



# 2021 Pre-Budget Consultations

February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021

## Written Submission: Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2021 Budget

Submitted by UNICEF Canada

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### INTRODUCTION:

UNICEF Canada welcomes the opportunity to participate in the 2021 pre-budget submissions and is deeply encouraged by the leadership role that the Government of Canada has demonstrated throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

This submission provides a critical opportunity to take stock of how the lives of children have been impacted by COVID-19 and to set a bold course of action for the future in alignment with the Government of Canada's current commitments and continued progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as we approach the final Decade of Action to 2030.

### PART I: LEADERSHIP FOR CHILDREN AROUND THE WORLD

**Recommendation 1: Canada should anchor their investments to the global COVID-19 response into the international aid budget and commit to further increases over the next 2 years, so that at least 1% of Canada's COVID response and recovery spending be directed to new and additional international assistance.**

Despite the devastating impacts of global crises on the world's most vulnerable, Canada spends an average of 27 cents for every \$100 in national income on addressing global development and humanitarian challenges. This investment is below that of Canada's peer countries, or its own historic contributions and undermines its domestic and global recovery efforts.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, however, Canada has shown strategic global leadership in rising to meet growing need by increasing contributions to global response. This includes allocating close to \$2 billion of additional funding to ensure equal access to vaccines, tests and treatment; respond to growing humanitarian crises; and protect the most marginalized from the harm caused by the pandemic.

The pandemic is ongoing worldwide, the global response is far from over, and the road to recovery will be long. To ensure continued leadership in a collective response, to build back better and ensure a just, inclusive recovery beyond COVID-19, Canada must commit to a roadmap for adequately funded international assistance. As a first step, Canada should anchor the recent investments committed in 2020/21 into a permanent increase to the international assistance envelope. This should be accompanied by further increases over the next two fiscal years, in line with the welcome commitments to annual increases to international assistance made in the Speech from the Throne and the Prime Minister's address to the United Nations General Assembly. In implementing these commitments, Canada should seek to allocate at least 1% of Canada's COVID-19 response and recovery budget towards sustainable global solutions.

Canada's leadership in the COVID-19 pandemic to date has recognized that we cannot solve global challenges in isolation. This understanding must continue through the next phases of the global response and recovery, and translate into continued commitment to meet growing need.

**Recommendation 2: Canada should protect against further rollback of progress towards achieving the SDGs, by protecting funding towards its existing commitments and championing an agenda for children.**

Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals is slipping backwards, and children continue to pay the steepest price. Without coordinated, global action to prevent, mitigate and respond to the effects of the pandemic, the consequences for children will be severe. It is they – especially girls; children facing exclusion or violence; those with disabilities; and particularly children affected or displaced by humanitarian crisis – who will live with the impact of this pandemic for decades to come.

To mitigate the impact on the most vulnerable children, Canada must stay firm in ensuring contributions to new COVID-19 commitments do not come at the expense of existing commitments for children, including health, nutrition, education, and protection from gender-based violence. Canada's welcome commitment to increase international assistance must also include a clear agenda for children, as outlined in UNICEF's [Six-Point Plan](#).

**Protecting education:**

COVID-19 unleashed a learning crisis, with school closures disrupting 91 percent of learners worldwide, and derailing progress against SDG 4. Building on the historic G7 commitments to girls' education in conflict and crisis, and existing policy commitments to lead a campaign to ensure refugee and displaced children's education, Canada should invest an additional \$450 million over three years from 2021-2023 for the campaign, recognizing that refugee and displaced children are among those most at risk of missing out on learning.

In light of the impact of COVID-19 on education particularly for girls, Canada must also increase the level of ambition on education financing as part of the Feminist International Assistance Policy. This includes building from the current Ministerial mandate commitment to invest a minimum of 10% of international assistance to education, and increasing to 15% of international assistance, in line with international benchmarks for donor financing.

Canada is a founding partner of both the Global Partnership for Education and Education Cannot Wait, and a leading contributor to UNHCR and UNICEF, the leading UN agencies working on education for children in conflict and displacement. Together the agencies have launched a joint "Blueprint for Joint Action" to improve access to and quality of education for refugee children.

Canada's commitments to education must consider this dynamic global education architecture and include these leading actors alongside Canadian partners as part of Canada's education portfolio.

**Protecting health and nutrition:**

Canada's significant and longstanding leadership in global health and nutrition has continued through the COVID-19 pandemic, when progress against child and maternal mortality has been increasingly at risk. In 2021, millions of the world's most vulnerable children are at risk of missing out on life-saving vaccines that protect them from preventable deaths. UNICEF also estimates there has been a 40% decline in the coverage of nutrition services for women and children across 135 countries during the pandemic – and

that an additional 9 million children under the age of 5 may suffer from wasting in 2021-2022 due to the impact of COVID-19.

Entering into 2021, Canada's strong support to nutrition and health will be essential, particularly in addressing child wasting and immunization. In the context of an increased international development assistance envelope, these urgent and needed resources for children are well within reach.

**Recommendation 3: Canada should ensure countries in need are ready to receive COVID-19 vaccines, enable trusted partners to reach frontline health workers and other vulnerable populations, and support efforts to tackle vaccine misinformation.**

Canada has demonstrated longstanding leadership on global health – from maternal and newborn health to sexual and reproductive health, and significant commitments to the ACT-Accelerator. Key to ensuring success of these initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic, is health system strengthening including vaccine readiness, without which we cannot deliver a vaccine effectively.

Through the COVAX Facility – together with Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, WHO and CEPI – UNICEF is leveraging its unique experience as the largest single vaccine buyer in the world by working with manufacturers and partners on the procurement of COVID-19 vaccine doses, as well as freight, logistics and storage. UNICEF is also bringing the full weight of its strength in community engagement and expansive social mobilization network to build demand and acceptance for vaccines. In order to prepare for this significant increase and ensure the vaccine reaches the most vulnerable, UNICEF requires urgent additional funding of up to \$800 million from international donors for diagnostics, treatments, vaccine delivery, risk communication and community engagement. In this regard, we encourage Canada to continue its longstanding support towards UNICEF and our partners in COVAX, helping UNICEF deliver two billion vaccines while providing urgent support at local and national level to strengthen health systems, protect frontline health workers, ensure cold chain and supply chain readiness, and build trust in vaccines.

## **PART II: LEADERSHIP FOR CHILDREN IN CANADA**

**Recommendation 4: Canada should establish through legislation an independent Commissioner for Children and Youth in Canada to advocate for and advance policy in the best interests of children and youth.**

More than 60 countries have established a Children's Commissioner or Ombudsperson. International evidence demonstrates that an independent, non-partisan, collaborative approach can support government decisions that advance equitable health and well-being outcomes of all children and youth.

Good governance for children and youth is sound economic policy and will be essential to Canada's economic recovery. A Commissioner is a very affordable and effective way to improve the long-term outlook for children and youth in Canada as they recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Canada should further commit to an annual budget of \$8 million CAD to operate the office of a Children's Commissioner. This is comparable to the annual budget of other Offices of Parliament with similar form and function to the proposed Commissioner for Children and Youth.

This recommendation echoes the joint submission to the 2021 pre-budget consultations made by UNICEF Canada, the Pediatric Chairs of Canada, Canadian Pediatric Society, and Children's Healthcare Canada. More details about the proposed role of a Children's Commissioner can be found therein.

**Recommendation 5: Canada should take bold action to avoid an increase in child poverty as a result of the pandemic, and include in the budget a specific commitment to increasing the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) for lower-income families if child poverty rates don't decline by 20% as set out in Canada's Poverty Reduction Strategy.**

UNICEF Canada commends the government's use of emergency fiscal measures including the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) and temporary increases to the CCB to address the most immediate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Research from the UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti shows that Canada's emphasis on direct payments to households has left Canada well-positioned to avoid significant increases in child poverty relative to our peer countries. However, without continued supports, child poverty is still likely to rise above pre-COVID levels for at least five years across high-income countries, Canada included. While Canada's pandemic spending has outpaced many peer countries, we also had higher rates of child poverty before the pandemic. Despite Parliament's 1989 commitment to end child poverty by the year 2000, child poverty has decreased just 3.4% since then, from 22% in 1989 down to 18.6% in 2018.

Child income poverty rates are predictors of poorer learning and health outcomes in following years. This leaves governments scrambling to catch up to the problem, spending more on downstream programs and services like child protection, remedial education, youth justice, healthcare and social assistance. When all of this is taken into account, the amount of financial relief allocated to children and families should be more explicitly targeted toward keeping them out of poverty.

**Recommendation 6: Canada should make upfront investments to stabilize the early learning and child care (ELCC) sector as it recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, and establish a clear roadmap to a national system of accessible, high-quality early learning and child care for all.**

UNICEF Canada supports work of Child Care Now and has endorsed their [Affordable Child Care for All Plan](#), including their updated COVID-19 recovery strategy. More detailed accounting of that plan can be found in the Child Care Now budget submissions.

The two-phased Affordable Child Care for All Plan now includes \$2.5 billion in new federal transfers to stabilize provincial ELCC systems that have been devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The second phase includes \$2 billion in 2021-22 and an additional \$2 billion each year after that to move Canada towards a fully publicly-funded system of ELCC by 2030.

Any new federal transfers for ELCC should be made conditional on provinces and territories using the funds to achieve measurable improvements in accessibility, inclusion, affordability, and quality. Ideally, these conditions should be outlined in new federal legislation.

## CONCLUSION:

The impacts of this pandemic will be felt for years to come. An integrated approach that helps end the pandemic, contain the spread, and address the impacts of the pandemic on children at both the national and international scale is required, while simultaneously contributing to deliberate efforts to support an inclusive and resilient recovery.

Canada can work with the increased interest from Canadians in support of UNICEF and other partners' work to ensure a just, inclusive COVID-19 response and recovery that progresses the Canada's national and international commitments and reimagines a better, more equitable future for every child.