

The Children's Health Crisis Canada Can't Ignore

Key Messages - October 2025

The issue:

- **Children's health in Canada is declining year after year, and an undersized system cannot keep up with a growing, increasingly complex population.** Strategic investments are needed to improve access, experiences, and outcomes of care.
- **Kids are not miniature adults.** They require specialized care tailored to their developmental needs—care that only purpose-built children's health systems can deliver effectively.
- **Investing early in children's health pays off.** It improves population health, reduces long-term health system costs, and strengthens Canada's workforce and competitiveness—making it not only the right choice, but the financially smart one.

The context:

- **Canada is failing its kids.** As a wealthy nation, we have the resources but lack the will to meaningfully and measurably improve children's experiences and outcomes of care. According to UNICEF, Canada ranks near the bottom among comparative OECD nations for children's physical and mental health.
- **Children wait longer than many adults for essential healthcare services.** Children's health systems are chronically underfunded, operating over capacity, and facing significant workforce shortages across the continuum of care.
- **We lack focus and accountability.** Children's health is under-prioritized, awareness of systemic challenges and inequities is low and no clear accountability exists for children's health outcomes.

The economic case

- *Thrive—The Economic Case for Investing in Children's Health* is the first national economic analysis of the return on investment in children's healthcare in Canada.
- This report makes the case for early investment in children's healthcare by estimating the social return on investment of expanding access to health interventions.



- Applying a cost-of-illness approach to three chronic pediatric conditions as examples, the report quantifies the current economic burden of these illnesses; models the costs and benefits of scaling up access to targeted interventions for children with these illnesses; and estimates the additional benefits of investing in this care earlier in the child's life.

Key Findings

- **Chronic pediatric conditions impose a significant annual burden on Canada's economy**, with estimated costs of \$483 million for type 1 diabetes, \$6.0 billion for mood and anxiety disorders, and \$2.2 billion for epilepsy.
- **Modeling across the three conditions show a positive social return, up to a five-fold return for every dollar invested.** This is consistent with global evidence.
- Investments tend to yield higher social returns when directed to health interventions with limited access but strong potential benefits.
- Focused and strategic investments in children's healthcare yield several benefits:
 - a financial return on investment;
 - better health outcomes for the child;
 - reduced caregiving burden on the family (boosting productivity); and
 - savings to the health-care system down the line.
- Investments in children's health should be coupled with a national strategy to ensure that they are being allocated where they are most needed.

What we're asking the federal government to do

- **Expediently advance Bill S-212** (National Strategy for Children and Youth), tabled by Senator Rosemary Moodie
 - Pan-Canadian strategy with clear targets, timelines, coordination, and public reporting
 - Has passed second reading in the Senate and was referred to committee—cross-party support needed when it reaches the House.
- **Protect and grow programs that deliver impact for children** (even in fiscal restraint)
 - Top up and broaden the Youth Mental Health Fund—prioritize prevention, early assessment, rapid intervention in early years;
 - Protect and expand capacity for Jordan's Principle and the Inuit Child First Initiative (federal responsibility);



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- Sustain PHAC's work to build vaccine confidence and combat mis and disinformation affecting children's healthcare decisions.
- **Include children's priorities in nation-building investments**
 - Modernize aging, undersized children's health infrastructure
 - Fund research, workforce planning, and learning health systems
 - Future-proof Canada by investing early to reduce lifelong burdens and inequities

Actions leaders can take today

- **Speak with your colleagues and party leadership.** Highlight the urgent need for a National Strategy for Children and Youth.
- **Visit a local children's healthcare organization.** Experience innovations and capacity gaps firsthand (Children's Healthcare Canada can help coordinate).
- **Stay connected with CHC and CCHF** for briefings, emerging priorities, and innovations to celebrate.

One-line closers (pick one!):

- When we invest in the health of kids, we invest in the health of Canada.
- Building a stronger, more prosperous and equitable Canada starts with children.
- Strong kids build a strong Canada.