

# Making Canada be the best place in the world to grow up



Federal Policy Priorities 2019

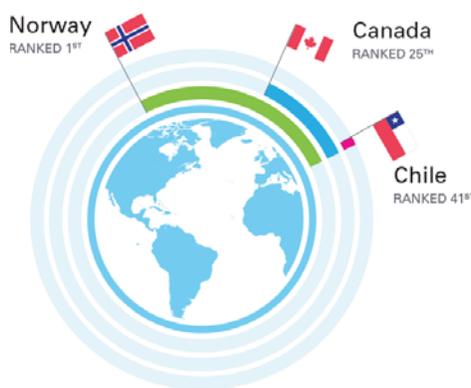


## For Every Child: UNICEF Canada’s Federal Public Policy Agenda 2019

UNICEF Canada’s priorities for public policy focus on solutions that will move the needle for Canada’s children toward our One Youth campaign goal: that Canada is the best place in the world to grow up by 2030. At the same time, we want Canada to be a leader internationally in the protection and promotion of children’s rights around the world.

### Shouldn’t Canada be the best place in the world to grow up?

For the past eighteen years—a generation—UNICEF Report Cards on the state of children and youth in wealthy countries have measured how our societies are progressing from the perspectives of the youngest citizens. UNICEF brings together and interprets some of the best available data and calls attention to areas of children’s lives that need urgent attention. Canada ranks 25th among the world’s 41 richest countries in overall child and youth well-being, a middle position that has persisted unchanged for more than a decade. Canada lags farthest behind in child health (including infant mortality and unhealthy weight); levels of violence (including child homicide and bullying); poverty; and young people’s own sense of life satisfaction. Progress is slowing in many aspects of children’s well-being even though national wealth continues a steady rise. There are persistently wide gaps between Canada’s children in aspects of well-being, but this is not a problem confined to a few very disadvantaged groups.



Canada’s middle position among its economic peers, children’s burdens of poor health and violence, and the gaps between children are strongly related to the significant increase in income inequality over the past 15 years. Canada is one of a handful of rich countries where income inequality has increased most markedly. The fallout of rising inequality affects all aspects of children’s lives across the socioeconomic gradient and across the country. This has profound implications for Canada’s future as a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable society.

### How can Canada champion children and youth on the global stage?

Canada has an extended legacy of leadership in improving the lives and futures of children throughout the world. It was a Canadian initiative—the Muskoka Initiative—that fostered a global commitment to reducing child and maternal deaths. A key reason why in many respects, at no other time in human history have the prospects for a child’s well-being and future been this promising. Globally, Both the number of under-five deaths and the rate of under-five mortality have fallen by more than half since 1990. Millions more children

every year are getting access to life-saving vaccines and the nourishment and nurturing they need for their growing bodies and minds.

Canada was among the first countries globally to commit to eradicating polio, and today the debilitating disease is 99.99% eradicated, with a few remaining yet resilient cases isolated in challenging terrain. Nearly 3 billion more people globally have access to clean drinking water. And proudly, as many girls as boys are enrolled in primary education in two-thirds of low-income regions. Investments in girls' education, especially in crisis, are part of a greater Canadian effort to protect the world's most vulnerable children, in some of the toughest places just to be a kid.

While progress has been good, that progress has not been shared equitably between and within countries. The economic gaps between wealthy and impoverished are deepening, and the growing impacts of climate change, crises and conflicts mean increasing numbers of children are displaced, exploited, in harm's way and more challenging to reach.

Every year, 3 million children die from malnutrition. An estimated 1.5 million of those deaths could have been prevented with access to routine immunisation. Every day, 16,000 children under five will die from predominantly preventable causes and 7,000 of those are newborns. While primary school attendance has improved overall, more than 1 in 3 children will leave school without learning to read, write or do basic math.

Lastly, it is estimated that 50 million children are currently on the move; mostly fleeing from increasing rates of violence, exploitation, war, poverty and climate change.

Girls and young women continue to be the most left behind and vulnerable, caught in intergenerational cycles of poverty and inequity. The failure to tackle this remains a key barrier to countries realizing demographic dividends, equality, resilience to change, peace and prosperity.

## Four policies to make Canada the best place to grow up

UNICEF Canada asked hundreds of people across Canada, including young people, what growing up in Canada should be like. This is our inspiring and achievable vision of children's lives in an equitable and sustainable society:

**A country where no child lives in poverty; where they're healthy, safe and secure;  
where they're free to dream, play, wonder and learn;  
where they know who they are, where they came from and where they're  
going;  
where they have access to the resources they need to reach their full potential;  
where they feel loved and that they belong<sup>1</sup>.**

We know where we stand; the 2019 federal election is our opportunity to stand with Canada's children. What federal actions that would have the greatest impact on the well-being of Canada's children and youth?

## Four policies to make Canada the best place to grow up

1. Reduce income inequality: spread fairness for children
2. Invest earlier in children's lives
3. Pursue Reconciliation for Indigenous children
4. Put children first in decision-making

### 1. Reduce Income Inequality: Spread Fairness for Children

Limiting income inequality is key to doing better for all children in all areas of their lives, not just for those falling farthest behind. It is critical to ensure not only that basic needs are met, but also that every child has fair opportunity to participate in society and reach for a positive future. The Canada Child Benefit (CCB) is a powerful equalizer, but has less impact than comparable programs in many other high-income countries. The CCB reduces child poverty by about 20%, but countries with the highest levels of child and youth well-being reduce child poverty by more than 60% with family income benefits. The CCB also leaves some of the most vulnerable children out<sup>1iiii</sup>.

**The Children's Dividend** would supplement the Canada Child Benefit with an income benefit for the lowest income families with children, to reduce the 2015 rate of child poverty by a minimum of 60%. The ultimate goal should be to reduce child poverty to 5% by 2030, similar to what the best-performing countries achieve today. As a result, close to 800,000 fewer children would live in poverty. A Children's Dividend would cost about 4% of the current federal program budget.

### 2. Invest Earlier in Children's Lives

Inequalities in child and youth well-being show up in the first few years of life. Supporting early child development helps all children thrive, reduces inequalities and enables parents to provide sufficient family income. All levels of government are building a national early-years framework<sup>2</sup>, with the federal government committing to invest close to \$8 billion over the next decade and provinces and territories investing close to \$12 billion annually. But high-quality early learning and childcare is not affordable for families, nor is it available to all children. Canada's trails far behind its economic peer countries in the provision of high-quality early education and childcare.

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<sup>1</sup> Children whose parents have irregular migration status, including Canadian-born children, are excluded from eligibility. Administrative barriers also exclude some children such as those with unstable housing, where verifying a home address is difficult. Due to service access barriers, about 20% of First Nations children do not receive the CCB; 5% of the general child population. Child poverty refers to the Low Income Measure, the international, comparable standard. The Children's Dividend could be delivered as a tax credit similar to the GST credit, as proposed in the Dignity Dividend modelled by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

<sup>2</sup> Government of Canada Budget 2016 and Budget 2017 proposed federal investments totaling \$7.5 billion over 11 years to support and create more high-quality, affordable child care across the country

**The Right Start:** To guarantee high-quality early learning and childcare for every child who needs it, raise the federal contribution to the multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework to \$4 billion per year, and work toward a contribution of 6% of the budget for children under 6, who are 6% of the population<sup>3</sup>.

### 3. Pursue Reconciliation for Indigenous Children

First Nations children and families living on reserve and in the Territories receive public services funded by the federal government. Since Confederation, these services have fallen significantly short of what other Canadians receive. In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission released its Calls to Action, including a call to achieve parity in well-being outcomes for First Nations, Inuit and Métis children. This requires equitable spending on public services for children including clean water, health care, education and protection.

**Fairness for Indigenous Children:** Permanently end funding shortfalls in federally funded public services provided to First Nations Children: adopt the Spirit Bear Plan proposed by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society and endorsed by the Chiefs of the Assembly of First Nations.

### 4. Put Children First in Decision-Making

Children are a large population whose interests are often overlooked in government decision-making, because they don't vote and lack influence and because it's often assumed that children won't be affected. Yet most decisions have impacts on children. With one chance at a childhood, children can be disproportionately affected by deprivation or adverse conditions. Decisions are better when the impacts on children are specifically considered and their interests are given priority among competing interests. Good governance for children is a low-cost way to support effective decisions.

- **Decide in Children's Best Interests:** Integrate Child Rights Impact Assessment in Memoranda to Cabinet and legislative development to improve policies, laws and other decisions affecting children and youth.
- **Publish What We Spend:** In federal budgets and economic updates, publish clear accounts of budgets and expenditures for child- and youth-focused investments. UNICEF's global Public Finance for Children program offers guiding principles and methods, and Generation Squeeze has demonstrated an approach that can be adopted by the federal government.
- **A Voting Age of 16:** Lower the voting age in federal elections so that young people can have a greater say in decisions affecting them and help ensure their interests are given consideration.
- **A Commission for Children and Youth:** Establish in legislation a Commission to support the federal government in creating and monitoring policies and laws that ensure the human rights, interests and well-being of children and youth are protected and fulfilled. A federal Commissioner's office would cost about \$1 per child, or the amount of the federal budget spent every 10 minutes.

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<sup>3</sup> The multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework federal contribution should include a condition that children with, and whose parents have, irregular migration status are eligible for publicly supported early child care and education services.

## Four more policy initiatives that will move the needle:

### A National Strategy to End Violence against Children

Countries with wider income inequality tend to have more violence that affects children and youth. Canada's children experience higher levels of bullying and homicide than peers in other wealthy countries. Canada's rate of child bullying is ranked 27 of 41 countries and in the rate of child homicide Canada ranks 33<sup>iv</sup>. Child homicide is a tip-of-the-iceberg indicator of other forms of violence including maltreatment, physical punishment and fighting. A national strategy that considers all forms of violence affecting all children will help focus efforts on the root causes and greatest burdens of violence. At the federal level, reducing income inequality is critical to reduce societal levels of violence endured by children. The Government of Canada can also ensure its laws and investments are part of a national strategy.

### Keeping Migrant Children and Families Together

People migrate to Canada under all kinds of circumstances. For some, that journey involves difficult decisions that can leave families separated from their loved ones, unsure of when or if they will be reunited. Sometimes, children arrive in Canada without their parents, while others may be temporarily left behind by family members who migrate to Canada. Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children have the right to live with their parents, unless it is not in their best interest.

Too often, migrant children in Canada remain separated from their families for reasons that are frustratingly bureaucratic. Family reunification often entails long wait times, while barriers like income thresholds and definitions of family that exclude extended families put it out of reach for some. Canadian law does not currently allow for family reunification for refugee children who come to Canada unaccompanied. Long delays in the process of determining a child's legal status or facilitating reunification with family members put many children's lives on hold and in a state of legal limbo or in irregular status. This makes planning for the future difficult and renders them acutely vulnerable to exclusion and exploitation.

UNICEF Canada urges the government of Canada to remove barriers to family reunification by: **giving priority to separated children in immigration processing** (the same six-month Express Entry promised to economic class applicants); **allowing refugee children to be reunited with their parents and siblings in Canada** (amend the definition of "family member" under s.1(3) of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations* (SOR/2002-227); **eliminating the lifelong ban on sponsorship for unexamined family members** (repeal s.117(9)(d) of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations* (SOR/2002-227), and; **pursuing alternatives to detention in cases where immigration detention would lead to family separation or children being housed in detention.**

### A Universal School Food Program

One in six children in Canada lacks food security—continuous access to sufficient, nutritious food—making Canada an international laggard in childhood nutrition. Canada ranks 37<sup>th</sup> of 41 wealthy countries in food security and nutrition<sup>v</sup>. When two-thirds of More than an impact of poverty or the food system, the right to adequate nutrition is a broad concern when two-thirds of high school students miss breakfast. As society has changed and families are under more stress and scheduling demands, it is more difficult for young people to have regular meals at home. Going to school hungry affects students' achievement and contributes to problems including bullying. Yet only one in five students goes to a school that offers a healthy meal each day. The current system contributes to inequality in learning and health that all three levels of government spend

hundreds of billions of dollars to treat every year. Publicly funded school meals are the norm internationally, including among the other G7 nations. Some provinces are taking a lead on this issue. As part of the Coalition for Healthy School Food, we urge the federal government to fulfil its promise to **create a pan-Canadian partnership for a Universal School Food Program** and #NourishKidsNow.

### The Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative

UNICEF encourages governments and other stakeholders to implement policies and plans of action that promote and protect breastfeeding up to 24 months—the best start for healthy lives. UNICEF facilitates the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) to support breastfeeding in hospitals and health centres around the world. Co-founded by UNICEF Canada, The Breastfeeding Committee of Canada administers the BFHI in Canada, a program endorsed by the Canadian Pediatric Society and supported by the Public Health Agency of Canada. Canada has more than 50 health facilities that operate with the gold standard in breastfeeding promotion, with strong commitments from provincial governments such as Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba.

Yet while about 90 per cent of women start breastfeeding at childbirth, the rate declines to about 30 per cent at six months. In some peer countries it is sustained at close to 70%, the world target<sup>vi</sup>. Only about a quarter to a third of women in Canada receive the recommended supportive interventions during their hospital stays. Women who sustain breastfeeding are likely to have several of the following support mechanisms in place:

- They live in a family, community and society with social norms supportive of good breastfeeding practices;
- They deliver the baby in a facility that has “baby-friendly” policies, and receive reliable information and practical support;
- Their governments support appropriate mother and baby-friendly policies including access to sufficient, affordable maternity leave and protection from marketing of breastmilk substitutes.

The federal government has a key role to play to enhance breastfeeding support by:

- **Building on parental leave** to increase the rate of income replacement to 70% and the family supplement to 100%, and decrease the qualifying income to a minimum of \$2,000 in insurable income during the qualifying period regardless of the number of hours worked.
- **Expanding investment in the BFHI**, particularly for Indigenous communities and birthing centres.

In addition to saving lives and reducing illness among children, these breastfeeding support policies could pay for themselves in reduced health care costs. Studies suggest lower health-care costs are associated with breastfeeding, including a U.K. study that found exclusive breastfeeding to four months could save the U.K. health system about \$27 million annually.

## What do U-Reporters think?

U-Report Canada is a platform for young people aged 13-24 to have a say and decision-makers to understand their views. Developed by UNICEF, U-Report gathers youth voice and perspective on issues they care about to influence positive change. U-Report is a unique opportunity to get a quick and real-time pulse check of young people’s views for a range of purposes, such as to understand how different groups of youth are being affected by decisions, policies, services and events, and involve youth in decisions that affect them. U-Report operates

in more than 45 countries with 6 million U-Reporters and counting – every 30 seconds a new U-Reporter signs up somewhere in the world.



Launched in Canada on 21 October, 2018 – one year before the scheduled federal election - U-Report Canada has more than 300 U-Reporters and counting, with young people in every province in territory. UNICEF Canada's U-Report partners include the Students Commission of Canada, Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada, Girl Guides of Canada, Kids Help Phone and the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society. Our first official poll asked U-Reporters about their priorities for the federal election in 2019. U-Reporters want their federal government to do more to improve health and food security and reduce violence. UNICEF Canada's policy priorities are developed by listening to children and youth. We urge the next federal government to do the same.

*U-Reporters think the Government of Canada is doing an “excellent or good” job on:*

**Improving the environment: 8%**

**Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples: 20%**

**Improving food security: 23%**

**Improving mental health services: 24%**

**Decreasing violence: 28%**

**Making sure children and youth are healthy: 37%**

## **Canada's Role in the World: Three policies that better ensure the health and protection of every child**

The 2019 federal election is also our opportunity to stand with children everywhere. What global priorities would have the greatest impact on the well-being of the world's children and adolescents?

### **Three policies for Canadian leadership on the global stage:**

1. Continue to Invest in Global Health
2. Protect Children in the Supply Chain
3. Eliminate all forms of Violence against Children in Conflict Zones

## 1. Continue to Invest in Global Health

Important gains have been made in the area of global health, with great support and leadership from Canada, but the job is not done. The reality is that many children are not receiving basic health care and nutrition to ensure they not only survive but thrive. For example, 7,000 newborns die every day, primarily from preventable causes. More needs to be done to address all the drivers of health and nutrition for children—including tackling inequities like poverty and improving education opportunities for adolescents and young women. Canada can continue its global leadership in ensuring children are surviving and thriving by increasing Canada’s international aid spending on health from 1 B to 1.4B per year over ten years, and making a policy commitment to ending preventable newborn deaths by 2030.

## 2. Protect Children in the Supply Chain

Globally, 152 million children are victims of child labour, modern slavery and other forms of human rights violations throughout the global supply chain. This can mean they are forced to work as minors, work long and inhumane hours, with poor or no pay, in environments that are abusive, violent, dangerous, and detrimental to their health, well-being and future. To protect children in the global supply chain, the federal government should pass legislation that requires Canadian companies to conduct due diligence and report on their efforts to address child labour, modern slavery, and other human rights issues in their operations and supply chains.

## 3. Eliminate all forms of Violence against Children in Conflict Zones

Children living in countries at war come under direct attack, are killed, maimed or recruited to fight, and used as human shields. Their homes, their schools and hospitals, and the other services that provide them with the basics of life are being denied or attacked. This cannot be accepted as the new “normal.” Building on Canada’s longstanding efforts to protect children in conflict, now more than ever Canada must step up, speak out, and hold perpetrators to account. Canada can begin by asking all countries to sign, as a package, the four key agreements on protecting children in armed conflict: the Safe Schools Declaration; the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict; the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and use of Child Soldiers, and; the Paris Principles on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups. It is imperative that we create a stronger foundation of consensus on this urgent issue.

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<sup>i</sup> Overlap Associates (2015). ‘If not UNICEF Canada: Designing an observatory of childhood well-being in Canada’. Brief for UNICEF Canada. Waterloo, Ontario

<sup>ii</sup> UNICEF Office of Research (2017). ‘Building the Future: Children and the Sustainable Development Goals in Rich Countries’, Innocenti Report Card 14, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, Florence: CANADIAN COMPANION

<sup>iii</sup> South East Asian Legal Clinic and partners (2017). Every Child Counts: Making sure the Canada Child Benefit is a Benefit for All Children.

<sup>iv</sup> UNICEF Office of Research (2017). ‘Building the Future: Children and the Sustainable Development Goals in Rich Countries’, Innocenti Report Card 14, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, Florence

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<sup>v</sup> UNICEF Office of Research (2017). 'Building the Future: Children and the Sustainable Development Goals in Rich Countries', Innocenti Report Card 14, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, Florence

<sup>vi</sup> UNICEF Office of Research (2017). 'Building the Future: Children and the Sustainable Development Goals in Rich Countries', Innocenti Report Card 14, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, Florence

# UNICEF Canada's One Youth

From 25th to 1st place, UNICEF Canada's One Youth is working to make Canada the best place in the world to grow up in. As the global UN agency for kids, UNICEF has worked to improve conditions for every child around the world for more than 70 years, and has saved more children's lives than any other humanitarian organization. UNICEF Canada's One Youth brings that work to Canada, by building the new gold standard for measuring child well-being, and developing and testing innovative solutions to the challenges they face.

We are calling on Canadians to take action and do better for children and youth.

From income inequality to early learning and child care, eight million children in Canada have a lot riding on this federal election. None of them have the right to vote. This October, we're calling on Canadians to **#VoteForEveryChild**

*For more information, please contact*

**Emily O'Connor**  
Communications Manager  
UNICEF Canada  
eoconnor@unicef.ca  
1 416 482 4444 ext. 8866

Charitable Registration No.  
122680572 RR0001

