

EMBARGOED UNTIL APRIL 14, 2016

New UNICEF report: Canadian children at back of the pack among rich nations

Well-being of most vulnerable children at risk if widening gaps are not addressed

TORONTO, April 14, 2016 – A new report released today by UNICEF highlights the inequalities in child well-being in the world's most affluent nations, including Canada. While progress in reducing child well-being gaps has been modest overall, Canada's children are at the back of the pack, ranking in the bottom third when measured against other rich nations.

[*Report Card 13: Fairness for Children*](#) reveals that Canada ranks 26th of 35 nations when compared across four key domains of child well-being: income, education, health and life satisfaction. The report measures bottom-end inequality of children compared to their peers in the middle. When inequality gaps between children in the middle and those at the bottom are closed, overall child well-being should improve for all of Canada's children. Despite Canada's relative economic strength, the dividends have not been spread equitably to children, with little progress to close disparities in their well-being over the past decade.

"The true measure of a nation is how well it attends to the needs of its children. Are our children healthy? Are they happy? Are they safe? Are they learning what they need to succeed?" said David Morley, UNICEF Canada President and CEO. "As Canadians, we are privileged to live in a wealthy nation. We have no excuse for the inequalities that continue to exist among our children. This report provides insight into how we can close those gaps and improve child well-being for all of Canada's kids."

Recent government commitments are great start to closing gaps

"We're pleased to see recent commitments by Canada that are strong steps to addressing these inequalities and the timing couldn't be more critical," said Morley. "In particular, the recently proposed Canada Child Benefit, a commitment to curbing the marketing of unhealthy food and drinks to children, the development of a national early years' strategy to support child care and learning and a commitment to greater flexibility for parental leave will all help in moving Canada's kids to the front of the pack."

Top concerns for Canada's children

Canada has one of the highest proportions of children reporting very low life satisfaction, which is associated with poor mental health and more risky behaviours. A full quarter of Canadian children report daily symptoms of poor health, which has obvious and significant long-term impacts. Today's *Report Card* also revealed many aspects of child well-being that are not only unequal, but have remained the same over time, with little to no progress being made in the last decade. Yet Canada's education system manages to reduce gaps among children, and in some aspects of child health such as physical activity Canada's gaps are smaller than in peer nations – but still very wide.

"What we can see from this report is that growing the economy is not enough to improve child well-being. What we can learn from the top performing countries and areas of child well-being in Canada where we are having success is that large gaps are not inevitable. There are deliberate steps we can take to close the inequality gaps," says Morley. "Canada's governments at all levels have been champions for children on many fronts, but we need to take more determined action to limit how far some children fall behind. Our youngest are looking to us for help – and for hope. Let's not disappoint them."

UNICEF Canada is calling on all levels of government to:

1. **Invest more and earlier in children.** Inequalities in child well-being show up in the first few years of life. More spending on the early years will ensure children get a good start in life and reduce costs later.
2. **Better understand child well-being through better monitoring and better data.** Improved monitoring and measurement of child well-being will ensure investments are made wisely and with greater positive impact.
3. **Put policies in place that support equitable services and outcomes for all children.** Child Impact Assessments can help ensure child well-being and equality is at the forefront of the public planning processes.

Fairness for Children Key Findings:

- Overall, Canada ranks 26th out of 35 rich nations, putting it at the back of the pack.
- Most areas of child well-being showed no improvement in Canada over the last decade.
- The widest gaps between those at the middle and those at the bottom were in the levels of income inequality and unhealthy eating.
- Of the 41 most affluent countries, Canada ranks 24th in the level of income inequality. The poorest children in Canada have family incomes 53 per cent lower than the average child.
- Inequality in health symptoms increased for Canada's children and in most rich countries. Canada ranks 24 of 35 countries for health inequality. However, inequality in physical activity and in healthy eating of fruits and vegetables in Canada remained stable and the gaps are smaller than in many countries.
- In Canada, nine per cent of children reported very low life satisfaction, more than the average among rich countries.
- One quarter of Canada's kids report daily symptoms of poor health – can't sleep, feeling sick or anxious. This is usually linked to difficulties with peers, at school or at home. Feeling that way on a daily basis interferes with learning, with relationships, with long-term health and risk behaviours like bullying and drug use.
- Canada ranks 14th out of 37 countries in the level of education inequality.
- Canada ranks 25th out of 35 countries in the level of life satisfaction inequality.

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UNICEF's Report Card Series

As the world's knowledge leader for children, UNICEF is committed to collecting and sharing critical information on the situation of children around the world. For the past 16 years, UNICEF has published a Report Card series on the well-being of children in industrialized countries. By making this data and analysis publicly available, parliamentarians and policy makers will have the information they need to make decisions in the best interest of every child. For more information, visit www.unicef.ca/irc13 and join the online conversation with the hashtag #FairnessforChildren.

About UNICEF

UNICEF has saved more children's lives than any other humanitarian organization. We work tirelessly to help children and their families, doing whatever it takes to ensure children survive. We provide children with healthcare and immunization, clean water, nutrition and food security, education, emergency relief and more in developing countries.

UNICEF is supported entirely by voluntary donations and helps children regardless of race, religion or politics. As part of the UN, we are active in over 190 countries - more than any other organization. Our determination and our reach are unparalleled. Because nowhere is too far to go to help a child survive. For more information about UNICEF, please visit www.unicef.ca.

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