

Children's
Healthcare
Canada

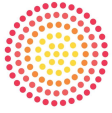
Santé
des enfants
Canada



Pediatric Chairs of Canada
Directeurs de pédiatrie du Canada

**Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations In Advance of the Upcoming
Federal Budget**

By: Children's Healthcare Canada



Children's
Healthcare
Canada

Santé
des enfants
Canada



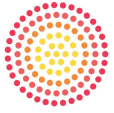
Pediatric Chairs of Canada
Directeurs de pédiatrie du Canada

Recommendation 1: Invest \$2 million to immediately develop a strategy (including timelines and targets) to right-size children's health systems in Canada.

Recommendation 2: Invest \$8 million annually to establish an office for a Chief Children's Health Officer.

Recommendation 3: Commit \$10 billion over ten years to support provinces and territories in increasing access to children's health services across the continuum of care, and to address lengthy backlogs for essential services (surgical, diagnostic, mental health, and children's rehabilitation).

Recommendation 4: Invest \$24 million to advance a robust maternal, child, and youth health research agenda.



Children's
Healthcare
Canada

Santé
des enfants
Canada



Pediatric Chairs of Canada
Directeurs de pédiatrie du Canada

The Time Is Now: Prioritizing Children Under the New Canada Health Transfer

Children's healthcare systems have been underfunded, under-resourced, and under-prioritized for decades. As a result, children now wait longer than adults for many essential and time-sensitive healthcare interventions. The recently renegotiated Canada Health Transfer, which included an immediate \$2-billion top-up to Canada Health Transfer payments for fiscal year 2022-23, provided a good first step toward right-sizing children's health and creating much-needed systems capacity. But more is urgently needed.

Children's Healthcare Canada, the Pediatric Chairs of Canada, and the members we represent (healthcare delivery organizations serving children and youth across the continuum of care, and academic physician leaders) believe the federal government has a leadership role to play in measurably improving children's health and well-being in Canada.

Improving health outcomes of Canada's eight million children and youth is a matter of political will. The children's health community (national organizations, physician leaders, executive leaders, and family partners) is well aligned. We have clearly defined the challenges our health systems face delivering care to a growing and increasingly complex population of kids, but we are also aligned regarding the systems-oriented solutions to improve access, address workforce shortages, and ultimately improve health outcomes.

Children's Healthcare Canada and the Pediatric Chairs of Canada call on the federal government to take immediate action to make children's health a priority. If we improve the health of children, we improve the health of Canada.

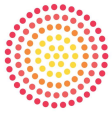
Recommendations:

1. Invest \$2 million to immediately develop a strategy (including timelines and targets) to right-size children's health systems in Canada.
2. Invest \$8 million annually to establish an office for a Chief Children's Health Officer.
3. Commit \$10 billion over ten years to support provinces and territories in increasing access to children's health services across the continuum of care, and to address lengthy backlogs for essential services (surgical, diagnostic, mental health, and children's rehabilitation).
4. Invest \$24 million to advance a robust maternal, child, and youth health research agenda.

Recommendation 1: Invest \$2 million to immediately develop a strategy (including timelines and targets) to right-size children's health systems in Canada.

Canada is experiencing a crisis in child and youth health and healthcare. Health systems serving children and youth are facing unprecedented demands and delays for services. Across the country, too many do not have access to primary care. Many wait months if not years for mental health services, and over 50 per cent of children now wait longer than medically recommended for essential surgical interventions, potentially compromising their health outcomes. Most children's hospitals are now consistently operating at or above 100 per cent capacity, while pediatric programs in community hospitals and pediatricians in office-based practices are facing reduced capacity and resources to meet the growing demands.

The current crisis in children's healthcare has been decades in the making. Amongst many competing concerns within our health systems, children and youth have never been made a genuine policy or investment priority. As a result, children's healthcare systems are undersized and under-resourced.



Children's
Healthcare
Canada

Santé
des enfants
Canada



Pediatric Chairs of Canada
Directeurs de pédiatrie du Canada

Canadians imagine a healthier future for their children. Children's Healthcare Canada and the Pediatric Chairs of Canada, together with the Canadian Paediatric Society (CPS) and the Canadian Association of Paediatric Nurses (CAPN), have developed a framework to guide the development of a national child and youth health strategy that includes national standards, is rooted in principles of health equity, and reflects the foundational importance of timely access to quality healthcare for all children and youth across the full continuum of care. This strategy must meet the challenges of today, but also anticipate and be responsive to the needs of tomorrow.

We urge the federal government to leverage this existing work and invest \$2 million to formalize a national child health strategy that can guide collective efforts across jurisdictions, across sectors, and across the continuum of care. This strategy would serve as the roadmap for federal and provincial investments to realize improved health outcomes for children, youth, and their families.

Recommendation 2: Invest \$8 million annually to establish an office for a Chief Children's Health Officer.

Children's health and well-being has been declining in Canada for many years. Where Canada was once a top-ten performer within UNICEF's international rankings, we have now fallen to 30th out of 38 OECD countries with respect to children's physical health, and, worse, 31st of 38 countries with respect to their mental health outcomes.

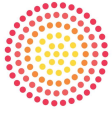
Jurisdictions that routinely rank highly have three things in common: they have declared children's health a national priority, they have made deliberate and sustained investments in children's health and well-being, and they have identified a leader accountable for measurably improving health outcomes.

Canada lacks a robust governance structure specifically designed to prioritize children's health and well-being compared to social democracies in Europe that consistently achieve better child health outcomes. Canada has identified a Chief Dental Officer, Chief Public Health Officer, and Chief Nursing Officer but no office with a mandate and accountabilities to improve the health of children, youth, and their families. With pediatric health systems in crisis, now is the time to invest in actionable, systems-oriented solutions that advance access to care for all children and youth in Canada.

In addition to a national child health strategy, Children's Healthcare Canada, the Pediatric Chairs of Canada, and seventeen collaborating national healthcare organizations believe it is necessary to establish an office dedicated to children and children's health to enable a brighter and healthier future for kids, and for Canada. We propose an office for a Chief Children's Health Officer (CCHO), funded in the amount of \$8 million annually. The CCHO would be responsible for implementing the national strategy, enabling a cross-departmental approach to child health and wellness, and facilitating necessary collaboration on shared priorities with provincial, territorial, and Indigenous governments. The CCHO would collaborate with civil society organizations and healthcare professionals across the continuum of care. The office would also be instrumental in highlighting and advancing pan-Canadian solutions that address systemic challenges.

The proposed budget of \$8 million for the office of the CCHO is comparable to the annual budget of other Offices of Parliament and amounts to only \$1 per Canadian child or youth per year.

Recommendation 3: Establish a fund of \$10 billion over ten years to immediately begin right-sizing children's health.



Children's
Healthcare
Canada

Santé
des enfants
Canada



Pediatric Chairs of Canada
Directeurs de pédiatrie du Canada

The development of a national child health strategy and the establishment of an office for a Chief Children's Health Officer are critical first steps on the journey to right-size children's health systems. Equally significant will be historic and sustained investments earmarked for children's health systems. Canada historically underinvests in children's health compared to peer nations, spending only 1.68 per cent of GDP versus other countries that spend up to 3.68 per cent of GDP on policies and infrastructure in support of kids (UNICEF 2020).

The federal investment of \$2 billion to immediately top-up the 2022-23 Canada Health Transfer payments with the intent of addressing pediatric backlogs was a well-intended gesture, but to date only two jurisdictions (Ontario and Nova Scotia) have committed these funds for the purpose of improving access to children's health services. Even with this injection of desperately needed resources, child health leaders from across the country agree that more is needed. Long-term (sustainable and predictable) funding allows health systems to implement new models of care, address lengthy backlogs, recruit and retain highly specialized healthcare workers, and build interoperable data platforms to improve access to healthcare information.

Children's Healthcare Canada and the Pediatric Chairs of Canada recommend that the federal government declare children's health a national priority and establish a dedicated fund of \$10 billion, to be administered over ten years (\$1 billion annually), to improve access to pediatric care, reduce backlogs, increase access to mental health supports, augment system capacity, and deliver timely access to services in the community.

We further recommend that such a fund be modelled upon the recently renegotiated Canada Health Transfer, where funding disbursement to the provinces and territories would be balanced on a per-capita and needs basis and would be contingent on provincial and territorial governments tabling action plans for how they intend to improve access to care and health outcomes for children. Accountability measures are critical to our collective success, meaningfully improving health outcomes and quality of life for kids.

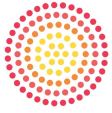
Recommendation 4: Invest \$24 million to advance a robust maternal, child, and youth health research agenda.

The link between a nation's economic health and the health of its citizens is well established. Health research plays an important role in our collective ability to attain good health but also minimize the impact or burden of disease, including public health threats such as COVID-19.

While investments in children's healthcare and health systems are certainly welcome and needed, we know that doing so without a corresponding investment in health research will ultimately fail to achieve sustained improvements to health. In short, health research must be part of the solution.

Canada has historically played a leadership role internationally, contributing world-class research to better understand determinants of good health, as well as a myriad of health conditions, including children's health and disease outcomes. We are fortunate to have world-leading talent and great potential in research and development, but we run the risk of squandering this excellence without further investment in health research.

The CIHR Institute of Human Development, Child and Youth Health (IHDCYH) is dedicated to developmental, physical, and mental well-being throughout the life cycle from a population perspective. The IHDCYH research community enquires into all the needs of children and families rather than being bound to one disease, or one organ. By facilitating partnerships and working to



Children's
Healthcare
Canada

Santé
des enfants
Canada



Pediatric Chairs of Canada
Directeurs de pédiatrie du Canada

accelerate the translation of new knowledge, IHDCYH funds and promotes research that addresses illness and promotes the well-being of Canadian children, youth, and families.

The IHDCYH budget has not increased in twenty-three years, despite serving a growing and increasingly complex population of children and youth living in Canada.

In Budget 2024, Children's Healthcare Canada and the Pediatric Chairs of Canada recommend a tripling of the base budget for the IHDCYH (an additional investment of \$16 million per year), to advance research dedicated to children, youth, and their families with focus on better beginnings, vibrant childhoods, and empowered youth. This funding will enable key priority areas:

- Facilitate interdisciplinary collaborations and enable purposeful partnerships to strengthen high-quality research, mobilize knowledge, and shape policy that enables children, youth, and families to experience the best possible health and well-being, and integrates their needs and voices.
- Fuel existing strengths, catalyze emerging areas, and embrace a life-cycle approach to advance knowledge and care, address reconciliation and health inequities, and inspire support for science to ensure that children, youth, and families see, feel, and champion the value of science and research.
- Support diverse career pathways and strengthen key infrastructure to improve efficiency, amplify impact, and nurture a thriving health research environment for children, youth, and families who will benefit from equitable access to evidence and knowledge, innovative therapies and treatments, and networks of care and support.

We further recommend a commitment of \$8 million to fund the Canadian Health Survey on Children and Youth (CHSCY), conducted by Statistics Canada. Conducting a minimum of two longitudinal follow-up rounds of collection (2025 and 2027) will provide urgently needed high-quality data to inform policy responses and resource allocations — and to determine overall changes in children's health and well-being, relative to pre-pandemic baseline levels established by the 2019 CHSCY.

About Us: Children's Healthcare Canada is a national association serving healthcare delivery organizations that care for children and youth. Membership includes all 16 children's hospitals in Canada, community hospitals, children's treatment centres, regional health authorities, palliative care, respite, and home-care agencies.

The Pediatric Chairs of Canada represents the Department Heads of Pediatrics within Canada's 17 medical schools.