



Executive Summary

● **BEYOND BANDAIDS:**
● Delivering Healthcare
● Fit for Kids

May 2024



Children's
Healthcare
Canada

THE PROBLEM: Canada is Experiencing a Crisis in Child and Youth Health



Canada is experiencing a crisis in child and youth health. Measurable decline in the health and wellbeing of this country's children has implications at the individual, family, society, and systems levels.

Healthcare delivery organizations serving children and youth are experiencing unprecedented demands for their services. The shortage of primary care providers in office-based practices means reduced capacity and resources to meet the demands of a growing population of medically complex children and youth. From coast to coast to coast, children are languishing on wait lists for essential and time-sensitive healthcare interventions, from child development assessments to community-based mental health services and acute surgical interventions. Many children's hospitals across the country are now routinely operating at or above one hundred percent capacity, while pediatric programs in community hospitals are being squeezed to meet the demands of adult (increasingly, elderly) populations.

Children in Canada do not have access to fully integrated health systems. Instead, we have a collection of healthcare delivery organizations that have grown organically to meet

their evolving needs. This means that children do not benefit from integrated physical and mental healthcare, leaving already-stressed parents to navigate a disjointed system on their own.

Mounting public evidence shows that children now wait longer for essential healthcare services than many adults. Waiting for care comes at a measurable cost. A 2023 research series commissioned by Children's Healthcare Canada reveals significant financial and human costs linked to delays in children's health services (CBoC, 2023). Whether it is the yearly \$4-billion expenditure to provide care to children and adolescents with anxiety and depression, the projected trillion-dollar expense over a lifetime for neglecting early indications of mental health issues, or the substantial lifetime costs of failing to provide timely services and support for children with autism, currently estimated at \$8.2 to \$11.1 billion, the economic impact is profound.

There is no simple solution to tackle the long healthcare delays children, youth, and families are facing. The current reality has been decades in the making and can be attributed to several complex factors. Health systems serving children and youth need more than bandaid solutions.



• **THE SOLUTION:**
• **Building Right-Sized**
• **Healthcare Systems for**
• **Children and Youth**

Children are not small adults. They require tailored physical and mental healthcare services across the continuum of primary care, community settings, acute care, and rehabilitation. Without access to highly specialized care and tools in interconnected, well-resourced, and sustainable systems, children in Canada will struggle to achieve their full potential.

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Children’s Healthcare Canada envisions a future where right-sized children’s healthcare systems are accessible, equitable, connected, and purpose-built to meet the needs of children, youth, and their families – and the highly specialized workforce that serves them.
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This desired future would include:

- A safe, inclusive, and healthy environment with stable housing, food security, education, friendship, inclusion, belonging, and a family that is equipped and supported to create physically and emotionally resilient environments,

and where leaders are acting to address climate change.

- Universal health promotion, prevention, and screening in schools and community settings that foster healthy practices and belonging for parents and kids and enable early intervention for physical and mental health needs.
- Team-based primary care close to home and fully integrated with specialized health, community, and social services.
- Rapid access to child-friendly healthcare in every setting, including community hospitals and, when needed, to sub-specialized pediatric care without delays.
- Family and care provider partnerships that enable access to knowledge to enable informed decision-making about options and care pathways.
- Seamless care and services across the lifespan, with supported transitions into adulthood.



The Origin of Our Recommendations: Through seven virtual roundtables, the Inspiring Healthy Futures Summit, and engagement of delegates attending the Children's Healthcare Canada conference, more than 600 voices contributed to develop recommendations for improved, integrated healthcare systems for children and youth across Canada. A shared vision of high-functioning children's healthcare systems was developed.

Building right-sized children's healthcare systems will require committed planning, funding, and resources designed around

children's specialized healthcare needs. There are three building blocks for health system transformation:



Dedicated and protected funding envelopes for children's health systems across the continuum of care, including child health research.



Publicly accessible child health data, captured under national health data strategies.



The highly specialized health workforce that cares for children and youth must be an intentional focus of national health workforce planning initiatives.

• **ACHIEVING OUR VISION:**
• **Coordinated Efforts to**
• **Maximize Results**



In addition to the three building blocks identified above, and to create healthcare systems fit for kids, the federal government, provincial and territorial governments, child health advocates, and children's healthcare delivery organizations must be meaningfully engaged, with interdependent roles and responsibilities.

Federal government: The federal government has an important leadership role to play in catalyzing and supporting children's health systems transformation.

Together we can:

1. Create and implement a National Children's Strategy that includes targets and timelines to improve children's health outcomes.
2. Establish a Chief Children's Health Officer.
3. Create a dedicated and earmarked funding envelope to ensure a robust maternal, child, and youth health research agenda.

Provincial and territorial

governments: Provincial and territorial governments play an important role as administrators and payors of healthcare service delivery, in accordance with principles defined in the Canada Health Act.

Together we can:

1. Leverage Canada Health Transfer funding to address the ongoing crisis and build capacity in systems across the continuum of care.
2. Collaborate with the federal government to support the development and implementation of a National Children's Strategy.
3. Establish virtual care guidelines, practices, and compensation standards for faster access to specialized care.
4. Facilitate timely access to universal screening, early identification, and intervention without delay to address children's healthcare needs, particularly for mental health and developmental needs.
5. Identify a designated primary care provider for every child before birth.

6. Create cross-ministerial commitments to recognize families as an essential part of the children’s healthcare workforce, supported by flexible financial resources and practical support.

Children’s healthcare delivery organizations: Collaborate meaningfully to create systems of care that share resources, centralize knowledge to apply research findings to evidence-based care, simplify system navigation, and enhance local capacity to better respond to surges.

Together we can:

1. Design healthcare systems holistically, spanning physical, social, and mental health needs.
2. Build purposeful partnerships that enable integrated care pathways for kids and families with medical complexity, disability, chronic conditions, or neurodiversity.
3. Expand localized capacity and innovative models for children’s healthcare in rural, remote, and Northern communities.
4. Work toward an “ecosystem of care” for shared resources, centralized referrals, child health research, knowledge mobilization, and implementation for timely access to quality healthcare.
5. Expand guidelines and education that drive child-centred, culturally

inclusive healthcare practices, across the continuum of care, in all healthcare settings.

6. Integrate electronic medical records and/or health information systems around the specific needs of the children’s health workforce, which includes parents and caregivers.
7. Develop technology-enabled navigation for more timely, integrated access to children’s healthcare and social services.
8. Design transitions to adult care that match the needs and capacity of each child and youth.

Child health advocates: Child health advocates play an important role serving as subject matter experts and as convenors of those with shared priorities with the means to influence change.

Together we can:

1. Elevate child health and healthcare priorities to ensure that the Canadian public, media partners, policymakers, and others understand the critical challenges facing children, youth, and their families in Canada and the tangible solutions available to improve outcomes.
2. Engage the philanthropic community to improve children’s healthcare services across the continuum of care.

CONCLUSION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Conclusion

Every day matters in the life of a child. Measurably improving the health and wellbeing of children, youth, and their families will require fresh thinking, brave ideas, and bold new collaborations.

Without interconnected, well-resourced, sustainable systems to provide physical and mental healthcare services across the continuum of primary care, community settings, acute care and rehabilitation, children and youth – and their families and healthcare providers – will not flourish.

Better is possible. Canada is a wealthy country with all the resources necessary to improve children's health outcomes. By mobilizing strategic partnerships from all levels of government, advocacy, and the health sector, coordinating the deployment of new resources with a focus on children's health, and creating leadership for change, we can move beyond bandaid solutions to create healthcare systems fit for kids.

Acknowledgements

The recommendations in this report were developed through an extensive consultation process spanning seven expert roundtables, the Inspiring Healthy Futures Summit (2023), and the Children's Healthcare Canada Conference (2023). Through that process, we engaged families, youth, caregivers, advocates, clinicians, researchers, data leaders, educators, policymakers, system leaders, administrators, and social service providers.

We would like to acknowledge the following partners whose contributions made this work possible:

- Alberta Children's Hospital Foundation
- BC Children's Hospital Foundation
- Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO)
- McMaster Children's Hospital Foundation
- The Canadian Association of Paediatric Nurses
- The Canadian Paediatric Society
- The Conference Board of Canada
- The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids)
- The Pediatric Chairs of Canada
- The Potential Group
- University of Calgary/One Child Every Child