Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being Q&A

1. What is the purpose of the Index?

The Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being is a framework to benchmark Canada's progress for children. This includes fulfilling children's enduring human rights, and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals for children by 2030. As Canadians, we want to understand our challenges, protect the good things we are doing and find new ways to do better.

> **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**

2. What is child and youth well-being?

There is no official definition. Different individuals, cultures, age groups and communities have different concepts of well-being. They have different goals and values. All citizens, including children, have the right to define the goals and directions of progress for themselves, their community and their society. However, there are common concepts about what well-being includes. UNICEF Canada asked people in different parts of Canada, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, including children and youth, about their visions of well-being[i]. We are building the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being around themes that are important to them: an 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[ii].

3. How does an average Canadian work with the Index?

1. Start a conversation with kids about well-being – what supports it and what gets in the way
2. Communicate and debate issues affecting children
3. Advocate for children
4. Vote for "children" in elections – for the candidates who give the highest priority to the rights and well-being of children

Governments?

1. Develop better data for and with children
2. See what is achievable in practice – and set bolder goals and benchmarks for community, regional and national progress for children
3. Use data and analysis to design policies, investments, programs and practices
4. Track progress toward commitments including the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals
5. Create dashboards of child and youth well-being
6. Assess the potential or desirable impacts of a decision on a range of interrelated aspects of children's lives and on different groups of children
7. Focus investments for children and youth
8. Dedicate funds to focus on challenges facing children and youth
9. Evaluate impacts of actions on children and youth
10. Include the often-excluded children and youth
11. Think about and plan for the future
12. Look for the connections among dimensions and indicators to support collaborations and innovative solutions that address integrated challenges and policy spill-overs

Business?
1. Use data and analysis to design policies, investments, programs and practices and to measure their impacts
2. Participate in progress toward the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals
3. Set priorities, goals, benchmarks and plans
4. Assess the potential or desirable impacts of a decision on a range of interrelated aspects of children's lives and on different groups of children
5. Focus investments for children and youth
6. Dedicate funds to focus on challenges facing children and youth
7. Evaluate impacts of actions on children and youth
8. Include the often-excluded children and youth
9. Think about and plan for the future
10. Look for the connections among dimensions and indicators to support collaborations and innovative solutions that address integrated challenges and policy spill-overs

Researchers?
1. Develop better data for and with children
2. Promote understanding of what life is like for children and youth in Canada through research and dialogue

Organizations?
1. Advocate for children – create public and political will to make Canada among the best places to grow up
2. Use data and analysis to design policies, investments, programs and practices and to measure their impacts
3. Track progress toward commitments including the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.
4. Start a conversation with kids about well-being – what supports it and what gets in the way
5. Set priorities, goals, benchmarks and plans
6. Create community-level dashboards of child and youth well-being
7. Assess the potential or desirable impacts of a decision on a range of interrelated aspects of children's lives and on different groups of children
8. Focus investments for children and youth
9. Dedicate funds to focus on challenges facing children and youth

10. Evaluate impacts of actions on children and youth
11. Include children and youth in decisions, planning and development
12. Communicate and debate issues affecting children
13. Apply for funding
14. Include the often-excluded children and youth
15. Think about and planning for the future
16. Look for the connections among dimensions and indicators to support collaborations and innovative solutions that address integrated challenges and policy spill-overs

4. How was the Index developed?
Please refer to the report available at: https://www.unicef.ca/one-youth/child-and-youth-well-being-index/

5. How were children and youth involved in developing the Index?
UNICEF is committed to developing and using data with children, not just about them. UNICEF Canada supports 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.

UNICEF Canada asked more than 500 children and youth across Canada about their lives and involved them in deciding what needs to be measured, holding indicator workshops at youth gatherings, in First Nations communities, in Francophone communities, in urban and rural places, and with children in custody. We brought young girls together with artists and data scientists. Street Teams of youth took to the streets, festivals and public spaces in their communities to ask community members what matters and found that freedom to play and food security are priorities. U-Report polls and online surveys helped identify the importance of certain issues to young people such as loneliness and learning about Indigenous cultures. On some issues, children and youth have different priorities than adults, and value things that are not validated with substantial academic research, such as their relationships with pets.

UNICEF Canada is facilitating young people to interpret data and bring it to life with stories, visualizations and participation in advocacy and decision-making. *Kids of Canada*, U-Report and the visualization of the Index are ways young people are doing this, and we will continue to find ways to support children and youth to make sense and meaning of data about them.

6. How does the Index differ from work done by other child and youth organizations?
Different approaches to measuring social progress and well-being contribute to important conversations about the kind of country we want. There are many indices and data dashboards focused on adult or broad population well-being. Some focus on children, or on particular aspects of their lives, at local and regional levels. The Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being is a pan-Canadian, eagle's eye view of the state of children (from birth to age 18). It provides a comprehensive view of many aspects of children's lives encompassing their universal human rights and the global Sustainable Development Goals. This complements dashboards developed for different purposes, such as those with specific focus areas such as child health or child development, for specific cultural contexts such as Indigenous community well-being frameworks, and for a local or regional focus. Many of these initiatives have drawn on UNICEF indices and data innovation. In addition to its breadth, as an index it is more selective than initiatives that aim to provide far more data about a particular theme. The index is also somewhat unique because UNICEF Canada has worked with children and youth around the country to identify what they view as key issues, complementing adult participation.

7. *Why UNICEF Canada?*

While governments have a duty to monitor the fulfilment of children's rights and policy commitments, independent social accountability efforts like the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being are complementary, helping link citizens – including the youngest - to governments. UNICEF helps governments fulfil their commitments to children's rights through policies, programs, budgets and governance mechanisms including data for children, and by amplifying young voices in the process. UNICEF has been a global leader in developing, innovating and mobilizing data for and with children for decades. UNICEF supports the world's largest survey of children and youth (Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey) and is the global custodian for child-focused SDG indicators. Creating powerful communication tools like the *State of the World's Children Report*, UNICEF Report Cards and U-Report, UNICEF has marshalled data to help prevent millions of child deaths, put millions of children in school, register their births and give young people a voice. UNICEF developed the Index of Child Well-being in 2007 to monitor how the world's wealthiest countries are fulfilling the rights of children and youth, with many iterations since. UNICEF Canada is building on the UNICEF Index with a more comprehensive set of measures and data to support Canadians in making Canada a great place to grow up for every child.

8. *Where does the data come from?*

The data used to measure the indicators are not at this point collected by UNICEF Canada, but drawn from many reputable and ongoing sources of statistical, population data. At this stage, the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being relies heavily on many public and quasi-public sources of data. The majority of the indicators are measured with data from Statistics Canada surveys and the WHO Health Behaviours in School-Aged Children Survey. In these surveys, young people can report their own well-being status. This is generally preferred to proxies such as adult reporting, given that adults often over- or under-estimate children's experiences. Other sources of data include administrative data sets, global data sets and research studies. The diversity of data sources will grow over time.

9. *How is equality or equity included?*

To measure inequalities is to measure differences. To measure inequities is to measure differences that are unfair. The Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being measures how evenly distributed children's opportunities and outcomes are; whether or not the differences are inequalities or inequities is a matter of interpretation. Since most of the measures in the Index are rights-based and policy-relevant, many of the differences in child and youth well-being are likely to be inequitable.

The Index measures equality in different ways: across the child population; between groups or sub-populations of children; and for some indicators, between generations. As well, some of the indicators in different dimensions of the Index directly measure aspects of inequality such as child poverty, deprivation and discrimination. Limitations in available data to measure inequalities is an opportunity to do better.

10. *Why are these indicators in the Index?*

Some indicators may be surprising and unexpected. Examples are:

- Voting age
  Why does the Index propose an indicator of under-18s who vote in federal, provincial and territorial elections when currently in Canada none are eligible? We believe the voting age should be set at age 16, when most young people can (and many do) form

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views about political and policy issues that affect them. There have been international and domestic efforts to include younger citizens in elections and, because the Index is built for the future as well as the present, we want to track any change in the inclusion of young people in the electorate.

- Pets
  Why does the Index propose an indicator of young people's relationships with pets? The importance of pets in young people's relationships surfaces frequently when young people are asked what supports their well-being. It is only beginning to be examined in academic research, but is not nearly as well-researched as children's relationships with parents, peers and teachers. Not every child needs, wants or should have a pet. However, including this measures contributes to asking questions and understanding the nature of the relationships young people have – how many, with whom and their quality.

- Registering a business
  Why does the Index propose an indicator of the number of young people in Canada who can legally register a business in the area in which they live? There are very few indicators and available data to describe a very important aspect of children's rights and well-being: their ability to participate in society. The legal recognition of young people as evolving in maturity and capacity is indicated by their ability to register a business, among other measures. It also recognizes that young people earn incomes and start their own enterprises; they have multidimensional lives.

11. Why doesn't the Index include some important things?
The Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being does not represent the full picture of what well-being means to Canadians, because of different conceptions of well-being; because some aspects of well-being can't be measured with statistical data; and because the Index is necessarily selective or "curated". The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is a universal set of entitlements that every child in Canada has, and to the extent we can measure the fulfillment of these rights, they form a unifying framework for the Index. Child-focused indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals are embedded in the Index because these are policy commitments Canada made with a pledge to leave no child behind. The Index also draws on global research, approaches and methods; the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (for the general population); and other efforts to measure child and youth well-being in Canada and worldwide[1][iii].

12. What difference will this make?
The Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being is a tool to measure things differently to help do things differently. Why should we? Canada ranks 25th among the world's 41 richest countries measured against the global Sustainable Development Goals for children[iv], even though the ranking for our general population is 17th.[2] These two rankings are not directly comparable, but Canada consistently ranks higher than its economic peers in adult-focused indices of social progress, yet lower in child-focused indices. Progress is slowing in many aspects of children's

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[1] There is a global convergence toward measuring social well-being and progress incorporating influences that include positivist (policy and statistics-driven), human rights based, international benchmarking (including the Sustainable Development Goals) and worldviews including Indigenous and Buddhist concepts of well-being.

[2] The child-focused SDG Index is published by UNICEF in Report Card 14 (2017); the general population SDG Index is published by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (2017).

well-being even though national wealth continues a steady rise, and there are persistently wide gaps between Canada's children in aspects of well-being.

Ultimately, the Index is not a data project – it is a change project. Data are a starting point for understanding, and understanding should precipitate action. As Canadians, we want to understand our challenges, protect the good things we are doing and find new ways to do better. UNICEF Canada heard from Canadians across the country that they want Canada to be at the top of the UNICEF league tables of child and youth well-being. That means it's time to do things differently. The Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being provides a way for children and those who stand with them to work with common purpose and measure the progress of our nation.

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:

- 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.

13. How can communities use an Index focused on national data?
The Index uses data mainly from pan-Canadian surveys because respondents from across Canada are asked the same question with the same set of response options. It ensures our comparisons are accurate and will ultimately facilitate international and inter-provincial comparisons. Many local communities can measure at least some similar things with more localized sources of data. While comparisons may not be perfectly accurate, some benchmarking is possible. Ultimately, communities are encouraged to develop their own indices of child and youth well-being and use their data to guide local decisions and actions. As we explore new ways to gather data with as well as about young people, more data should be available.

14. What do you say to the Indigenous community? How does this relate to Truth and Reconciliation?
The process of developing the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being has been shaped by Indigenous voices. However, UNICEF Canada recognizes that approaches to measuring the well-being of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples are rightfully determined by First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

There are considerable limitations to data that are available to Indigenous peoples[v].

Measuring parity in outcomes between Indigenous children and other Canadian children is a Call to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (no. 19). The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and UNICEF have called repeatedly for states to invest in data that describes the distinct experiences of Indigenous peoples, including children.

We respect that Indigenous communities have worldviews and conceptions of well-being, as well as inherent rights, which are culturally distinct. We recognize that data selection, collection, analysis, reporting and use are not neutral, but are embedded in different cultural frameworks. We understand that Indigenous communities and governments have sovereignty over their children and information about them, and we strive to respect the First Nations principles of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP®) and other protocols governing their data and information.

[i] Overlap Associates (20150. 'If not UNICEF Canada: Designing an observatory of childhood well-being in Canada'. Brief for UNICEF Canada. Waterloo, Ontario

[ii] Overlap Associates (20150. 'If not UNICEF Canada: Designing an observatory of childhood well-being in Canada'. Brief for UNICEF Canada. Waterloo, Ontario

[iii] Salvaris, M. (2013). 'Measuring the Kind of Australia We Want: ANDI, the GDP and the Global Movement to Redefine Progress', *Australian Economic Review* 46(1).

[iv] 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.

[v] Reading, C. L. and F. Wien (2009). 'Health Inequalities and Social Determinants of Aboriginal Peoples' Health'. National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health. Prince George, BC.