

A BETTER FUTURE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN CANADA

REIMAGINE PLAYBOOK

CLIMATE CHANGE

DISABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

MENTAL HEALTH

RACIAL JUSTICE AND INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

UNICEF Canada extends our gratitude to:

The young people who participated in the Youth Advocacy Sessions and contributed to writing this Playbook.

Our National Child Day partners:

BGC Canada, Equitas, International Institute for Child Rights and Development,
The Students Commission of Canada and YMCA Canada.



Special thanks to:

Overlap Associates

UNICEF Canada thanks the following partners who support One Youth and our efforts to advance the well-being of Canadian children and youth:

Brookfield Partners Foundation
Intact Financial Corporation
Leapfrog Capital Corporation
RBC Foundation in support of RBC Future Launch
The Lawson Foundation

UNICEF Canada recognizes that our work takes place on Indigenous territories across Turtle Island and pledges to work in reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. UNICEF Canada's national office is situated on the ancestral, traditional territory of many nations including the Huron-Wendat, Petun, Seneca and, most recently, the Mississaugas of the New Credit. This territory is part of the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement for all people to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. This territory is also covered by the Upper Canada Treaties. It is home to diverse First Nations, Metis and Inuit Peoples today, and we are grateful to live and work on this territory.

Aussi disponible en français.

All photos ©UNICEF Canada

Extracts from this publication may be reproduced with due acknowledgement.
Requests to use larger portions or the full publication should be addressed to UNICEF Canada.

We suggest the following citation:

UNICEF Canada. 2021. Reimagine Playbook: UNICEF Canada, Toronto.

For more information about UNICEF Canada:

Call: 1 800 567 4483
Email: info@unicef.ca

ABOUT THIS PLAYBOOK

This playbook represents the work of over 100 young advocates who came together throughout 2021 to learn and share knowledge and skills about their human rights and how to advocate for them. These young people identified four interconnected issues that unite them in their passion for shaping a better country and a reimagined world: Climate Change, Disability and Accessibility, Mental Health, and Racial Justice and Indigenous Rights.

Each session statement summarizes a youth-led discussion on these issues, as understood and written by the youth themselves. Each section includes recommendations from the youth for decision-makers, adult allies, and other young people on how we can support them in their advocacy. Please read and share them widely to amplify youth voices and experiences and help reimagine a better future for young people in Canada.

The playbook was formally released at the Youth Activism Summit on November 19, 2021, in recognition of National Child Day and World Children's Day.

 A DIGITAL VERSION OF THIS PLAYBOOK IS AVAILABLE AT [ONEYOUTHCANADA.CA](https://oneyouthcanada.ca)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

5	A Message from the Youth Advocates
6	Climate Change
10	Disability and Accessibility
13	Mental Health
16	Racial Justice and Indigenous Rights
20	A Message from the Partner Organizations

SPOTLIGHT: U-REPORT CANADA



U-Report is a polling platform developed by UNICEF for youth ages 13 to 24. It provides quick, real-time pulse checks of young people's views about issues they care about; to understand how different groups of youth are affected by decisions, policies, services and events; and to involve youth in decisions that affect them. There are more than 1,100 U-Reporters in Canada, and they reside in every province and territory.

Visit www.ureportcanada.ca for more information and to sign up for U-Report Canada.



**WE ARE
SKIPPING
OUR LESSON
TO TEACH
YOU ONE**

A MESSAGE FROM THE YOUTH ADVOCATES

We should be in our classrooms learning lessons; instead, we are here to teach you some.

Our home is on fire.

The disabled are not disposable.

Mental health matters.

No justice, no peace.

We are on stolen land.

Nothing about us, without us.

This year, UNICEF Canada launched the Youth Advocacy Program. Hundreds of young people all over the nation gathered to have insightful discussions on the following priority areas: Climate Change, Disability and Accessibility, Mental Health, Racial Justice and Indigenous Rights.

Advocacy contributes to UNICEF's mission through progressive steps that "promote, influence and achieve policies, practices, programs or resource allocations in support of the optimal fulfillment of the Convention on the Rights of the Child."

Sea levels continue to rise.

The disability community continues to face barriers.

Mental health continues to be ignored.

Minority groups continue to be mistreated.

Indigenous children continue to be discovered in mass graves.

Youth need to **speak up** and **take action**.

In this year's Reimagine Playbook, we will share our experiences and perspectives on national injustices and share recommendations for how our fellow youth, adult allies and other decision-makers can address our concerns.

We have a lot of work to do, and we plan on harnessing our generational impatience to get it done.

Are you with us?

CLIMATE CHANGE



What we know about Climate Change

Carbon is stored all over the planet. We release carbon into the atmosphere as carbon dioxide through activities such as burning fossil fuels (coal, oil and gas) and destroying natural carbon stores such as forests and wetlands. That carbon dioxide builds up in the atmosphere with other greenhouse gases, creating a “greenhouse effect.” The amount of greenhouse gas emissions is directly linked to Earth’s average global temperature.

Since the industrial revolution, these actions have caused average global temperatures to rise by about 1°C. Climate change doesn’t just mean warmer temperatures. It’s accelerating sea-ice loss and worsening wildfires, floods, drought, avalanches, heat waves and sea-level rise. It’s acidifying oceans, which threatens marine life. Climate change is also degrading and altering natural habitats, which is impacting wildlife and people in Canada and around the world.

Climate change affects everyone, but certain areas are more vulnerable to its impacts. The Arctic ecosystem is currently warming about three times faster than the average global rate due to less ice reflecting the sunlight and other factors, reducing its ability to cool down the rest of the world.

Climate change is worsening other issues as well. Droughts and changing rainfall patterns are leading to crop failures and rising food prices, leading to increased food insecurity and nutritional deprivations that can have lifelong impacts. These issues will disproportionately affect people who are already living in poverty.

The recent UN report on climate showed that urgent action is needed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and keep global warming below 1.5 degrees. Without any action, the world could see an increase of up to 3 degrees before the end of the century. According to UNEP, 10 years ago, if countries had acted on this science, governments would have needed to reduce emissions by 3.3% each year. Every year we fail to act, the level of difficulty and cost to reduce emissions goes up.

Climate change is a massive issue that affects everyone, and many are concerned about it. According to an Environics poll, 67% of Canadians are pessimistic about the condition of the planet for future generations, and 88% of Canadians are concerned about climate change. Urgent action on the climate crisis needs to be taken now—we can’t wait any longer.

How Climate Change is impacting young people's lives

Across Canada, climate change is causing warmer and irregular weather patterns, more precipitation, melting sea ice, less snowfall and shorter winters, more droughts and floods, and more pollution. Climate change has also caused colder temperatures in some areas. As the polar vortex around the North Pole weakens, cold air starts to move south, while warm air continues moving north. Climate change is making it harder to travel, especially in the North, and rising gas prices have also made commuting more expensive. We're speaking up, but we're not sure politicians and world leaders are listening. The sense of urgency still seems low, and we face continued apathy. As one youth participant shared, "Climate change has put a huge weight on my shoulders because leaders aren't taking enough action."

Climate change is causing and worsening social issues such as internal displacement, income inequality, food insecurity, and illnesses. Eco-anxiety, or worry about the future state of our planet, is also affecting our generation's mental health. We're unsure whether or not we want to have children because we don't want them to deal with the future impacts of climate change. As young people, we are both the least responsible and among the most impacted by climate change.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also affected climate change and the environment in various ways. Political leaders have stopped caring as much about climate change, prioritizing pandemic responses despite the looming environmental crisis. Yet, the pandemic is proof that we can respond to global emergencies urgently.

There may have been less individual travel pollution because people weren't commuting and travelling as often during the pandemic. However, emissions were only reduced by 12% with fewer people driving and flying, so COVID-19 has reinforced that we need to think beyond individual actions. Corporations have a massive responsibility in climate change.

Moreover, there's also more litter from personal protective equipment and an increase in hand sanitizer bottles, which end up in landfills and contribute to the greenhouse gases they emit.

In the future, climate change will continue to harm our physical and mental health. We'll feel more despair and hopelessness if we reach the time when nothing can be done to help us and future generations. The effects of climate change will make finding stable housing, adequate water supply, and protection and shelter from toxic materials and extreme weather events incredibly difficult. There will be sharp changes in weather and increases in natural disasters. The costs of climate change will only increase as time goes on if urgent action isn't taken now.



90%

of U-Reporters say it is at least somewhat common for young people in Canada to experience eco-anxiety.

(APRIL 2021)

How can Canadians take action to improve this area of young people's lives?

YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people need to be conscious of their individual actions. Although reducing your own carbon footprint won't reverse climate change, it's important to think about your impact on your local environment, and showing that you care about it. Young people can also speak up and advocate for larger changes. You can start and lead clubs and projects in your schools; you can make a greater impact when you come together with other youth.

INDIVIDUAL ACTION

- Be a conscious consumer. Be mindful of online purchases, buy local goods, shop at thrift stores, only buy what you need, buy reusable products and sustainable fashion.
- Carpool and take public transit more often.
- Throw waste in the right spot, and don't litter.
- Stay connected with nature—get houseplants, take walks, plant native plants.
- Fundraise for and volunteer with environmental organizations.
- Get inspired by other young climate activists.

ADVOCACY

- Come together with other youth to make a bigger impact and start environmental groups and projects in your community; don't be afraid to ask for help.
- Be innovative—use your other interests (e.g. art) to advocate for the climate.
- Educate yourself and others—have conversations about climate change with friends, family, school staff, and other adults.
- Make noise and demand policy change—get involved with your local government and share your opinions.
- Take mental health breaks to avoid burnout. You can't do everything yourself!
- Contact your government representatives to push for change.

ADULT ALLIES

Adult allies can do a lot to assist youth in the fight against climate change, such as being positive role models for eco-friendliness, listening to young people's opinions and voting in line with climate action. Adult allies can also engage in individual acts to reduce their consumption and waste, and they can help put pressure on the government to take concrete climate action.

INDIVIDUAL ACTION

- Reduce your consumption and waste.
- Be prepared to reduce your carbon footprint so that you don't fall back on what's convenient—bring your own bag or cup, plan ahead to carpool.
- Stop treating the things you use like the things you use up—only buy what you need, donate or swap old products, upcycle products, use reusable products, and shop from thrift stores.
- Work/volunteer at or donate to environmental organizations.
- Suggest and implement actions to make your workplace more environmentally-friendly.

TAKE CLIMATE CHANGE SERIOUSLY

- Listen to youth opinions and ideas.
- Believe climate change and its impacts are real and listen to science.
- Vote with the climate in mind and encourage other parties to go green; the environment is a non-partisan issue.
- Educate others: have conversations about climate change with others.
- Educate yourself and others—have conversations about climate change with friends, family, school staff, and other adults.

PROVIDE SUPPORT

- Support youth with their efforts to fight climate change.
- Acknowledge eco-anxiety and ecological grief in youth.
- Be good role models for making eco-friendly decisions.

"I THINK ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE EVERY DAY. IT MAKES ME WORRY ABOUT MY FUTURE."

– U-Reporter, January 2020



DECISION-MAKERS

Decision-makers need to take young people seriously and take concrete actions against rising emissions and the increasing destruction of our planet. We need them to listen to science and Indigenous knowledge and increase climate education so that people and corporations can make better and more informed choices for the environment. Decision-makers must ban or reduce harmful materials and practices and take action to protect nature and wildlife. They need to do their job and protect our future by focusing on the well-being of people rather than profit.

LISTEN TO OTHERS

- Take youth opinions and ideas seriously.
- Listen to both science and Indigenous knowledge and ensure that decisions are grounded in it.
- Ensure that those on the frontlines of the climate crisis can advocate for themselves—communities disproportionately affected by the climate crisis were underrepresented and excluded at COP26.
- Prioritize Indigenous sovereignty and stewardship practices, and respect their right to their own land.
- Support and collaborate with environmental NGOs.
- Work with other political parties to address the climate crisis together.

INCREASE OPPORTUNITIES

- Increase climate and environmental education for everyone—people should know about the issues that affect them.
- Provide more green transportation options that are accessible to everyone.
- Help businesses to be more environmentally-friendly and provide them with support and subsidies.
- Provide grants for clean energy.

END HARMFUL PRACTICES AND LAWS

- Create strict consequences for climate inaction and actions that contribute to climate change.
- Stop making empty promises—go beyond talking about change and actively implement policies to protect the planet.
- Enforce laws that hold corporations accountable for reducing their emissions and mass production—we are currently producing a lot more clothing than we need.

81%

of respondents agree or strongly agree that all federal parties should work together to address the climate crisis.

(JANUARY 2020)

- Ban harmful actions such as fracking and oil dumping, and enact stricter consequences for oil spills.
- Ban materials that are harmful to the environment, such as single-use plastics, crude oil, coal and oil plants, and pipelines.
- Enact taxes or fines on businesses for throwing away products and food that are still good or usable.
- Ensure that green solutions are affordable.
- Invest in renewable energy, and work towards making it the standard energy source. Stop relying on coal and oil out of convenience.
- Take urgent action on climate change in the areas that are most affected, such as the Arctic.

ADOPT NATURE-BASED CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

- Conserve and restore ecologically important areas such as forests and wetlands, which store massive amounts of carbon.
- Create more Indigenous protected areas.
- Ensure that existing protected areas aren't being threatened.
- Protect the health of water and oceans—prevent water contamination and limit the effects of the shipping industry.

PROTECT PEOPLE

- Address climate change through an intersectional lens—take action on the social inequities caused or worsened by it, such as food insecurity.
- Shift the metric of success from profit to the well-being of people.
- Create a universal basic income or a living wage to help young adults afford basic needs.
- Support communities through the current effects of climate change they're facing, such as wildfire destruction.

DISABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY



What we know about Disability and Accessibility

According to the World Bank, 1 billion people or 15% of the world's population, experience some form of disability, with a higher prevalence in developing countries. During the pandemic, it is reported that, "With widespread school closures, children with disabilities are lacking access to basic services like meal programs; assistive technologies; access to resource personnel; recreation programs; extracurricular activities; and water, sanitation, and hygiene programs. COVID-19 has led to a sudden shift in the role of the parent/caregiver to act simultaneously as their teachers, in addition to exacerbating the digital divide between learners related to access to equipment, electricity, and the internet."

In Canada, disability prevalence is 13% (more than 540,000 people) for youth aged 15 to 24. The province that has the highest percentage of disabled residents is Nova Scotia.

Based on statistics compiled by the Government of Canada, "Nearly half of Canadians with disabilities, difficulties or long-term conditions experience technology-related barriers. The most common barrier reported was using in-person self-serve technology (27.2%), such as ATMs or self-checkouts in

retail environments. The second most commonly reported barrier was online access to federal government information, services or support (24.3%). This includes applying for employment insurance or disability benefits, completing a passport application, or filing tax forms.

About one in five Canadians with disabilities, difficulties or long-term conditions encountered barriers when watching TV shows, movies, or other content through traditional television platforms (22.0%), and when accessing websites of federally regulated businesses (19.1%). In addition, almost two-thirds of those with disabilities or long-term conditions report communication barriers. The proportion who experienced a communication barrier varied by the type of situation. About two in five Canadians with disabilities, difficulties or long-term conditions reported a barrier in communicating by phone (43.1%), in-person (40.5%), and in reading and understanding written materials (40.2%). About one-quarter reported communication barriers while using video conferencing (26.4%) or social media or online chat forums (23.5%).

How young people are experiencing Disability and Accessibility issues

Young people who have a disability/disabilities should not be infantilized, mocked and bullied because they require different accessibility needs to live their lives. In our session, youth expressed the barriers they face or difficulties their loved ones experience such as bullying, fears or stigmas surrounding disabilities, lack of engagement from peers/environment, and physical barriers (for example, inconvenient entrance locations with lack of ramps for wheelchairs).

Many youth also lamented how accessing support systems/needs can be time-consuming, complicated and sometimes expensive. Other accessibility issues that tremendously impacted young people's lives included delays and disorganization in medical diagnosis and resources (especially with virtual supports due to the pandemic), lack of comprehensive health insurance/benefits, lack of peer support and accessible programs and services.

While this was the reality that youth faced every day even before the pandemic, these issues are even more prominent now. Inaccessible virtual systems have been put in place such as virtual medical check-ups, medical records and so on. Many people with disabilities have also remarked how in-person services are increasingly harder to access (education, transportation considerations, etc.). For example, people with disabilities have found it more difficult to sign up for appointments online to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. The pandemic has truly affected everyone's mental health, and for those with disabilities and accessibility needs, their overall well-being is compromised. As one participant pointed out, "...My dad uses a wheelchair to get around, and not much has changed where he is in the last 10-20 years." This statement alone illustrates the importance of advancing disability and accessibility rights in Canada, particularly in light of the inaccessible systems exposed during this pandemic.

How can Canadians take action to improve this area of young people's lives?

YOUNG PEOPLE

There continues to be bullying, fear, and stigma around disability and accessibility. In 2021, no young person in Canada should be discriminated against and bullied by their peers. Schools, community gatherings, and public places should be safe and inclusive for all youth, regardless of their abilities.

- Stop bullying others and create inclusive spaces.
- Eliminate stigma and stereotypes around disabilities.
- Stop the fear around disabled youth and disabilities.
- Ask disabled youth and youth with disabilities their preferences on language.
- Support other youth and advocate for each other.

ADULT ALLIES

Youth have solutions, recommendations, and experiences to share. Adults must provide the space and time to listen to young people. Adults must also be uncomfortable and willing to learn from youth with disabilities. Adults have the responsibility to treat disabled youth with respect and create inclusive, safe spaces for them.

- Adults need to know that they cannot understand disabled children's experiences and needs. Children and youth with lived experiences know best.
- Do not be afraid of saying "disabled" or any related terms. Use appropriate language and do not use ableist words to make those with no disabilities feel better, such as "special needs."
- Treat disabled youth with respect. Youth are in the best positions to know what they need and how to reach them best.
- Adults need to educate themselves and those around them about disabilities, learning from people with disabilities.
- Be responsible for creating inclusive spaces and dialogues for disability and accessibility.

"TREAT DISABILITIES AS A COMMON PART OF THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE RATHER THAN A RARE EXCEPTION TO NORMALCY"

– U-Reporter, November 2021

DECISION-MAKERS

Decision-makers are best positioned to create political and systemic changes around disability and accessibility issues in Canada. In 2021, no young person with a disability should have to wait for social and health services. No young person should be discriminated against. Decision-makers must be held accountable and follow through on the needs of youth with disabilities.

- Create an inclusive educational setting: establish sign language as mandatory learning in provincial and territorial education curriculums and more accessible opportunities, including through virtual learning. Create more testing and diagnosis opportunities for youth in schools.
- Be accountable and responsible with current policies for inclusive built environments.
- Be proactive, instead of reactive, by making mandatory policies for all public and private places to be accessible.
- Understand that accommodations and supports benefit everyone. Hiring employers should not discriminate against people with disabilities who are highly qualified and need accommodations.
- Do not focus solely on numerical data to create policies. Listen to disabled youth, their allies, and everyone with lived experiences to make change. If even one young person is asking for help, provide the support they need.
- Establish a new federal Youth Disability Advocate to help ensure standardization and accountability, and to promote and protect the rights of young people with disabilities in a similar way to how the new Federal Housing Advocate supports the right to housing.

**“PLEASE JUST LISTEN TO US,
WE KNOW WHAT WE NEED.”**

– U-Reporter, November 2021



57%

of U-Reporters (57%) say they or someone they know has faced barriers to participation or inclusion because of a disability or lack of accessibility.

(NOVEMBER 2021)



MENTAL HEALTH



What we know about Mental Health

The majority of people in Canada, especially youth, cannot sufficiently access the mental health resources they need. According to the Mental Health Commission of Canada, 75% of children and youth do not have access to the services and support to help them address their mental health concerns, compared to 67% of adults. The Children's Mental Health Ontario reports that children and youth in urgent need of mental healthcare are waiting up to 1.5 years for treatment in some parts of Ontario.

Indigenous communities are facing the most dire outcomes of this public health crisis. Suicide rates among Inuit are shockingly high at 6 to 11 times the Canadian average. In Nunavut, 27% of all deaths since 1999 have been suicides. This is one of the highest suicide rates in the world, and it continues to rise, especially among youth. First Nations people experience major depression at twice the national average of Canada.

The pandemic has exacerbated the situation for young people. Even before COVID-19, youth aged 15-24 were the least likely to report excellent or very good mental health compared to every other age group. During the pandemic, they reported

the greatest decline of any age group: a 20% reduction of those who report excellent or very good mental health, a drop from 60% (pre-COVID) to only 40% (July 2020), according to Statistics Canada.

Despite this mental health crisis, only services offered by doctors (e.g. psychiatrists and family doctors) and mental health services provided in a hospital setting are publicly funded by Canada Health Act. Research points out that, in 2001, approximately 80% of consultations with psychologists in Canada took place within the privately funded system. Overall, 30% of spending on mental health is paid directly out of pocket. Vulnerable youth and their caregivers, therefore, face a significant financial barrier. In fact, youth of low socioeconomic status are 3 to 4 times more likely to report mental health problems, estimated by one study in 2015. Additionally, the ages of onset for major mental disorders tend to be in childhood and adolescence. Missed opportunities for early intervention will lead to poorer outcomes.

Mental Health challenges young people are facing today

This generation of young people might be the most isolated and anxious of all time. Compared to previous generations, we are growing up alongside the social media industry, entering the workforce later, and facing bigger financial obstacles. With increased mental health awareness, we are becoming more open to talking about depression, anxiety, eating disorders, ADHD and other mental illnesses. However, a clear diagnosis and consistent treatments still remain unattainable for many, plenty of dysfunctional conditions go unnoticed. Despite increased societal attention on mental health, there are still significant amounts of misinformation and a lack of practical knowledge and skills to handle it. The pandemic further exposed the shortage of mental health workers and resources. It's not uncommon to wait for many, many months for an urgent appointment with a psychiatrist.

In schools, the efforts for mental health education lean towards superficial treatment, and the availability of the school psychologist/ counsellor is often very scarce. Ignorance on the parents' side can impede the attempt to get help. Community resource distribution is also wildly uneven. A slip in mental health that occurs as youth enter university or college can keep on deteriorating in grad school with accumulated debt and pressure. Among them, minority groups (BIPOC, queer, immigrants and second-generation children) are more vulnerable than average. More accessible and urgent care for mental health for youth should be a priority for the Canadian government to allow all young people, especially those who reside in low-income households or identify as a minority group, to access the support they need.

For most youth, the COVID-19 pandemic and its lasting effects have impacted their lives significantly. Community engagement is crucial to maintaining good mental health. The rise of internet culture and virtual communities, accelerated by the pandemic, has altered social engagement for youth. Although this yields some beneficial aspects, the exposure to harmful content plus the extended use of social media has been linked to increased anxiety, depression and distorted body image. Less quality, in-person interactions with others leads to feeling isolated, which is a strong risk factor for various mental health conditions. Other contributing factors are less time outside and lack of exercise. Minority youth, such as Indigenous and immigrant youth, and youth who live in low-income families, are also struggling with isolation and the lack of resources. Limited access to the internet and cultural barriers can significantly hinder youth's ability to connect with others.



Almost two-thirds of U-Reporters (65%) say the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively or very negatively affected their mental health.

(SEPTEMBER 2021)

How can Canadians take action to improve this area of young people's lives?

YOUNG PEOPLE

These ideas mainly deal with the importance of physical health, social support and access to mental health resources. Physical health and social support are keystones to good mental health, though the former is often less discussed.

- Educate yourself on the roles of nutrition, exercise and sleep in mental health, and spread the knowledge to others. Mindfulness meditation is also an evidence-based self-care approach that's accessible to everyone.
- Take advantage of your meetings with family doctors/general physicians, as they can give basic therapy and refer you to psychologists and therapists.
- Take advantage of free therapies offered by schools or community organizations. Locate other resources such as mental health organizations for minorities, services with sliding scales, support groups and free crisis lines. Keep an updated list of resources at hand. Everyone can benefit from therapy.
- Be vigilant about the use of social media. Protect yourself from cyberbullying and discriminatory content. Practice social media retreat when needed.
- If you feel isolated, find or organize your own community proactively. Don't be afraid to reach out.

ADULT ALLIES

These ideas mainly address the distribution of mental health information, investing in mental health resources, and allowing youth to thrive and express concerns.

- For organizations: Find better ways to share mental health information, latest research and best practices. Make education more accessible. Equip different sectors and teams with the right mental health training and toolkits.
- For individuals: Educate yourself on bystander skills for youth experiencing challenges. Learn how to discern distress signals, actively listen, and direct them to resources while respecting boundaries.
- Support and promote non-profit youth mental health organizations and communities to help expand the scope of their services.
- Help ensure that youth grow up in a financially and relationally stable environment, with access to educational and medical resources, where they can feel safe expressing themselves.
- Amplify the voices of Indigenous communities and other minorities, help them express their distinct mental health needs and concerns.

DECISION-MAKERS

Our advice is about tackling the obstacles of accessing care and education, with the goal of allowing mental health to share equal status with physical health in healthcare systems. This can be accomplished through policy changes and funding.

EDUCATION AND EARLY INTERVENTION

- Implement specific school criteria for the quality of mental health education, early intervention, and suicide prevention. Encourage the improvement of mental health literacy for parents. Provide safe spaces, especially for minorities, to help alleviate the stigma.
- Implement mandatory basic mental health training including suicide prevention and addictions for professionals working with youth, such as educators.

PUBLIC HEALTHCARE SYSTEMS

- Expand the public healthcare system to incorporate more mental health treatment for youth of age 12 to 25. Fund evidence-based therapies like CBT and addiction counselling. Realize the promise of universal healthcare and change that Canada spends the least portion of funds on mental healthcare among all G7 countries.
- Fund community mental health services, where various cultural perspectives can be embedded in the treatments, to promote equitable access for minority groups.
- Hire and train more mental health professionals to serve in the public system. Encourage mental health literacy and training for general medical practitioners, such as family doctors and nurses. Invest more in mental health research.
- Provide financial assistance, if needed, for the primary caregivers of youth who suffer from mental health problems.

"GOOD MENTAL HEALTH MEANS FEELING AT COMFORT IN MY BRAIN AND BODY. IT MEANS BEING ABLE TO EXIST IN A NORMAL, DAY-TO-DAY LIFE WITHOUT MENTAL ILLNESS(ES) GETTING IN THE WAY OF MY NORMAL FUNCTIONING."

– U-Reporter, September 2020

RACIAL JUSTICE AND INDIGENOUS RIGHTS



What we know about Racial Justice and Indigenous Rights

In 2017, it was reported that 43% of hate crimes were related to race or ethnicity. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, these race-related hate crimes have drastically increased. Statistics Canada reports that the proportion of visible minorities who experienced an increase in harassment or attacks has tripled compared to the rest of the population. Major cities report 2020 rates that are six and seven hundred percent higher than the previous year, especially anti-Asian hate crimes.

COVID-19 has also disproportionately affected racialized communities in health and financial security. Data from Toronto and Ottawa indicates that COVID-19 cases are 1.5 to 5 times higher among racialized populations than non-racialized populations. The Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey showed that while there have been unprecedented increases in unemployment due to the COVID-19 economic shutdown, it has been exceptionally high among racialized communities. Meanwhile, employed BIPOC Canadians earn an average of 81 cents to the dollar compared to other Canadians.

When it comes to discrimination against Indigenous Peoples, as Bob Joseph says, "If there was a Stanley Cup for systemic racism, Canada's name would be all over the cup. We would be multiyear champions of the entire world. I believe that title is in large part due to an idea that almost no other country had or has, which is the Indian Act. It makes systemic racism, discrimination and mistreatment omnipresent."

The majority of the 94 Calls to Action from the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada have not yet been implemented.

According to the 2016 Canadian Census, 33.65% of those who identified as "Aboriginal" had no secondary school or equivalency certificate, compared to 18.3% of the rest of the Canadian population. Certain high schools, CEGEPs and post-secondary programs are only offered in urban areas, which are far from reserves. Leaving for school can be socially jarring for Indigenous youth, especially if separated from their family and community.

On reserves, there is inadequate infrastructure and services. 50% of communities in Ontario are on boil water advisories, despite the government pledging to end them all by 2021. Water systems for Indigenous communities are undrinkable and pose a risk to human health.

Indigenous women and girls are killed at a disproportionate rate, and their cases do not get as much justice or attention as non-Indigenous individuals. Indigenous and Black men are more likely to be racially profiled than other groups by the justice system. Racial profiling can lead to psychological distress, a diminished sense of community belonging, and a feeling of being isolated and unwelcomed.

How young people are experiencing Racial Justice and Indigenous Rights issues

Systemic racism continues to affect every aspect of the lives of racialized people. Inequities persist in health care, education, the justice system and the job market, among others. Moreover, COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted minority communities, exacerbating existing social issues like climate change, housing, poverty and food insecurity.

Young people of colour experience name-calling, bullying, and stereotyping, and other microaggressions every day.

"I can't pronounce your name, so I'm going to call you _____."

"You're so pretty for a brown person."

"I don't see colour."

We've heard it all.

We've experienced cultural appropriation, attempts to assimilate us to the dominant culture, tokenization, the burden of educating others, and the adultification of girls of colour. With limited access to mental health services to help young people, it becomes even more detrimental.

Young people also continue to notice a lack of racial representation in positions of power and influence that could help address racial injustice. Although it is improving, there is still tokenization of racialized characters in shows and movies. There is also a lack of representation in other decision-making positions in the education sector, health sector and in policy-making. This contributes to the racism young people experience at school, at work, in hospitals and in interactions with the justice system.

Meanwhile, there is an overrepresentation of racialized groups in the justice system. The ongoing dehumanization of BIPOC is leading to increased police brutality and incarceration. The lack of equity and anti-racism training among law enforcers is putting racialized lives and futures at risk.

Indigenous young people are also dealing with the intergenerational trauma of Canada's colonialism. The bodies found at the Kamloops Residential School are a horrific example of the devastation of residential "schools" and their ongoing legacy. Indigenous peoples still don't have some basic needs met, such as access to clean water, and medical care in remote communities and reserves. Indigenous children and youth are overrepresented in the justice system, and in the care system, and are more likely to experience homelessness. There is a lack of education available in Indigenous languages. People should have the right to learn in their own language. However, current laws and policies continue to discriminate against Indigenous peoples every day.



88%

of respondents said racism is a problem, with over half reporting they have experienced or witnessed it.

(SEPTEMBER 2020)



How can Canadians take action to improve this area of young people's lives?

YOUNG PEOPLE

EDUCATE YOURSELF

- Educate yourself, acknowledge biases and prejudices.
- Have conversations with others on how racism exists and is prevalent in Canada.
- Change doesn't have to start at the policy level. Education, training, etc. are beneficial for individuals.
- Indigenous rights matter all the time, and so they need to be addressed all the time. Research the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action and find one that seems long overdue and fight for it. Choose realistic goals as progress is progress, no matter how big or small.
- Read books and watch TV shows from BIPOC creators, i.e. *We Hunt the Flame* by Hafsah Faizal, Aru Shah book series by Roshani Chokshi. Listen to music from different cultures.

EMPOWER OTHERS

- Empower the voices of those with lived experience, and bring attention to these issues.
- Let racialized communities speak on their own behalf. Be an effective (not performative) ally.
- Everyone's experiences in life are different. Be open-minded to others' lived experiences and care about this issue even if you don't personally relate.

BE AN ACTIVE ADVOCATE

- Call out racist systems and behaviours in your communities.
- Speak up—it is important for young people to stand up for themselves and others when they are witnessing racial injustice. Microaggressions are common and make up a large part of society's norms which need to be addressed as much as possible.
- Join/Volunteer with racial justice groups and organizations or create one.
- Recognize impact over intent—apologize when your actions cause harm to racialized communities.
- Celebrate diversity—learn Indigenous/foreign languages, learn about different cultures, etc.

ADULT ALLIES

INDIVIDUAL ACTION

- Promote BIPOC creators that put out new books, movies, or TV shows.
- Ensure people can tell their own stories - get more books written by racialized authors.
- Vote wisely, vote for more representation of BIPOC in the government.
- Amplify the voices of those with professional and lived experiences who are a part of the community affected by the issues highlighted.
- Support businesses owned by BIPOC.

EDUCATE YOURSELF AND OTHERS

- Educate yourself and take anti-racism training.
- Teachers are critical influencers for lots of kids. Educating on racial justice from a young age is important.
- Discuss these issues at home and remind children about topics surrounding racial injustice.
- Encourage conversations around decolonizing our history and education system.
- Provide resources specialized in leadership and decision-making skills from a young age.

HELP AMPLIFY YOUTH VOICES

- Make sure that youth organizations and services are inclusive and accessible.
- Allow youth to have more of a voice in their communities, like through youth community councils.
- Encourage peer-to-peer connections with marginalized groups.
- Work on making youth programs/organizations more diverse and inclusive.
- Create safe spaces for youth to talk about experiences with racism and discrimination.
- Reduce barriers that prevent youth from having influence in their communities.
- Invest in youth entrepreneurship by giving them the tools and support needed to lead projects in their communities.
- Include youth voices at the table.

DECISION-MAKERS

INCREASE REPRESENTATION

- Champion more media representation for BIPOC folks.
- Consult Indigenous groups in decision-making that affects them.

DIVERSE AND BETTER EDUCATION

- Include modules on systemic racism in school curricula.
- Move away from a white supremacist curriculum to teaching the history and culture of racialized groups.
- Integrate the concept of racism into the educational system starting in elementary school. Teach how to spot it and stop it. Microaggressions begin from childhood, so early prevention is key.
- Implement workshops and programs to track progress on fighting racism.
- Enforce policies that allow Indigenous communities the right to education in their own language.
- Subsidize higher education for racialized youth with limited access. Systemic factors have increased barriers for people from racialized backgrounds, preventing them from accessing education.

IMPROVE PROFESSIONS

- Change policies in teaching and authority jobs (like policing) to be more aware of racial injustice and how it needs to be addressed.
- Ensure diversity in careers such as teaching, healthcare etc., to address inequities in those fields.
- Challenge leaders to have ambition with action, as the Prime Minister of Barbados Mia Mottley highlighted at COP26.

ENFORCE EQUITABLE POLICY

- Prioritize BIPOC communities' access to vaccines in Canada.
- Provide more funding to Indigenous services.
- Address poverty and food insecurity in racialized communities.
- Highlight individuals making a difference in Canada and around the world, such as Webster, aka Aly Ndiaye, who sheds light on topics that history books ignore.
- Revise laws consistently, so there is no disadvantage for certain races.
- Enact all of the TRC's Calls to Action. The current rate of implementation is much too slow.
- Properly implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples.
- Ensure that Indigenous peoples have ownership over their lands, more Indigenous protected areas.
- Ensure that basic needs for racialized and Indigenous groups are met, such as access to clean drinking water.



62%

of U-Reporters feel that federal, provincial, and municipal governments have not responded well to the Black Lives Matter movement.

(SEPTEMBER 2020)

"ADDRESS GAPS IN EMPLOYMENT, UNDEREMPLOYMENT, PRECARIOUS WORK, LIVING WAGES, SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS, EDUCATION, HEALTH, ACCESS TO RESOURCES (I.E. CLEAN WATER), HOUSING FOR FOLKS IN BIPOC COMMUNITIES."

– U-Reporter, August 2020

A MESSAGE FROM THE PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

When our organizations first came together to host the first-ever Youth Activism Summit on National Child Day in 2019, the event felt timely. All around the world, youth were taking to the streets in #FridaysForFuture protests. Here in Canada, young people were mobilizing themselves around everything from sexual education curriculum to racial justice. The work felt urgent but optimistic. Never could we have imagined what the next two years would bring and how it would impact young people in particular.

Now, we're committed to turning what we've learned from young people before and during the pandemic from a "moment" to a "movement." The young leaders at this year's summit have spent over eight months together in UNICEF Canada's Youth Advocacy Program, gaining and teaching the skills and knowledge to speak up on the issues they care about, now and in the future. They know their work is just beginning. If you missed their message on page 5, please make sure you take the time to read it. If you did catch it, please go back and read it again.

We'd be foolish to think we could put it any better ourselves. For now, suffice to say that we're incredibly proud to be associated with this work, and committed to their vision of the future--and all the work it will take us to get there. Some will choose the world we know over a world we cannot imagine or believe. These young people are helping us see and believe.

Sincerely,



David Morley
President and CEO
UNICEF Canada



Odette McCarthy
Executive Director
Equitas Center for
International Human
Rights Education



Owen Charters
President and CEO
Boys and Girls Clubs
of Canada



Peter Dinsdale
President and CEO
YMCA Canada



Sharif Mahdy
Executive Director
The Students Commission
of Canada, Centre of
Excellence for Youth
Engagement



Vanessa Currie
Executive Director
International Institute
for Child Rights and
Development

About UNICEF Canada's One Youth

UNICEF Canada's OneYouth is working to make Canada the best place in the world to grow up. 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 OneYouth brings that work to Canada by building the new gold standard for measuring child well-being, and working with young people to develop innovative solutions to the challenges they face. We are calling on Canadians to take action and do better for children and youth.



UNICEF is supported entirely by voluntary donations.

For more information about UNICEF Canada's OneYouth, please visit www.oneyouthcanada.ca

For updates, follow us on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.



