



2022 Pre-Budget Consultations

February 11th, 2022

INTRODUCTION:

This submission provides a critical opportunity to take stock of the continuing impact of COVID-19 in the lives of children in Canada and globally, and sets a bold course of action in alignment with the Government of Canada's priorities and progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

PART I: LEADERSHIP FOR CHILDREN AROUND THE WORLD

Recommendation 1: Canada should increase its International Assistance Envelope (IAE) by \$1.5 billion above the current 2020-21 financial commitments to reach \$9 billion in Budget 2022-23. This investment is aligned with the government's commitment to predictable, sustained increases to Canada's international development assistance annually, and is critical to advance preparedness for future pandemics, move us forward on climate action, and secure a just, inclusive and sustainable recovery in the world.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Canada has shown strategic global leadership in rising to meet growing need by increasing contributions to global response. Despite the progress we have made here in Canada, the pandemic is ongoing worldwide, and the road to recovery will be long. To build back better and ensure a just, inclusive recovery beyond COVID-19, Canada must commit to a roadmap for adequately funded international assistance. In addition to the moral imperatives of contributing to efforts to save lives, and recognizing the devastating impact of COVID-19, climate change and conflict on vulnerable communities around the world, Canada has every economic incentive to contribute to a coherent global intervention of this kind. The proposed global response is part of a sustainable road to recovery, will ensure greater control over the pandemic and lead to economic progress that will benefit high-income countries like Canada.

Recommendation 2: Canada should protect against further rollback of progress towards achieving the SDGs, by protecting funding towards its existing commitments and championing an ambitious, inclusive and holistic agenda for children as part of the global response to and recovery from COVID-19.

To mitigate the impact on the most marginalized children, Canada must stay firm in ensuring contributions to new COVID-19 commitments do not come at the expense of critical longstanding commitments for children, including health, nutrition, education, and protection from gender-based violence. In addition, Canada must work to create and support a COVID-19 response and recovery that is holistic and inclusive in nature. Canada's welcome commitment to increase international assistance must also include a clear agenda for children, as outlined in UNICEF's [Six-Point Plan](#), prioritization critical investments in children's education, health and nutrition.

Protecting education:

COVID-19 unleashed a learning crisis, and has derailed the progress of SDG 4. Almost two years into the pandemic, more than 600 million children are still out of school. An additional 250 million children and youth, including those in crisis and conflict, were already out of school before COVID-19. There is also a growing need to support schools in becoming environmentally sustainable and resilient to natural disasters to protect children in the face of a changing climate.

In the face of this global education emergency, and recognizing the devastating impact of COVID-19, climate change and conflict on children's learning, **Canada must maintain its commitment to invest at least 10 percent of bilateral assistance to education, working up to 15 percent.** This increase is commensurate to the growing global need particularly for the most marginalized children, including girls, refugee and displaced children and those living with disabilities.

Education is a human right and a critical enabler to all other global development goals including gender equality, poverty, hunger, and health, and reduced social inequalities. Despite its importance, access to education continues to be severely threatened by persistent and concurrent crises, including COVID-19, conflict and climate shocks. Marginalized children are particularly at risk, including girls, refugee and displaced learners and children with disabilities. Children's mental health has also been impacted, hindering their ability to learn and thrive. Canada can continue to build on its global leadership in education and increase its commitments in this area in line with growing and unmet needs. Canadian programming should focus on those most at risk of being left behind through systemic and structural inequities, prioritizing flexible and multi-year funding to ensure learning outcomes for the hardest to reach.

Protecting child 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 and nutrition that protect them from preventable deaths. The situation has deteriorated in recent months. In 2020, an estimated 45.4 million children suffered from wasting, with needs escalating sharply because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This wasting estimate is likely to be conservative because, as conflicts increase, the climate crisis grows, and the COVID-19 pandemic continues, this continues to impact on food, health, and social protection systems.

As the world looks to move past the current pandemic, Canada's strong support to child nutrition and health will be essential, particularly in addressing child wasting and routine immunization. In the context of an increased international development assistance envelope, these urgent and needed resources for children are well within reach and must be prioritized to mitigate against further preventable death of the youngest and most marginalized children.

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.

The Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-A) is working to accelerate progress towards increased access to COVID-19 tools of vaccines, diagnostics and treatments, including through strengthening health systems. Through the COVAX Facility – the vaccine arm of the ACT-A, and the world's largest and fastest ever supply and procurement of vaccines – 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 continue ensuring that the vaccine reaches the most vulnerable, UNICEF requires urgent funding of USD \$4.8 billion for the procurement and in-country delivery of vaccines and other COVID-19 tools, and for community engagement to ensure vaccine uptake. This includes \$1.175 billion to support countries to procure and deliver COVID-19 vaccines, ensuring vaccines get from the tarmac into arms, and to provide specialized support in humanitarian and fragile settings. Canada has made significant contributions to the ACT-A in 2021, and is in a strong position to build on this leadership. In this regard, we encourage Canada to continue its longstanding support towards UNICEF and our partners in the ACT-A, helping UNICEF with the delivery of 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. To date UNICEF, through the COVAX Facility, has shipped more than 1.1 billion vaccine doses to 144 countriesⁱ – and will need continued support to ensure countries are able to roll-out and administer vaccines to the further corners of each country.

PART II: LEADERSHIP FOR CHILDREN IN CANADA

Recommendation 4: Canada should establish through legislation an independent Commissioner or Commission 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, fulfilling their international obligations pursuant to children’s rights. 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 recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. 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 a minimum 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.

UNICEF Canada commends the government’s use of emergency fiscal measures and temporary increases to the CCB to address the most immediate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on family incomes. 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 in the short term. 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. Many affluent countries have sustained a rate below 10%. Canada should increase the CCB to achieve the target established in the federal Poverty Reduction Strategy and continue to progress to the elimination of child poverty. Measures should include anchoring eligibility to the child rather than the parents' immigration status, and simplifying tax filing rules.

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 honour and build on the spending and policy commitment made in the 2021 budget to stabilize the early learning and child care (ELCC) sector as it recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, and continue to work towards a national system of accessible, high-quality early learning and child care for all.

UNICEF Canada has highly encouraged to see the historic commitments to early learning and child care made in the 2021 budget, investments for which we have advocated for decades. The 2022 budget should harness that momentum by renewing the total annual spending allocations established in the 2021 budget: \$5.6 billion in 2022-23, \$7 billion in 2023-24, \$8 billion in 2024-25, and \$9.2 billion in 2025-26. These federal funds should be targeted specifically towards building a Canada-wide system of publicly funded and managed high quality child care in partnership with the provinces and territories. Negotiated funding agreements with provinces and territories should ensure that federal funds are used to (a) make child care affordable, available and accessible; (b) support a comprehensive child care workforce strategy to address challenges of recruitment and retention of qualified staff; and (c) limit the expansion of regulated child care to the not-for-profit and public sectors.

The 2022 federal budget should also earmark additional federal infrastructure funds to support spending on public child care infrastructure to facilitate the expansion of regulated child care across the country.

ⁱ For latest figures on UNICEF's deliveries of vaccine doses through COVAX, refer to the COVID-19 Vaccine dashboard: <https://www.unicef.org/supply/covid-19-vaccine-market-dashboard>