

---

Participating in cultural activities and events

---

Participating in preschool

---

Participating in quality early learning and child care

---

Reading well in primary school

---

Thriving in the middle years

### Are We Healthy?

Breastfeeding

---

Feeling satisfied with my health care

---

Feeling tired before school

---

Getting health care

---

Getting vaccinated

---

Having frequent mental and physical symptoms

---

Having good self-rated health

---

Having good self-rated mental health

---

Having good spiritual health

---

Having low birth weight

---

Having poor dental health

---

Having thoughts of suicide

---

Infant death

---

Liking how I look

---

Living with a mental health condition

---

Managing my health

---

My activities are limited by my health

---

Obesity

---

Preterm birth

---

Suicide

---

Taking risks

---

Teen births

### Are We Connected to our Environment?

Being affected by a disaster

---

Being environmentally aware

---

Feeling satisfied with my local area

---

Having access to public transit

---

Having barriers to getting places

---

Having clean water sources

---

Having parks and open space

---

Having places to spend free time

---

Having polluted air

---

Having recreation facilities

---

Having safe drinking water

---

Living in a sustainable ecosystem

---

Living with a sustainable climate

# Interpreting the Index

**Dimensions** represent broad, conceptual aspects of children’s lives. There are eight dimensions in the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being, including ‘We are Protected’ and ‘We are Participating,’ that influence young people’s sense of well-being, within the central dimension, ‘We are Happy and Respected.’

**Measures** describe distinct aspects of child and youth well-being in each dimension. The measures take on a particular meaning within the dimension in which they are embedded. The measures are equally weighted, recognizing the importance of balance in achieving well-being and that children’s rights are not subject to a hierarchy. The names of the measures are general descriptions that are understandable for young people.

**Indicators** are statistical definitions of the measures. The indicators are the closest fit possible to the measurement concept, data selection criteria and available data. More ‘objective’ indicators such as incidence counts (e.g., breastfeeding rate) are balanced with more ‘subjective’ assessments by children and youth of their experiences (e.g., feeling left out) in every dimension of life. As much as possible, the indicators focus on the state or status of children (reported by children or observable in the lives of children), rather than on ‘inputs’ or conditions that might influence the state of children.

**Data** are population-level, statistical, numeric values – mainly reported as rates (percentages of a child population). Most of the data are collected by pan-Canadian surveys by governments and researchers; some are from administrative data sets. There are many gaps in available data for the indicators, particularly to break down the data for specific groups of children.

**Proxy indicator (PI):** The indicator does not fully describe the measurement concept, but a partial indicator has been developed for survey use and, in some cases, there are available data.

**Limited data (LD):** The indicator is collected in national surveys or data sets, but data are reported only for particular regions or populations in Canada at this time. Consequently, reported data might not be entirely representative of Canada, or a national average is not currently available.

**No data (NI/D):** There is no existing indicator for a measure identified as an important aspect of well-being, there are no current data available for the measurement concept at the national level, and/or the data are not available due to high cost and access barriers. For the measures with no data, indicators that have been developed or are in development at national or subnational levels are described; for others, model indicators are proposed as an agenda for action.

**Sustainable Development Goal (SDG):** The indicator aligns with an official target of the Sustainable Development Goals for children and youth.

The example below shows the connections among dimensions, measures, indicators and data:

DIMENSION	MEASURE	INDICATOR	DATA
We Are Secure	Living in poverty	Percentage of children under 18 living in a household with income lower than 60 per cent of the median (LIM)	20.0%

# Why Kids Need Their Own Index

With many different well-being frameworks and indexes available at different scales, from local to international, why do the kids of Canada need their own national index?

## **Kids Need Different Things**

Children and youth have important needs and entitlements that are distinct from what adults need. Childhood is a period of development in which breastfeeding, immunization, schooling, language development and playing are among children's distinct needs and rights. Because of their developmental stage, children are also more vulnerable than adults to deprivations such as food insecurity and exposures such as air pollution. Children are also more vulnerable to violence and exploitation because of their developmental stage and their legal status. At the same time, children and youth have many of the same rights as adults, such as the right to participate in decisions affecting them, but they struggle to have their rights recognized and respected.

## **Kids Think Different Things are Important to Their Well-being**

Adults tend to place a great deal of emphasis on certain aspects of child and youth well-being, such as health and educational achievement. While these are also important to young people, they also report that a sustainable ecosystem is part of well-being and that their relationships with their pets are very important, among other things that adults rarely consider. Kids may be taking fewer health risks and graduating from high school at higher rates than previous generations, but they are also feeling unprecedented pressure and anxiety about succeeding and belonging that impairs their well-being. Taking a comprehensive and balanced view of well-being, from the perspective of kids, is critical to understanding their lives.

**“I feel a lot of pressure from those around me to act ‘perfectly’ and get good grades and scores on tests. I don’t want to let anyone down, but sometimes, I don’t always want to be the kid who is a ‘model student.’ I want to act like a kid.”**

YOUTH CONTRIBUTOR

## **Kids Experience Life Differently**

Kids experience life differently than adults do. In some indicators of well-being, such as poverty and exposure to air pollution, children are disproportionately affected compared to adults. In life satisfaction, a standard indicator of overall happiness and well-being, children and youth in Canada report lower levels than do adults. In fact, many global indexes of well-being rank Canada near the top for adult-focused or general population indicators, but much lower for child-focused indicators. As well, adults may over- or under-estimate how young people experience bullying, mental health and other aspects of their lives – even in the lives of children close to them. In some surveys, parents or teachers are asked about children's experiences, but they are proxies for children's views. However, in most of the surveys used for the Index, children are asked about their own views and experiences: about 60 per cent of the indicators are based on young people's self-reported perspectives and experiences. This respects their right to be heard and to participate in decisions affecting them.

## Blended Worlds: Online and Offline

Children and youth live in blended worlds; there is not much of an online/offline dichotomy. Learning music or math often takes place through integrated online and offline experiences. Both friendships and bullying can start and follow young people online and offline, often involving the same people they see in person and on screen. The indicators in the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being are status indicators that can be more or less influenced by young people's engagement with digital technology and content, and by many other factors.



For all of these reasons, the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being includes some different measures of child and youth well-being than instruments designed for an adult or general population; compares how kids experience life differently than adults, where data permits; and includes indicators in which kids rate their own experiences and perceptions.



**CANADA**

We used U-Report Canada to ask young people for their perspectives on various topics related to the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being. Keep your eye out for this icon to see what young people in Canada are thinking. U-Report is a polling platform developed by UNICEF Canada and our partners for youth ages 13-24. We gather youth voice and perspective to understand how different groups are being affected by decisions, policies, services and events, and to involve youth across Canada in decisions that affect them. Visit <https://www.unicef.ca/one-youth/u-report/> for more information.



A need statement by a youth participant in the 'Belonging' Change Summit in Montreal, Quebec in May 2019, hosted by UNICEF Canada and the Dawson Boys and Girls Club.

## Where Does Canada Stand? What Stands Out

How are Canada's 8 million children and youth doing? It is a complicated question. Which children? Indigenous or immigrant children? Children in which province? Children and youth are diverse and have diverse lives.

The Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being uses national rates and averages of population-level, statistical data to provide a high-level, bird's eye view of the state of children and youth. National averages reveal important patterns and trends, and can benchmark 'normal' life as a child in Canada. If the average level of life satisfaction among kids is low, it is not just because of challenges among a small group of children (the population numbers are typically too small to sway the average value); rather, it is a telling picture of the state of many Canadian children and youth.

But there is no such thing as an average child. National averages mask differences among children that can be inequitable. We complement national averages with disaggregated data about the lives of smaller groups of children where the data are available and focus our discussion where differences are the greatest.

Measuring and understanding child and youth well-being are ongoing, multi-faceted efforts. This is our take. For each dimension of well-being, we focus on some of Canada's greatest challenges and opportunities to fulfill the human rights of every young person. The 'snapshots' that follow overview some of the findings that stand out. We hope you will go further: ask new questions, find new answers and take new actions to make Canada truly – measurably – the best place to grow up.

### **Snapshot 1: How do Canadian children feel about their lives?**

Asking young people how they feel about their lives is a relatively new effort in data collection. The majority of the indicators in the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being involve young people's self-reports about their lives. If there is one thing that really stands out, it is the discouraging number of children and youth who say they are very satisfied with their lives – an overall take on their sense of well-being. According to the most recent data from the World Health Organization's Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) survey, only 55.0 per cent of children and youth in Canada rated their lives high on a life satisfaction scale. Only half of girls, 49.9 per cent, reported a high level of satisfaction with their lives, compared to about 60.3 per cent of boys.

Why are so many children unhappy? There are signals of gendered differences and inequalities within other indicators in the Index. Girls are more likely to report poor body image, lack of confidence and exclusion from decision-making, while boys are less likely to achieve in school. There are strong signals that the stress of striving to achieve academically and socially in an increasingly competitive society may be falling more heavily on girls. They are far more likely to report extreme time pressure (26.3 per cent of girls compared to 8.3 per cent of boys), lack of life balance and being tired at the start of the school day.

### **Snapshot 2: Children and youth are sensitive indicators of their environments**

The mental health of young people is a bigger focus of public discussion than in any previous generation. About one in three young people (34.2 per cent) reports weekly symptoms – including headaches and stomach aches – linked to mental distress. Recent findings from the Ontario Child Health Study suggest that overall, the number of children and youth experiencing mental illness has not increased, but the types of mental health problems they experience have shifted. Among children ages 12 to 16, the prevalence of anxiety and depression has significantly increased.

The Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being includes a range of indicators that signal how children and youth are experiencing mental health, from the frequency of feeling physically ill, to experiencing mental illness, to self-harm. Measures of mental well-being in the Index have an evident gender gap. Girls are more likely to report mood and/or anxiety disorders than boys (12.2 per cent compared to 8.9 per cent),

and they more often report signs of psychological distress (43.4 per cent compared to 24.3 per cent).

Putting the mental health of children and youth in perspective requires recognizing that children's health status is a sensitive indication of social conditions. Well established in health research is that medical/clinical care accounts for only about 25 per cent of an individual's health status, while 50 per cent or more can be attributed to social and economic factors.<sup>i</sup> Children's health is not merely the result of personal, lifestyle choices (e.g., eating fruit), skills and behaviours to manage stress (e.g., meditation and physical activity), or even the accessibility and quality of health care. The question, requiring more investigation, is whether the relatively high rate of psychological symptoms and the increase in anxiety and depression disorders among young people are warning signs that wider income and social inequalities are threatening their well-being.

### **Snapshot 3: Connected or disconnected?**

The Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being includes decidedly mixed signals about young people's sense of belonging with or connection to family, friends and society. The quality of relationships young people have is changing in a rapidly changing society experiencing rising inequality, urbanization, immigration and technological disruption. Unlike many American studies finding distressing ruptures in young people's connection and trust in their communities, a high percentage of Canadian children and youth, 84.6 per cent, report a strong sense of belonging to their local communities. Young people in smaller communities and rural areas are more likely to feel the strongest sense of belonging (close to 90 per cent), but even youth in more urbanized areas report positive community connection.

Community connection is somewhat contradicted by how connected many children and youth feel in their relationships with family, friends, other groups and the institutional setting of school. Close to two thirds (65.9 per cent) say they feel well supported by their friends; 57.3 per cent say they feel well supported by their families; and 42.9 per cent report a high level of support from their teachers. One in four children (24.5 per cent) reports feeling lonely – almost one in three girls (29.7 per cent). It is encouraging that the vast majority of children and youth (96.2 per cent) report that they have someone to talk to when they face a problem.



More than one third of young people (35.2 per cent) report experiences of discrimination and unfair treatment, which occur in their homes, at school and in the community. The pattern of such experiences is substantially uneven across the country. For example, 72.8 per cent of children and youth in Saskatchewan report incidents of discrimination or unfair treatment, and young people in Alberta (44.5 per cent) and Manitoba (40.9 per cent) report relatively higher rates of discrimination. In addition, there are signs of problems with young people's trust in some institutions; 43.6 per cent of adolescents say the police force does a good job at being approachable, treating people fairly and providing information. Local studies in Canada have linked this lack of trust to racial discrimination. In the United States of America, a dramatic drop in public trust has been linked to growing inequality, a signal picked up in the most recent World Gallup Poll.

#### **Snapshot 4: The poverty of well-being**

In 2019, the Government of Canada announced a strategy to reduce poverty in Canada by 50 per cent by 2030, a target of the SDGs. Recent changes to the Canada Child Benefit have contributed to a modest reduction in child poverty, from 22.2 per cent<sup>5</sup> to 20.0 per cent.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the rate of child poverty dipped slightly below the average population rate for the first time in many years. However, many children and youth continue to go to school or bed hungry and some live in precarious and substandard housing. For the first time, the Government of Canada has defined an official 'poverty line,' but the impact of inequality doesn't stop at the 'poverty line.'

Growing up in a more unequal society, with a wider gap between the top and bottom incomes than in previous generations, is more difficult for kids at the bottom of the family income gradient. Beyond not having their basic needs met, they face a wider gap to fair opportunity and participation in society. Starting with a gap in early child development, children experience gaps in academic achievement, health and happiness. While equitable public education can level some

differences, income inequality makes it much more difficult. Income inequality affects almost every aspect of child well-being, not only for the lowest income group but also for the children in the middle. On the thirtieth anniversary of Canada's pledge to ensure human rights for every child and to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000, we have clearly let our children down.<sup>6</sup> Canada's commitment to deliver the global SDGs is a fresh opportunity to ensure the well-being of children and youth rises along with Canada's steadily increasing wealth. The costs of failing to deliver for every child are too high.

#### **Why income inequality matters to children and youth**

Income inequality may not be the most obvious explanation for many of the patterns revealed in the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being, but it is one of the most powerful. What matters is not only the difference in income between those below and above the poverty line, but also the difference in income between the top and bottom. Canada's level of income inequality has increased sharply over the past 15 years. In 2009, researchers Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson's book, *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*, explored the relationship between income inequality and a host of health and social problems.<sup>iii</sup> The deeper the level of income inequality in a country, the more likely the population is to experience lower reading ability, public trust and social mobility, and higher rates of mental health problems, substance abuse, obesity, teen pregnancy, violence and imprisonment. Not surprisingly, the researchers found a strong relationship between overall income inequality within a country and child well-being outcomes.

A decade later, in 2019, the same researchers investigated how income inequality affects emotional well-being, including challenges to relationships with friends and family and higher rates of stress and social anxiety.<sup>iv</sup> It became clearer that income inequality within and between countries is a better predictor of how people feel about their lives than income levels. American studies that have been tracking trends in the

<sup>5</sup> The data are derived from what is known as the Low Income Measure (LIM), the recognized international standard for cross-country comparability. LIM shows the proportion of each country's children living in a household where disposable income is less than 60 per cent of the national median (after taking taxes and benefits into account and adjusting family size and composition). In Canada, the new, official headline measure of poverty at the federal level tells us the percentage of children in a household below the Market Basket Measure of income. Poverty using this method is measured as approximately 9 per cent; this is a low-water mark that focuses on how many children live in families who can't afford to meet basic needs, though these needs are not defined for children and youth. The Market Basket Measure was created by Statistics Canada as a measure of low income based on the cost of a specific basket of goods and services for a modest, basic standard of living. Included in the basket are qualities and quantities of food, clothing, footwear, transportation, shelter and other expenses for a reference family and adjusted for family size and local geographic area.

<sup>6</sup> In 1989, the Government of Canada signed on to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the House of Commons unanimously voted to end child poverty by the year 2000.

psychosocial well-being of children using survey data from the 1930s to the present day, like Pickett and Wilkinson, have found a correlation between rising income inequality and escalating narcissism, a decline in public trust, and more loneliness and other forms of disconnection.<sup>vii</sup> In another study, Elgar and Currie (2016) identify a relationship between income inequality and adolescent subjective well-being: young people in countries with higher income inequality are more likely to report lower satisfaction with life.<sup>viii</sup> UNICEF Report Cards have been tracking the relationship between income inequality and child well-being since 2015, finding that income inequality appears to sustain or increase gaps between children in many aspects of life and limits the overall well-being of children.

The Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being profiles a generation shaped by a sharp increase in income inequality. Income inequality appears to undermine a collective

commitment to well-being, foster a social climate of competition and limit the equitable distribution of resources and opportunities. Research has long made the connection between excluding low-income children from fair opportunity and lower academic aspirations, substance abuse and other forms of self-harm. More recently, research is documenting the effects on children and youth across the socio-economic gradient, and the Index shows strong signs of this. The growth of 'concerted cultivation' describes how adults are pushing children to intense participation in education, sport, cultural and social activities to improve their competitive opportunities. A body of research points to the contribution of such competitive pressures to a rise in mental health problems such as anxiety and depression. We believe that investing a fair share of Canada's rising national wealth in children and youth to reduce inequality is one of the greatest opportunities of our time.





# Are we happy and respected?

**W**ell-being for children and youth is a state of mind, at a critical stage of life. Young people's sense of well-being – how they tell us they are – is ultimately how we know how Canada measures up. To feel happy and respected is the confluence of many indicators of different dimensions of well-being. Young people express their overall sense of well-being in different ways. Life satisfaction is a strong proxy indicator of overall well-being. Young people who participated in developing the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being said that when they feel valued and respected, achieve balance across different dimensions of well-being, have goals and a sense of purpose, and are coping with stress and managing the demands of life – you can trust that they are doing well. All of the indicators in the Index influence the overall assessments kids make about their lives to answer the question, 'Are we happy and respected?'

## Children's life satisfaction is an indicator of their overall well-being.

Measure	National Estimate	Indicator
Feeling balanced physically, emotionally, spiritually & mentally	No data	MODEL INDICATOR: Percentage of 9–17 year-olds who report their life feels balanced most of the time
Feeling free to set my own goals	No data	MODEL INDICATOR: Percentage of 9–17 year-olds who report they're free to set their own goals
Feeling sad or hopeless for a long time	27.4	Percentage of 11–15 year-olds who report feeling sad or hopeless
Feeling satisfied with life	55.0	Percentage of 11–15 year-olds who report high life satisfaction
Feeling self-confident	65.9	Percentage of 11–15 year-olds who report having confidence in themselves
Feeling stressed	12.5	Percentage of 15–17 year-olds who report finding most days stressful
Feeling valued and respected	88.2	Percentage of 10–19 year-olds who report feeling their parents think they are good at things
Having a sense of purpose in life	80.4	Percentage of 11–15 year-olds who report that it's important to experience joy in life and that their life has meaning and purpose
Managing the demands of life	Limited data	Percentage of 12–17 year-olds who report being able to handle the day-to-day demands in life

● SDG  
● Proxy

# 17%



of U-Reporters said that their opinions are taken seriously by adults 'always or a lot,' while 42% said their opinions are 'rarely or never' taken seriously.

### Snapshot

Only half (55.0 per cent) of Canadian children and youth say they are happy. Close to one in four (27.4 per cent) has felt sad or hopeless for a long period in the past year. Children's life satisfaction is an overall indicator of their well-being from their perspectives. It is heavily influenced by how secure they are – free from poverty and included in their society – and by the quality of their close relationships. These are, in turn, affected by rising income inequality, which may explain the free fall in young people's life satisfaction in recent years. The level of happiness (life satisfaction) among Canada's kids is a sensitive indicator of social, economic and possibly environmental changes: **happily, it is something we can change.**





# Do we belong?



**B**elonging for children and youth means feeling loved and supported and having mutually caring and respectful relationships. Feeling supported by and connected to family, friends, teachers, people in the community and, for some, their pets contribute to a sense of belonging and to many aspects of well-being, including health, learning and protection. Supportive connections with others – even just a few – can reduce loneliness, which can occur even when young people are participating in groups and social activities. Fostering healthy family relationships from birth, reducing the separation of children from their families and cultures, and restoring relationships that are damaged by trauma, stress, poverty and other factors are all critical to belonging. Belonging also means building relationships with young people who are disengaged, disenfranchised and furthest from protective and supportive environments, including eliminating youth homelessness, providing rights-enhancing environments for children in care and making every effort to provide positive pathways for youth in contact with justice systems.

**43%** 

of U-Reporters said they feel most comfortable with their friends; **41%** with family. Only **3%** feel comfortable enough to be themselves at school.

## Snapshot

Many young people find supportive relationships. But just over half (57.3 per cent) report having a high level of family support. One in three (34.1 per cent) reports they don't have a high level of support from friends, one in three (31.5 per cent) is not involved in social groups and activities, and about one in four says they often feel lonely (24.5 per cent) and left out (23.8 per cent). School is not a place of support for more than half of children and youth (57.1 per cent), though they are much more likely to feel connected to their local communities. Some children and youth are involved in institutions including the child welfare, immigration and justice systems. Without sufficient data for public monitoring and accountability at a national level, tracking how well these institutions fulfill their duties to protect and help restore children's family relationships is difficult. The digital revolution is often blamed for eroding young people's relationships and fostering loneliness and disconnection. However, the impact on relationships is mixed and does not explain the trends that began well before the digital era. Rising income inequality and erosion in indicators of belonging appear to be strongly linked, though the lack of longitudinal data in Canada limits the ability to explain the 'belonging slide' evident in some other countries and in the cross-sectional, internationally comparable data.

## Feeling supported by and connected to family, friends, teachers and people in the community contributes to a sense of belonging.

Measure	National Estimate	Indicator
Being charged with an offence	1.3	Ratio of youth not charged to youth charged, based on rates for 12–17 year-olds per 100,000 population
Being involved in groups and group activities	68.5	Percentage of 11–15 year-olds involved in groups or group activities
Being separated from my family	No data	MODEL INDICATOR: Percentage of children separated from their families in migration and waiting for reunification
Caring for a pet	52.2	Average daily amount of time spent on pet care in minutes, by households with children under 15 years
Feeling left out	23.8	Percentage of 11–15 year-olds who feel left out of things
Feeling like I belong to my local community	84.6	Percentage of 12–17 year-olds with a strong sense of belonging to local community
Feeling lonely	24.5	Percentage of 11–15 year-olds who report feeling lonely
Feeling supported by my community	Limited data	Average score on the Social Provisions Scale for Attachment, Guidance, Reliable alliance and Reassurance of worth for 12–17 year-olds
Feeling supported by my family	57.3	Percentage of 11–15 year-olds in the high family support group, based on the Family Support Scale
Feeling supported by my friends	65.9	Percentage of 11–15 year-olds in the high friend support group, based on the Friend Support Scale
Feeling supported by my siblings	No data	MODEL INDICATOR: Percentage of children and youth under 18 with siblings who report that they have a positive relationship with their siblings
Feeling supported by my teachers	42.9	Percentage of 11–15 year-olds in the high teacher support group, based on the Teacher Support Scale
Having emotional challenges in the early years	12.7	Percentage of kindergarten students who are vulnerable on the 'Emotional maturity' domain of the Early Development Instrument (EDI)
Keeping family relationships	Limited data	Percentage of children in care who are reunified with families

● SDG  
● Proxy



# Are we secure?



**M**aterial security – having enough family income and resources to support good child development and provide opportunities to participate normally in society – is fundamental to the well-being of children and youth. Children are secure when their parents have access to decent employment, and when they live in safe and affordable housing, have enough nutritious food, and can meet their basic needs, as well as the things that enable them to feel included in society and among their peers, such as having access to the Internet. For some children, this includes affordable public transportation and sports equipment. For others, it is music lessons, textbooks or hygiene products. Families and their children should have access to universal, high-quality public services – including health, education, school nutrition, recreation, child care, income support, transportation and housing support when needed – but sufficient family incomes are also essential to a sense of security and belonging in society. Material security supports health, protection, learning, freedom to play and the opportunity to dream.

## Snapshot

Children’s material security can be viewed from two distinct, yet overlapping, perspectives. One perspective is that every child is entitled to have their basic needs met. The other perspective is that children should have similar opportunities to participate ‘normally’ or fully in society. Both are necessary for the well-being of children and the future of Canada. The Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being reports that about one in ten young people (9.0 per cent) lives in families without enough income to meet even their basic needs. About one in five (20.0 per cent) is relatively poor, which can limit opportunity compared to their peers. But as many as one in four (23.3 per cent) at least sometimes goes to school or to bed hungry because there isn’t enough food at home. Half of young people (56.1 per cent) report feeling their family is well off, suggesting that although they perceive a social distance even when they live above the poverty line, many feel their needs are met. There are hopeful signs that the overall rate of children and youth living in poverty is declining, but Canada still lags behind many comparable, high-income countries and would have to cut the rate of poverty in half to achieve the benchmark set by the best-performing countries. The evidence about the policies that can lift children out of poverty and achieve material security is clear. The poverty gap is really a gap in action to fulfill a decades-old pledge. What is not spent on children today to lift every child out of poverty will be spent in the future, on poor health and life expectancy gaps, remedial education, violence, income assistance and substance abuse.

U-Reporters said transportation is the most difficult basic need to access in Canada’s official measure of poverty. They also said this measure, which should include what every young person should have, is missing basic needs including sanitary products and access to mental health services.



# The poverty gap is really a gap in action to fulfill a decades-old pledge to eliminate child poverty.

Measure	National Estimate	Indicator
Being excluded from opportunities	Limited data	● Percentage of 12–17 year-olds who are not satisfied with their financial situation
Feeling like my family has as much money as others	56.1	● Percentage of 11–15 year-olds who report feeling their family is well off
● Getting child benefits	90.3	● Percentage of economic families with children receiving a child benefit
● Getting support for disabilities	No data	● MODEL INDICATOR: Percentage of families with children under 18 with disabilities receiving disability benefits
● Going hungry	23.3	● Percentage of 11–15 year-olds who report going to school or to bed hungry because there is not enough food at home
Going without things I need at home	No data	● MODEL INDICATOR: Percentage of 9–17 year-olds who report being deprived of 3 or more items in a Deprivation Item Scale
Having parents with insecure work	28.2	● Percentage of adults with children under 18, with some form of nonstandard employment
● Having safe and secure housing	12.6	● Percentage of children under 18 who have a core housing need
● Homeless	3.0	● Percentage of 15–17 year-olds who have ever been homeless and/or have ever experienced hidden homelessness
● Living in poverty	20.0	● Percentage of children under 18 living in a household with income lower than 60% of the median (LIM)
● Living in severe poverty	3.5	● Percentage of children under 18 living in deep income poverty (below 75% of Canada's Official Poverty Line)
● My basic needs are not affordable	9.0	● Percentage of children under 18 living in low income based on the Market Basket Measure
● Not getting enough healthy food	Limited data	● Percentage of children under 18 living in households affected by some level of food insecurity

● SDG  
● Proxy



# Are we participating?



Children and youth have the right to have their voices heard and respected. As they develop, they should have every opportunity to participate in decisions affecting them, including decisions about the society they will lead and the environment that sustains them. Participating includes being actively engaged, according to their capacity, in family affairs, in community organizations, at school, in social movements and in civic and political life. Regular opportunities to participate in ways appropriate to each child should be provided and valued. Creating real opportunities for children and youth to participate helps develop their capacity to express themselves and their identity, exercise their rights responsibly, and develop a sense of agency and belonging. It also makes decisions more effective. To participate, young people need access to information; avenues to express themselves and be heard; fewer barriers to being fully included in society, to access services and to manage their affairs; and freedom to express their identity and culture and to choose their relationships.

Measure	National Estimate	Indicator
Able to register a business	60.6	Percentage of children under 18 who can register a business
Contributing income tax on the money I make	2.2	Percentage of 15–17 year-olds who pay income tax
Free to be online	No data	MODEL INDICATOR: Percentage of 9–17 year-olds scoring high on the Free to Participate Online Index
Free to choose relationships	88.8	Percentage of 12–19 year-olds who feel they have a choice about which activities to do with their friends
Free to express ideas and opinions	81.5	Percentage of 12–17 year-olds who feel confident to think/express their own ideas and opinions in past month
Free to express my identity and culture	77.9	Percentage of 12–19 year-olds who report feeling free to express themselves to family and friends
Having citizenship	94.0	Percentage of children under 18 with Canadian citizenship
Having control over my life	85.9	Percentage of 12–17 year-olds who report feeling good at managing their daily responsibilities
Having opportunities to engage in reconciliation	No data	MODEL INDICATOR: Percentage of children in elementary schools that provide at least one Indigenous learning opportunity
Indigenous children speaking an Indigenous language	32.3	Percentage of Indigenous 15–17 year-olds who speak an Aboriginal language
Managing my money	87	Percentage of 15 year-olds reaching the baseline level of proficiency (Level 2) in financial literacy
Not getting information I need	Limited data	Percentage of 12–17 year-olds who needed health information or advice and reported experiencing difficulties getting health information or advice
Participating in decision-making	74.2	Percentage of 11–15 year-olds who feel their family listens to them when they speak
Voting in elections	0.0	Percentage of children under 18 who voted in last federal election

● SDG  
● Proxy

76%



of U-Reporters said they don't know how to have their views included in politicians' election platforms.

### Snapshot

The lack of data about young people's participation makes it challenging to answer the question, 'Are we participating?' The kids of Canada are permitted some forms of participation in their personal, family, civil and political lives, in laws and in institutions. About three quarters of young people (77.9 per cent) feel free to express themselves to their families and friends, but just as many don't know how to be heard by politicians. Policies lack coherence in determining how, when and where children and youth should be able to participate in society. Many young people work and some remit taxes – close to \$30 million in a year – yet none have the right to vote on the public policies that affect their lives. Participation has many benefits for children aligned with their evolving capacities, and limits should be questioned in relation to their assumptions and impacts. Fostering participation can help children from less materially secure backgrounds to build confidence, pathways and opportunities; however, there are signs of widening gaps between the materially advantaged and disadvantaged in terms of participation rates and types of participation.





# Are we free to play?



**P**lay and leisure are children’s rights because they are critical to development and influence every aspect of well-being. Free time and free space for self-directed play and leisure – for fun! – are necessary for children’s mental and physical health, safety and learning, as well as developing independence, social skills and decision-making. Organized social and cultural activities are also important opportunities for children and youth to explore their interests and identities and to express and define themselves. Opportunities for leisure must be accessible to all, and should include affordable, appealing and welcoming places and programs for all ages. Being free to play also depends on having sufficient time, with young people having a say in how they spend their time to balance their needs and responsibilities.

Measure	National Estimate	Indicator
Balancing my activities and responsibilities	20.6	Average percentage of time spent by 15–17 year-olds on the previous day in leisure activities
Balancing physical activity, sleep and screen time	9.5	Percentage of 5–17 year-olds who meet the moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA), screen time and sleep recommendations within the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Behaviour Guidelines for Children and Youth
Feeling time pressure	16.5	Percentage of 15–17 year-olds who report high levels of time pressure
Getting around on my own	76.4	Percentage of 12–17 year-olds who report walking or cycling to get places or visit friends
Having barriers to participating in activities	11.9	Percentage of 15–17 year-olds who stopped participating in a sport due to a negative experience
Not spending much time with friends	23.4	Percentage of 11–15 year-olds who never or hardly ever meet friends before 8 p.m.
Playing actively or independently	20.8	Percentage of 5–11 year-olds whose parents report them engaging in active play or non-organized/unstructured leisure activities for at least 1.5 hours a day
Spending a lot of time at a job	12.4	Percentage of 15–17 year-olds working 16 or more hours per week
Spending a lot of time on family responsibilities	2.5	Average percentage of time spent by 15–17 year-olds on the previous day on family responsibilities
Spending time in outdoor play	80.1	Percentage of 11–15 year-olds who report spending four or more hours per week participating in outdoor play in free time

● SDG  
● Proxy

## Snapshot

Adults are very concerned about, and involved in, how children use their time, including their amount of physical activity, screen time and participation in organized activities. All of these are important, but the relationship between freedom to play and well-being is not yet widely recognized. Too few children are playing enough, with only one in five (20.8 per cent) getting at least 1.5 hours a day in active and unstructured activities. One in four young people (23.6 per cent) doesn't walk or bike around their neighbourhood. A small but significant group of school-aged young people get too little quality sleep and have too much work. Adding up their time use, 16.5 per cent of young people ages 15 to 17 people report feeling considerable time pressure. In an era of income inequality and economic insecurity, parents and caregivers appear to respond by increasingly controlling and constructing children's time, and time pressure may be affecting young people's stress levels, sleep and physical activity. Recognizing that children need time and space for independent play, according to their evolving capacities, for mental and physical health, learning and many important developmental benefits, this is the time to stop and reflect on how regulating children's time, across many institutions and systems, might be undermining their well-being. Freedom to play is a good overall measure of the state of children and youth, evident in a study of European countries that found a link between more freedom to play and higher levels of overall child well-being. The Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being offers a balanced view of children's lives that will track how children's time use changes in a changing world.

U-Reporters said the biggest reason young people don't join activities that get them moving is that they don't have enough time due to school, work and family responsibilities. The second-biggest reason is lack of confidence.





# Are we protected?



Children and youth need to be safe and protected in their homes, at school, at work and in their communities, online and offline. They should not be exposed to bullying, discrimination, exploitation, serious crime or disproportionate risk of harm – physically, socially, emotionally or psychologically. Having information, safe environments, healthy relationships and people they trust and can rely upon, as well as opportunities to develop their own skills to manage risks, are important ways to protect young people. When harm occurs, young people need access to rehabilitative services and to appropriate advocacy and justice systems.

1/3

of U-Reporters said they don't feel safe being themselves in public or at school. Most feel the safest at home.



## Snapshot

'Are we protected?' is a fundamental question in relation to childhood. UNICEF Report Cards and other studies show that compared to many rich countries, children and youth in Canada experience more bullying (27.0 per cent) and fighting (28.3 per cent) and are more likely to be victims of homicide. The Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being reports that one in four young people (24.6 per cent) has experienced violence at home. Although most young people report feeling satisfied with their personal safety from crime (92.6 per cent) and few experience violent crime (11.3 per cent), one in three (35.2 per cent) experiences discrimination. Experiences of violence vary with gender: girls are more likely to be victims of sexual violence and cyberbullying, and boys are more likely to experience physical abuse and fighting and to be victims of homicide. Some groups of children carry a much larger burden of violence, including Indigenous children, children with diverse gender identities and children of racialized ethnic minorities. Young people in low-income communities have a greater risk of severe injury. Young people have somewhat low trust in the authorities they should rely on to protect them, yet they are remarkably resilient and find their own ways to cope within a society that places them at unacceptable risk. Overall, rates of injury and violence have been declining over time, though the nature of risk is changing. It's time to end violence against children and make Canada a safer place for every child.

Most young people have strategies to protect themselves from crime. Canada needs a **strategy to protect young people** from many forms of violence.

Measure	National Estimate	Indicator
Abuse at home	24.6	Percentage of 15–24 year-olds who report having experienced abuse before the age of 15
Abuse in an intimate relationship	8.5	Percentage of 15–24 year-olds who have experienced abuse in an intimate partner relationship in the past 5 years
Bullying	27.0	Percentage of 11–15 year-olds who report experiencing bullying at least two to three times in the past couple of months
Discrimination	35.2	Percentage of 15–17 year-olds who report experiencing discrimination or being treated unfairly by others in Canada in the past 5 years because of various traits/characteristics
Feeling safe in my neighbourhood	92.6	Percentage of 15–17 year-olds who report being satisfied with their personal safety from crime
Fighting	28.3	Percentage of 11–15 year olds who have been in one or more physical fights in the past 12 months
Getting injured at work	9.4	Number of lost time claims for 15–19 year-old workers per 1,000 population
Having control over my reputation and privacy	No data	MODEL INDICATOR: Percentage of children and youth under age 18 who report having control over their reputation and privacy
Having someone to talk to	96.2	Percentage of 11–15 year-olds who report finding it easy to talk to someone about things that bother them
Having strategies to deal with risky situations	91.7	Percentage of 15–17 year-olds who use various strategies to protect themselves or their property from crime
Homicide	0.7	Number of deaths of 0–19 year-olds by intentional assault, per 100,000 population
Physical punishment	No data	Percentage of 15–17 year-olds who report being slapped on the hand or spanked before age 15
Satisfied with access to justice	43.6	Percentage of 15–17 year-olds who think the local police force does a good job of being approachable, providing information and treating people fairly
Serious injury	No data	Percentage of 0–19 year-olds with a serious injury, based on the Serious Injury Indicator
Violent crime	88.7	Percentage of 15–17 year-olds who have not been victims of violent crime (robbery, physical assault and/or sexual abuse)

● SDG  
● Proxy



# Are we learning?



Children and youth have the right to learn in many different supportive and respectful environments. Learning begins from birth, in families, in communities and in cultures. It happens inside and outside schools. It is shaped by healthy and secure family relationships and material conditions, and opportunities for high-quality child care and preschool. When children start school, achieving proficiency in a diverse range of competencies is possible when education is provided equitably and safely and respects the individual passions and abilities in every child. Reading literacy is a gateway for school achievement and learning for life. Equally important are environments that foster opportunities for children to set their own goals and pursue them. Children need opportunities to wander and wonder and to recover from mistakes and challenges.

## Snapshot

Every child has the right to an education. In the preschool years, children in Canada have fewer opportunities for high-quality, early child care and learning than their peers in other rich countries, with considerable variability across Canada. More than one in four children (27.0 per cent) starts school with significant developmental vulnerabilities that hamper their readiness to learn. Canada's public education systems help many children achieve, and most children graduate high school. But there are education gaps between boys and girls and for some groups of children. The education journey is difficult for many young people. Less than half (46.9 per cent) say they have more positive perceptions of their school environment, and one in four young people (26.8 per cent) reports their workload is too much to handle. They are schooling, but are they learning for life? Beyond competence in reading, science and math, children also want to learn life skills – for example, how to manage their health and finances and information about their human rights. Many educators, policy-makers and other experts agree that student success in both school and life consists of much more than a hyper-competitive focus on grades, literacy and numeracy. Education that helps develop children's social and emotional skills, as well as their individual abilities and passions, enables children not only to learn the 'basics' but to develop a sense of control over their lives, become more resilient in the face of adversity and aim higher in their aspirations. Schools can't do this alone; they need to be backed by policies that help families and young people feel secure and optimistic amid changing economic and social conditions.

# 100%

of U-Reporters agreed or strongly agreed that all children, including Indigenous children, should have safe and comfortable schools, realizing Shannen's Dream.<sup>viii</sup>



The education journey is difficult for many young people. Less than half have very positive perceptions of their school environment, and one in four young people reports their workload is too much to handle.

Measure	National Estimate	Indicator
Achieving in high school	80.8	Percentage of 15 year-olds achieving baseline competency in reading, mathematics and science
Being suspended from school	No data	MODEL INDICATOR: Percentage of children and youth under age 18 who have been suspended out of school at least once in the past school year for any reason
Disengaged from learning and employment	9.3	Percentage of 15–19 year-olds not in employment, education or training (NEET)
Feeling positive about school	46.9	Percentage of 11–15 year-olds who rate their school high on the School Climate Scale
Graduating from high school	93.9	Percentage of 20–24 year-olds in the labour force with at least a high school diploma or some postsecondary education
Having opportunities to explore my potential, passions and interests	No data	MODEL INDICATOR: Percentage of 9–17 year-olds who report that they have opportunities to choose and develop their own passions and interests
Having talk time with adults	20.3	Parents' average daily time in interactions with their children under 18 years of age
Having too much homework to manage	26.8	Percentage of 11–15 year-olds who report they have more school work than they can handle
Knowing my human rights	No data	Percentage of 12–17 year-olds who report having knowledge about children's rights in Canada
Not ready for school with the skills I need	27.0	Percentage of kindergarten students vulnerable on one or more domains of the Early Development Instrument (EDI)
Participating in cultural activities and events	31.9	Percentage of 11–15 year-olds who report involvement in arts groups
Participating in preschool	97	Percentage of children participating in organized learning one year before official age to enter primary school
Participating in quality early learning and child care	No data	Ratio of qualified to unqualified staff in preschool groups in licensed child care centres
Reading well in primary school	96	Percentage of students in Grade 4 achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in reading
Thriving in the middle years	Limited data	Percentage of children in the middle years thriving in physical health and social and emotional development

● SDG  
● Proxy



# Are we healthy?



The health of children and youth is a balance of mental, emotional, physical and spiritual conditions. Because of the comprehensive and subjective nature of health, many indicators are important. Children's health is shaped from birth and, as they grow, by their own choices, but most importantly by the conditions and resources that influence health. Material security and the availability of appropriate, sufficient and nutritious food have a major influence on health, including low birthweight, chronic disease and obesity. As they develop, young people seek to balance their mental and physical health. They take risks, but for most children risky behaviours do not impair their overall health. Some live with mental health conditions and activity limitations but may thrive in different areas of life. What every child should be able to count on, from birth, is to be born into an economically secure family where their chances of having low birthweight and preventable infant death are much lower, with support for good nutrition including breastfeeding, and with access to appropriate health care, including vaccination and dental care. As they mature, young people should be accessing appropriate health care and participating in health care decisions. Young people's own sense of health and their views about their health care are critical to their overall well-being. In turn, their health influences and is influenced by the other dimensions of well-being.

**37%** 

of U-Reporters said they mostly prefer individual activities such as jogging or yoga to be active in order to be healthy; **only 16%** prefer large group activities.

## Snapshot

Are the kids of Canada healthy? The majority report good health, both mental and physical. However, more than half of young people (59.8 per cent) start their days feeling fatigued. One in three (34.2 per cent) experiences symptoms of mental distress. One in four (24.3 per cent) reports that their health isn't very good or excellent. One in five (18.8 per cent) reports that their activities are limited by a physical or mental condition. A much smaller group of young people, about one in ten, have significant health challenges such as obesity (10.6 per cent) or a mood or anxiety disorder (10.5 per cent). Canada has long valued its universal health care system – often viewed as an iconic symbol of our country. Despite the many challenges facing the system and the gaps in it, such as a lack of dental care, low vaccination rates and insufficient mental health services for children and youth, there is good evidence that the health systems across Canada contribute to the health and well-being of young people. The health care system is a key reason why the infant mortality rate has fallen over time and why more preterm and other fragile infants survive birth. But the variable rates of infant mortality across Canada also remind us what the health care system alone cannot accomplish – improving social conditions that contribute to children's physical, mental and spiritual health.

Measure	National Estimate	Indicator
● Breastfeeding	32.1	● Percentage of mothers exclusively breastfeeding for at least 6 months
● Feeling satisfied with my health care	Limited data	● Percentage of 12–17 year-olds who are satisfied with any health care services received in the past 12 months
● Feeling tired before school	59.8	● Percentage of 11–15 year-olds who report being tired when going to school in the morning
● Getting health care	85.6	● Percentage of 12–17 year-olds with a regular health care provider
● Getting vaccinated	90.2	● Percentage of 2 year-olds receiving at least one dose of measles vaccination
● Having frequent mental and physical symptoms	34.2	● Percentage of 11–15 year-olds who report two or more psychological symptoms more than once a week
● Having good self-rated health	75.7	● Percentage of 12–17 year-olds who report their health status as being excellent or very good
● Having good self-rated mental health	76.0	● Percentage of 12–17 year-olds who report their mental health status as being excellent or very good
● Having good spiritual health	50.8	● Percentage of 11–15 year-olds who report that spiritual health is important
● Having low birth weight	9.1	● Percentage of babies born Small-for-Gestational Age (SGA), of live singleton births with gestational ages from 22 to 43 weeks
● Having poor dental health	12.1	● Overall rate of dental surgery to treat early childhood caries (ECC) per 1,000 population aged 12–59 months
● Having thoughts of suicide	9.8	● Percentage of 15–17 year-olds who have ever seriously contemplated or considered suicide
● Infant death	4.5	● Number of infant deaths during a given year per 1,000 live births
● Liking how I look	55.7	● Percentage of 11–15 year-olds who think their body is about the right size
● Living with a mental health condition	10.5	● Percentage of 12–17 year-olds who report having a mood and/or anxiety disorder
● Managing my health	Limited data	● Percentage of 12–17 year-olds who report wanting to improve their physical health and having something stopping them from improving their physical health
● My activities are limited by my health	18.8	● Percentage of 12–17 year-olds who report their activities are limited due to a long-term physical or mental condition or health problem
● Obesity	10.6	● Percentage of 5–17 year-olds who are obese
● Preterm birth	7.8	● Percentage of babies born preterm, of live births with a gestational age less than 37 weeks
● Suicide	9.0	● Suicide rate of 15–19 year-olds per 100,000 population
● Taking risks	7.2	● Percentage of 14–15 year-olds often taking risks with alcohol, cannabis and smoking
● Teen births	7.9	● Live births to 15–19 year-old females per 1,000 population

● SDG  
● Proxy



# Are we connected to our environment?

A relationship with and living in a sustainable environment are critical aspects of child and youth well-being. The sustained quality of the air, water and land, as well as the protection of the climate and ecosystems, are fundamental to children's survival, health and development. Children are more sensitive than adults to deprivations, toxins and air pollution, and they can be particularly vulnerable to disasters and displacement, which can threaten their survival and health, disrupt their education, relationships and culture, and drain resources that could have been used to invest in their well-being. Children and youth also need access to parks, trails and other green or open spaces in which they are welcome. They need to move freely around their environments for leisure, school, work, cultural activities and other pursuits. A sense of place supports a sense of belonging. Young people are also committed to being good stewards of the environment and should be included in decisions affecting it.

# 75%

of U-Reporters said they notice the impacts of climate change weekly or daily. Only **6%** are not taking any sort of action to combat climate change. **90%** are willing to pay the federal carbon levy that would be charged to fill a car with gas.



## Snapshot

The Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being signals that children are affected by climate change and environmental degradation. Every child has the right to clean water, but one in ten homes with children (11.1 per cent) can't consistently rely on having clean water – in a country as abundant in natural and economic wealth as Canada. Children and youth in cities live just under the safe limit for fine, particulate air pollution. Although almost every home with children in Canada (93.8 per cent) has a park or green space close by, one in four young people (25.8 per cent) says they don't have good places to spend time in their neighbourhoods. Children are also disproportionately affected when environment-related disasters displace them from their homes and communities and disrupt their education, relationships and health. We can see Canada's environmental well-being in the well-being of children. They are telling us that we must protect our environment for their future and for future generations. Will we listen?

Children are typically more sensitive than adults to deprivations (such as clean water) and to exposures (such as air pollution) and they can be disproportionately affected by disasters.

Measure	National Estimate	Indicator
Being affected by a disaster	44	Number of evacuated persons attributed to disasters per 100,000 population
Being environmentally aware	71.0	Percentage of 15 year-olds familiar with, or knowing something about, five or more environmental issues
Feeling satisfied with my local area	Limited data	Percentage of 12–17 year-olds who are satisfied with their neighbourhood
Having access to public transit	Limited data	Percentage of 12–17 year-olds who report having a transit stop less than a 15 minute walk away
Having barriers to getting places	No data	MODEL INDICATOR: Percentage of children and youth under age 18 who have limited freedom to get around their community
Having clean water sources	83	Percentage of designated monitoring sites (rivers) in southern Canada with water quality identified as fair, good or excellent
Having parks and open space	93.8	Percentage of dwellings with children under 18 with a park and/or public green space close to home
Having places to spend free time	74.2	Percentage of 11–15 year-olds who report there are good places to spend free time
Having polluted air	9.7	Annual average PM2.5 concentrations in urban areas, weighted by proportion of child population (0-19) living in urban areas
Having recreation facilities	Limited data	Percentage of 12–17 year-olds with several free or low-cost recreation facilities in their neighbourhood
Having safe drinking water	11.1	Percentage of dwellings with children under 18 informed of a boil advisory
Living in a sustainable ecosystem	-10	Percentage increase or decrease in the Canadian Species Index from baseline (1970)
Living with a sustainable climate	716	Absolute greenhouse gas emissions (megatonnes of CO2 per year)

● SDG  
● Proxy

## Stand With Kids:

# How to Use the Index

The Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being is not a data project – it is a change project. As Canadians, we want to understand our challenges, protect the good things we are doing and find new ways to do better. The Index is a tool to measure things differently to help do things differently. We can move the needle if we stand with Canada's children and set courageous goals to be – measurably – better.

Statistical data have limitations, but define many of our national conversations and influence decisions that affect children's lives. We can make better use of it to support better childhoods. One of the advantages of a composite index is the overview it provides of a complex concept and the trends and patterns it reveals. The Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being tells us about:

- important aspects of children's lives that are, and are not, getting better over time ('progress gaps')
- where there are smaller, and wider, gaps between children ('equity gaps')
- where Canada does better than, and lags farthest behind, peer countries ('possibility gaps')
- the extent to which rights and policy commitments are realized, and those that remain unfulfilled

The information is for:

- influencers who want to ignite a conversation about the state of children and what supports their rights and well-being
- decision-makers who are not afraid of evidence, accountability or bold goals
- everyone who wants to create a more equitable and sustainable society

### Seven ways to use the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being:

- Promote understanding of what life is like for children and youth in Canada through research and dialogue
- Develop better data for and with children
- Set bolder goals and benchmarks for community, regional and national progress for children

- Advocate for children – create public and political will to make Canada among the best places to grow up
- Use the well-being framework to pay attention to more aspects of children's lives in designing and measuring the impacts of programs, services and policies; use the data to focus on the greatest challenges facing children
- Track progress toward commitments, including the 2030 SDGs
- Take these steps with engaging children and youth

Data are seeds of understanding – questions to be asked as much as answers about how kids are doing. For this reason, a number of efforts are underway to deepen understanding about the lives of Canada's children and youth.

### Where We Stand:

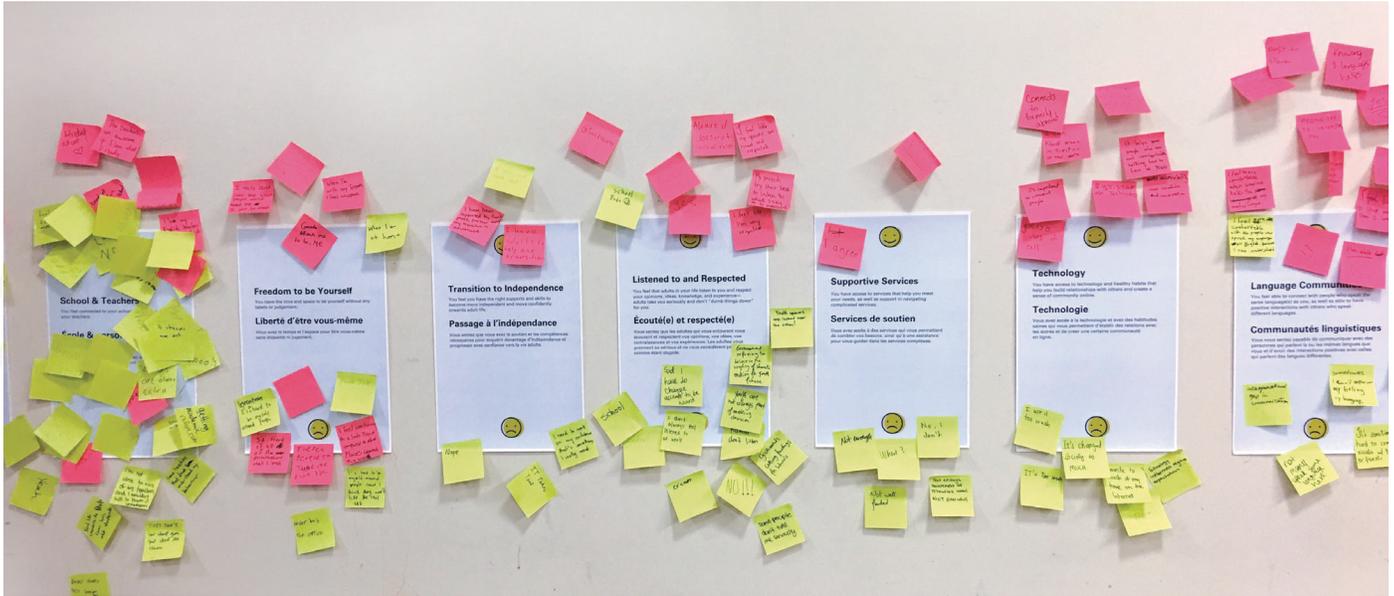
## The Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being

### Is a Framework To:

Communicate to Canadians what Canada is like for kids from birth to age 18

Track progress for their rights and well-being

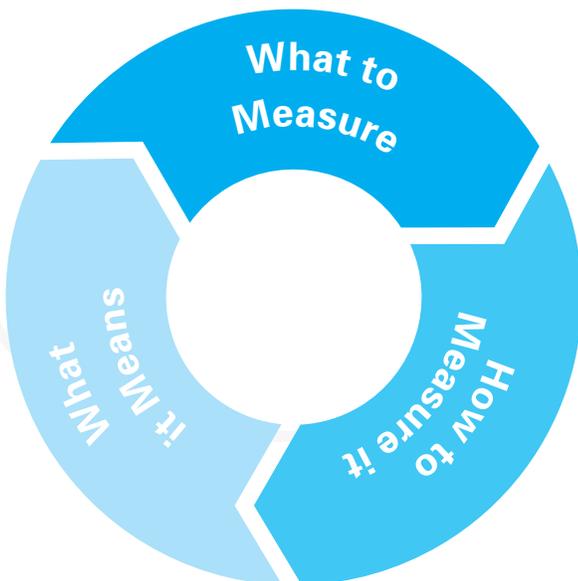
Guide action to address the greatest challenges



This is data, too: what 'Belonging' looks like to kids at the June 2019 Change Summit in Ottawa, Ontario, co-hosted by UNICEF Canada and YMCA Ottawa.

### Kids in the Data Cycle

UNICEF is committed to developing and using data with children, not just about them. We support the participation of children and youth in all stages of the data cycle, from deciding what to measure, to collecting data, to interpreting, using and sharing data and analysis. Gathering and using data about children better supports their rights and well-being when they have a say in how it is decided, collected and used.



### Resources

Resources created for and with young people to help interpret the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being are available at <https://oneyouth.unicef.ca/en/child-and-youth-well-being-index>.

### U-Report

U-Report polls report on young people's experiences, insights and priorities in relation to the findings of the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being.

### #KidsOfCanada

Blogs by diverse young people tell stories and explain how they are experiencing life beyond the data in the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being, from bullying to learning Indigenous languages.

### Partnerships

Research and other partnerships can support secondary analysis and use of the data in the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being. In partnership with the Region of Waterloo, the Canadian Index of Wellbeing/University of Waterloo and the Ontario Trillium Foundation are developing a community survey based on the Index, for any community in Canada to use to gather data with and about their kids. A collaboration with PolicyWise for Children and Youth in Alberta will develop videos to explore each dimension of well-being in the Index.

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