

Canadians Agree: It's Time for All Levels of Government to Prioritize Children's Health

Nearly all Canadians agree that it is time for decision-makers to put children first in health care planning and spending. New public opinion research, released Feb. 6 by Abacus Data in partnership with Children's Healthcare Canada and the Pediatric Chairs of Canada, found that 92 per cent of Canadians (and 95 per cent of parents) agree health care services must urgently be bolstered to better meet the needs of children and youth.

For years, Canada has systemically underinvested in child and youth health and well-being compared to peer nations. In fact, Canada invests only 1.68 per cent of its GDP in policies and investments directed to children and youth.¹ This pales in comparison to countries like France, the United Kingdom and Sweden which invest up to 3.68 per cent and whose children and youth are thriving.

The impacts of chronic underinvesting are reflected in the health outcomes of Canadian children and youth. Where Canada once ranked amongst the top 10 OECD countries with respect to children's health outcomes, the 2020 UNICEF Report Card ranked Canada as 30th of 38 wealthy countries with respect to children's physical health, and 31st of 38 countries regarding children's mental health.

Canadians of all backgrounds, with and without kids, have become concerned about the ability of children – who are among our most vulnerable populations – to access health care services in a timely manner when they need it most.

Said Emily Gruenwoldt, CEO of Children's Healthcare Canada, "Canadians imagine a healthier future for their children. As our political leaders convene to negotiate a long-term, predictable funding arrangement under the Canada Health Transfer, my advice to them is simple: now is the time for all levels of government to prioritize investments to 'right-size' children's health and improve outcomes for our kids."

Canadians believe now is the time for bold, national leadership to improve children's health outcomes. Per Abacus' research, 91 per cent of Canadians (and 94 per cent of parents) feel we need to set national goals to improve children's health outcomes, and 87 per cent agree the federal government should set aside a portion of the Canada Health Transfer specifically for child and youth health care.

Polling also confirmed that parents are alarmed about their children's level of access to healthcare. Specifically, 39 per cent of parents lack confidence in the timeliness of access to primary care and their ability to access medicine and products. About half of parents lack confidence in their children's timely access to emergency care (47 per cent) and timely access to mental health care supports (48 per cent).

¹ UNICEF Report Card 16: https://www.unicef.ca/sites/default/files/2020-08/WorldsOfInfluence_EN.pdf

Added Gruenwoldt, “By earmarking \$1 billion annually under the 10-year window of a re-negotiated Canada Health Transfer, we can begin to right-size children’s health. With this level of funding, we can safeguard access to pediatric emergency care; address long wait times and eliminate surgical and procedural backlogs; augment capacity for pediatric intensive care systems; increase access to mental health supports for kids; and ensure timely access to diagnostic and developmental services.”

Key Findings from Abacus Data:

- Improving health care for children and youth in Canada is important for all Canadians, not just parents. Canadians want the federal government to place a larger focus on child and youth health care, both overall and from a financial and measurement perspective.
 - 92 per cent of Canadians agree we need to improve Canada’s health care system to better meet the needs of children and youth in Canada (95 per cent among parents).
 - 91 per cent of Canadians feel we need to set national goals to improve children’s health outcomes (94 per cent among parents).
 - 87 per cent agree the federal government should set aside a portion of the Canada Health Transfer specifically for child and youth health care.
- Over a third of parents lack confidence in the health care system’s ability to provide children’s health care medicine and products (39 per cent). The same number aren’t confident they have timely access to primary care.
- About half of parents aren’t confident they can access timely emergency care (47 per cent) or have timely access to mental health care (48 per cent) for their children.

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.

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