



Thrive: The Economic Case for Investing in Children's Health

Questions & Answers | October 2025

Q. Why should Canadians care about this report?

- Health outcomes for children and youth living in Canada are worsening year over year, and the healthcare systems that serve them are stretched thin.
- This report provides a compelling, evidence-based case for why investments in children's healthcare are morally right AND economically smart.
- When we invest in the health of children, we are also investing in the health, productivity, and resilience of Canada as a whole.

Q. Can you explain your findings that, for every dollar invested in children's healthcare, generates between \$1.39 and \$4.90?

- This report demonstrates that targeted investments in children's healthcare lead directly to improved societal and economic outcomes (improved experiences and outcomes of healthcare for children, reductions in costs to the healthcare system and reductions in lost productivity due to mortality, morbidity and caregiving).
- For every dollar invested in children's healthcare, we realize (up to) a five-fold return to society and to our economy.
- The report studied three chronic conditions (Type 1 diabetes, depression and anxiety, and epilepsy) as examples to determine cost savings. These three case studies are prevalent amongst children and youth, require care across the continuum (hospital setting and community setting), and data exists to study the impact of early interventions.
- International studies leveraging different case studies noted up to a \$17 return on investment for every dollar invested in children's healthcare.

Q. Are returns on investment measured in the short term or long term?

- Both!
- Early investments in children and their health yield life-long impacts.
- Early investments in children's health and healthcare
 - Improve experiences and outcomes of care in the short term;
 - Reduce demand for chronic, acute, and long-term care over the lifespan
 - Improves educational attainment
 - Improves workforce productivity over the lifespan.

Q. How did you come to the decision to focus on the three chronic conditions? Are those the most prevalent for children and youth?

- These conditions were chosen because they are common and chronic childhood diseases, care is delivered across a variety of care settings (hospitals, primary care, community-based services), and robust comparative data exists for the purposes of our study.
- These are not the most important or urgent areas of investment, simply examples of the impact of early investment in children's healthcare.
- International studies consistently demonstrate comparable and positive returns on investment in a variety of children's diagnoses.

Q. Can you talk about how underfunding of children's healthcare impacts a child's life over time and what an increased investment would mean?

- Children's healthcare systems in Canada are undersized to meet the needs of a growing and increasingly complex population of children and youth.
- Children's healthcare systems in Canada have been underfunded for decades, resulting in long wait times for essential and time sensitive healthcare services.
- Many children now wait longer than adults for healthcare services, which result in worsening symptoms, increased complexity of care to follow, prolonged pain and suffering, developmental delays, poorer health, and strains on healthcare resources and increased costs to families and to the healthcare system.
- Underfunding children's healthcare creates a cycle of poor population health, reduced opportunities for children, youth, and their families, and economic strain.
- This report notes that early investments in children's health and healthcare
 - reduce demand for chronic, acute, and long-term care
 - improves educational attainment
 - improves workforce productivity over the lifespan.
- Recent examples of investment in children's healthcare in Ontario and Nova Scotia have increased capacity within the system and reduced wait times for surgical, child development and mental health services.

Q: Are there specific regions of the country that are worse than other areas? (for local media...how does BC, compare to the rest of Canada).

- The lack of investment in children, their health, and healthcare exists across the country, from coast to coast to coast. Provincial policies and investments vary, and thus so do children's experiences and outcomes of healthcare.
- Experiences and outcomes of care for Indigenous children and other vulnerable populations (low income, newcomer, racialized, rural and remote, disabled, LGTBQ2+) are relatively quite poor and represent an important focus for health systems improvement.

Q: Why is Canada so far behind other countries in terms of its funding for children's health?

- This report focused on the benefits of investment in children's healthcare.
- Earlier work by Children's Healthcare Canada has noted that the current reality has been decades in the making and can be attributed to several complex factors, including sociodemographic changes within the broader population, advances in science and medicine, changes within the healthcare workforce, and the increasing health and social complexity amongst children and youth presenting for care.
- There remains limited awareness of the challenges children face with regards to their health. Resources are often allocated to other more vocal or visible populations (elder care, most recently).
- The measurable decline in the health and wellbeing of the children in this country has implications at the individual, family, society, and systems levels.

Q: How much increased investment is being proposed to improve healthcare outcomes for children?

- This report indicates that for each dollar invested in children and their health and healthcare, Canada can anticipate a return of \$1.39 – \$4.89 in improved access, consistent with global evidence of \$1.80 – \$17.10 returned per dollar invested.
- To optimize the return on investment, this report recommends
 - directing funds to health interventions with limited access but strong evidence of potential benefits
 - investing earlier in a child's healthcare journey by reducing the ongoing burden of illness for the child and their family
 - the development of a robust national children's strategy which has been a consistent call to action by Children's Healthcare Canada and other child health organization for years.

Q: Where will the funds come from to make this happen?

- Earlier work by Children's Healthcare Canada has established that right-sizing children's healthcare will require collective effort from all levels of government and the philanthropic sector.
- There are predictable, measurable and staggering costs of inaction and underinvestment. A 2023 research series commissioned by Children's Healthcare Canada reveals significant financial and human costs linked to delays in children's health services.
- This report demonstrates, for the first time, the powerful economic return children, youth, families, and Canada can realize from investments in children's health and healthcare.

Q: I know this report used three chronic conditions as the model, however, is this consistent across diagnoses?

- International evidence demonstrates consistent results across a variety of children's diagnoses. There is a powerful economic return for investments in children's health.
- Global evidence demonstrates returns of between \$1.80 and \$17.10 per dollar invested in children's healthcare across a variety of diagnoses.
- These three case studies were chosen because they are popular diagnoses in the Canadian context, and data was available to support a study of the impact of investment.

Q: You are also asking for a national plan for children and youth. What would that plan include?

- Children's Healthcare Canada and many other children's health organizations are calling on the Federal government to lead the development of a national strategy to measurably improve the health and wellbeing of children and youth in Canada.
- The proposed national child health strategy should set ambitious pan-Canadian goals while at the same time, reflecting provincial priorities, strengths, and opportunities.
- Senator Moodie's Bill S-212, now at committee in the Senate, calls for such a pan-Canadian strategy. We urge all parties to support and pass this Bill when it reaches the House of Commons.

Q: Health is a provincial responsibility, yet your campaign also targets the federal government. How do you see cooperation happen at all levels?

- Children's Healthcare Canada believes we all have a role to play, right-sizing healthcare systems for children and youth. This includes all levels of government.
- The federal government plays an important role establishing a pan-Canadian vision for children and youth, setting clear targets to measurably improve their health and wellbeing.
- Provinces and territories play an important role allocating and prioritizing funding for children's health and social services. P/Ts will also play an important role co-developing and implementing a national children's strategy to address local priorities.

Q: Should we be prioritizing investments in children and youth over supporting our aging population?

- This report and previous work of Children's Healthcare Canada highlight the unique challenges children's health systems face in the context of a growing population of children and youth with increasingly complex medical needs.
- There are predictable, measurable, and staggering costs of inaction and underinvestment in children's health. A 2023 research series commissioned by Children's Healthcare Canada reveals significant financial and human costs linked to delays in children's health services.
- There are many competing and pressing priorities within governments and our healthcare systems. This report presents a powerful economic argument to support upstream investments to ensure children and youth have the best possible opportunity to live a healthy and long life.