



CHILD TOWN HALL

National CHILD Town Hall Report November 2025

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Town Hall attendees

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National CHILD Town Hall convened 96 researchers, policymakers, service providers, community organizations, caregivers, and people with lived experience (PWLE) of disabilities to advance a shared understanding of the key indicators of well-being for children with disabilities that must be taken into account in program, policy, and research.

Hosted by the Canadian Health Indicators for children with Disabilities (CHILD) research study team in partnership with Children's Healthcare Canada, the event focused on presenting the **CHILD Framework** as a tool to inform evidence-based policy, practice, and advocacy. The research team also presented the CHILD Framework associated **data from existing Canadian datasets**, and the **data gaps** that must be addressed to fully understand the well-being of children with disabilities in Canada.

Participants explored recent progress in framework development, emerging insights from national data analyses conducted in partnership with Statistics Canada, and persistent gaps in disability-inclusive data systems. Through plenary presentations and facilitated breakout discussions, the Town Hall generated actionable insights on implementation, equity, and the need for coordinated national leadership.

Across discussions, participants emphasized the importance of:

- Child-centred, rights-based, and intersectional approaches;
- Meaningful engagement of children, youth, families, and Indigenous communities;
- Develop tools that support real-world application of the CHILD framework.

Strong consensus emerged around the value of the CHILD Framework as a unifying structure to guide measurement, policy alignment, and system change across jurisdictions.

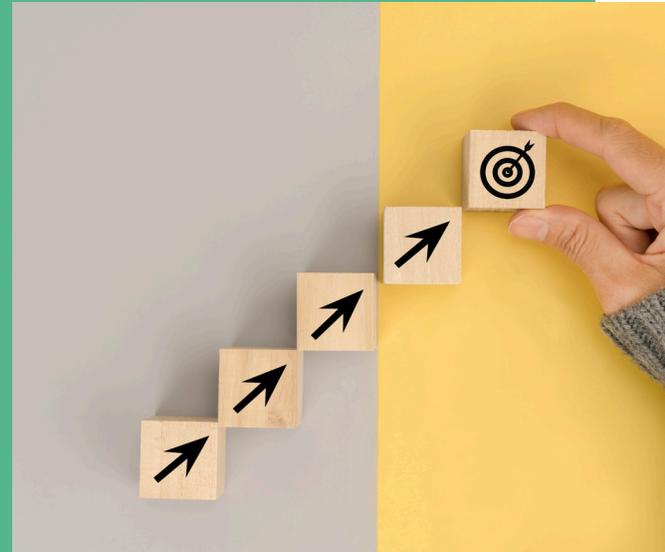


The Childhood Disability Participation and Knowledge Translation Collaborative

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Town Hall served as a continuation of a multi-year, collaborative effort to develop an equitable and evidence-informed approach to measuring and improving the wellbeing of children with disabilities in Canada.

Town Hall objectives were to:



Present updates on the CHILD Framework, including refined domains and indicators.



Share findings from the analysis of national datasets conducted with Statistics Canada.



Engage participants in identifying opportunities, barriers, and priorities for implementation.



Gather feedback to inform the next phase of indicators development and knowledge mobilization tools.



Support collective planning toward coordinated policy and system-level action.

ABOUT THE CHILD FRAMEWORK

The Canadian Health Indicators for children with Disabilities (CHILD) Framework (1) is designed to capture the complex, multidimensional realities of children with disabilities. It provides a coherent structure to support national measurement, reporting, and comparison across jurisdictions, while remaining grounded in lived experience.

The framework is explicitly aligned with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (2) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (3), and benefits from the extensive review of research and policy frameworks of inclusion of children with disabilities done for the CHILD Community Health Inclusion Index (4). Reinforcing a **rights-based foundation** for policy and practice, it integrates domains spanning health, family environment, education, community belonging, social participation, access to services, and material wellbeing, recognizing that **child wellbeing is shaped by individual, familial, and societal contexts**.

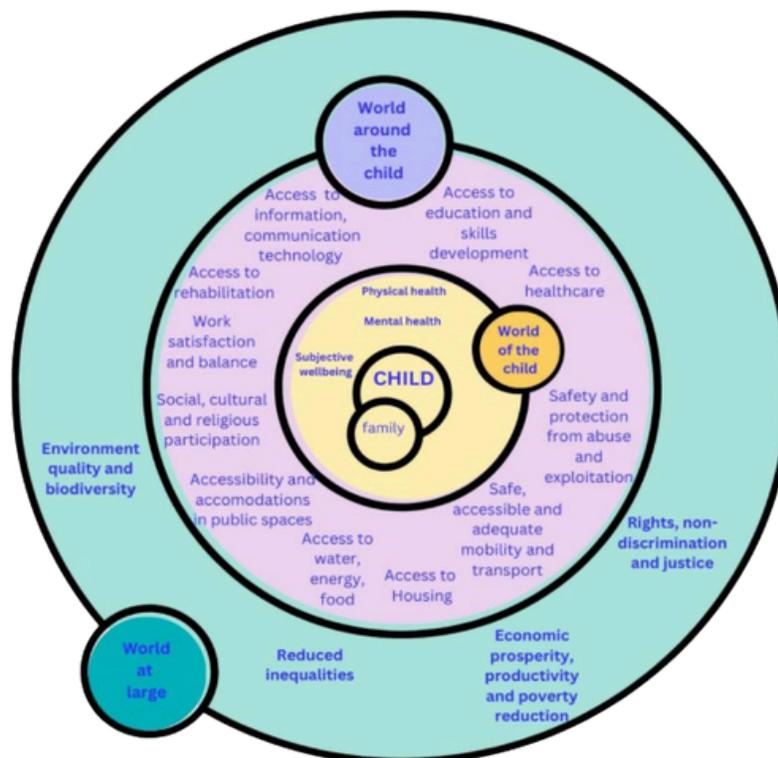


Figure 1. CHILD Framework

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION AND KEY THEMES

◆ **Meaningful Child and Family Engagement**

Participants consistently emphasized that children with disabilities and their families must be central partners in shaping, validating, and applying the framework. Engagement must be meaningful, accessible, culturally safe, and ongoing. Incorporating perspectives from Indigenous children, newcomers, and those with intersecting disabilities was seen as essential to ensuring equity, relevance, and impact.

◆ **Data Sources, Gaps, and System Fragmentation**

While existing administrative and survey data can inform certain indicators, significant gaps remain - particularly for early childhood, inclusive education, community participation, mental health, caregiver experiences, and key life transitions. Participants highlighted the need for longitudinal, disability-inclusive data systems and Indigenous-led data governance approaches grounded in self-determination. Fragmentation across health, education, and social systems continues to limit coherent analysis and action.

◆ **Holistic Family Wellbeing**

The Town Hall participants reinforced that children's well-being cannot be separated from family well-being. Caregiver health, financial stability, access to coordinated services, and language accessibility - especially for Deaf children and families - were identified as critical components that must be reflected in national indicators to provide a complete picture of wellbeing.

◆ **Operationalization and Practical Use**

Participants underscored the importance of translating the framework into practice through a user-friendly implementation toolkit. This includes plain-language resources for children and caregivers, guidance for governments and organizations, and tools to embed indicators into program design, evaluation, funding models, and policy development.



◆ **Intersectionality, Equity, and Rights**

Equity was a cross-cutting theme throughout the event. Participants emphasized cultural safety, recognition of structural inequities, and respect for Indigenous sovereignty. The framework must account for systemic barriers faced by racialized families, newcomers, and those in rural or remote communities to ensure that measurement and policy efforts advance inclusion rather than reproduce disparities.

◆ **Life Course and Transitions**

Disability is dynamic, and participants highlighted the importance of indicators that span developmental stages and support continuity across the lifespan. Transitions - such as entry into adulthood, workforce participation, and movement between service systems - were identified as critical moments that shape long-term outcomes and require better alignment with adult wellbeing frameworks.

◆ **Advocacy and Policy Alignment**

The CHILD Framework was viewed as a powerful tool to unify childhood disability policy across jurisdictions and strengthen advocacy efforts. Standardized indicators and improved data were seen as essential to addressing policy fragmentation, enhancing accountability, and ensuring children with disabilities are fully represented within broader child-rights and disability policy agendas.



EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES



PARTICIPANTS IDENTIFIED SEVERAL PRIORITY OPPORTUNITIES TO ADVANCE THE FRAMEWORK AND ITS IMPACT:

“... many deaf adults do not feel strong connection to their family because of lack of shared communication. So this is an indicator of how childhood experiences and indicators is related to longitudinal mental health...”

“Measuring the wellbeing of the whole family is as critical as measuring the wellbeing of the child.”

“I just came from a webinar that spoke to disability & intersectionality (e.g., a trans person who has lived experience with Autism), and the rights, discrimination and justice is hugely important as an aspect in the framework, as they are largely underrepresented groups...”

01.

Strengthening childhood disability-inclusive national data systems.

02.

Embedding family and caregiver wellbeing indicators.

03.

Addressing accessibility and language rights gaps to avoid disparity between recognized language rights and the lived marginalization of non-dominant language speakers.

04.

Advancing a coordinated, cross-sector national approach.

05.

Applying indicators directly to planning, funding, and evaluation.

06.

Strengthening partnerships with children and youth, families, community organizations, and researchers to use the indicators for data collection, program planning, policy and program evaluation, implementation, and monitoring of the UN Conventions and policy.



NEXT STEPS

Moving Forward Together

The **CHILD** Study team will develop detailed reports, policy briefs, and advocacy tools that synthesize quantitative and qualitative findings from the study, including the TownHall recommendations. Insights gathered will inform further refinement of the CHILD Framework, development of an implementation toolkit, and future engagement sessions across regions and communities.

Through continued collaboration with governments, researchers, service providers, youth, and families, the project will advance stakeholder-informed, disability-inclusive indicators that support smarter policies, more equitable systems, and improved well-being for children and youth with disabilities across Canada.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Suggested reference for this document:

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FEEDBACK SURVEY

We invite you to complete this questionnaire (POLIQ) to help inform the potential impact of our work.

Link to the survey:

<https://forms.office.com/r/jFrkMZ7pVy>

Scan the QR code

