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Ottawa, ON-

Budget 2023: No sense of urgency for Canada's kids

Today, the federal government unveiled Budget 2023, outlining their spending priorities for the year. The budget included a much-needed injection in health care funding, including a focus on expanding access to dental care for uninsured Canadians, and improved affordability mechanisms to support Canadian families. Yet, greater prioritization of children and youth is urgently needed to ensure that promised funding meaningfully improves the physical and mental health and well-being of young people in Canada.

Children's healthcare systems across Canada have faced increasing pressures recently due to healthcare workforce shortages, medication supply challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic, increased mental health admissions, and extremely long waitlists and backlogs for surgical, child development and diagnostic interventions. Despite being a wealthy country that prides itself on its universal health system, we have disproportionately and systemically underinvested in child and youth health and well-being for far too long. The fall viral crisis reinforced the need to immediately "right-size" children's healthcare to support a growing population of kids with increasingly complex needs.

We are pleased to see Budget 2023 reaffirm the government's commitment of \$2 billion in immediate funds through the Canada Health Transfer to address backlogs in pediatric emergency and surgical care. But these funds have yet to be realized locally within children's healthcare systems, jeopardizing the ability of children's healthcare providers to address critical backlogs and waitlists for care. We note that Budget 2023 fails to prioritize dedicated funding for child and youth mental health through the promised Canada Mental Health Transfer.

Canada needs a plan for children and youth health. Today, Children's Healthcare Canada, the Pediatric Chairs of Canada, the Canadian Paediatric Society and the Canadian Association of Paediatric Nurses are calling for sustained annual investments to support a national child health strategy to "right-size" children's healthcare in Canada.

By investing in a national child and youth health strategy today, we can positively impact health outcomes, decrease the burden on the healthcare system in the future, and promote economic growth. It is imperative that government leaders appropriately allocate resources to prioritize the health and well-being of Canada's children and youth and collaborate with the paediatric healthcare community to help create a future where children and youth in Canada truly have access to the health care they need, where and when they need it.

Quotes:

"Budget 2023 acknowledges many of the challenges children and youth face accessing essential healthcare services in Canada. Unfortunately, the budget falls short without a commitment to develop a plan and deliver resources to measurably improve children's health outcomes." **Emily Gruenwoldt, President and CEO, Children's Healthcare Canada and the Pediatric Chairs of Canada.**

“Paediatric nurses care for children across the continuum of care in our country. Ongoing nursing recruitment and retention issues, along with the budget oversight of the importance of a strategy to address the full breadth of the child health crisis, puts our system at an even greater risk for collapse. We need to think ahead. Collectively we have the specialized knowledge, skills and passion to restore our global standing on children’s health. Canada’s kids are counting on us”. **Rebecca Earle, RN; President of the Canadian Association of Paediatric Nurses.**

“Without targeted and reliable funding for mental health, we are at risk of continuing to overlook and underfund Canada’s mental healthcare system and push us further away from the goal of mental health parity. “ **Marie Adèle Davis, Executive Director, Canadian Paediatric Society**

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