



Children's Healthcare Canada's Brief on Bill S-212: A National Strategy for Children and Youth

Overview

Children and youth across Canada face growing and increasingly complex health and well-being challenges within systems that remain under-resourced, fragmented, and difficult to navigate. Of Canada's approximately 8 million children, [one in four](#) lives with a chronic illness, [one in five](#) experiences mental health challenges, and [roughly 100,000](#) live with medical complexity requiring coordinated care across multiple systems.

At the same time, many children and youth experience barriers related to poverty, food insecurity, and unequal access to services. Outcomes too often depend on where children live, who they are, and what their families can afford.

Despite being one of the wealthiest countries in the world, Canada consistently ranks in the [bottom third](#) of peer nations on child well-being indicators and lacks a cohesive national framework to align efforts across sectors and jurisdictions.

While many services for children and youth are delivered by provinces and territories, the federal government plays an important role as a coordinator across jurisdictions, it can set national targets and desired outcomes, and has spending power, which can be tied to performance targets.

[Bill S-212, An Act respecting a National Strategy for Children and Youth in Canada](#), provides an opportunity to address these gaps through a coordinated, legislated, and outcome-driven national approach and measurably improve the lives of children and youth.

What Bill S-212 Would Do

Bill S-212 would require the federal government to develop a National Child and Youth Strategy that:

- Establishes national priorities and measurable outcomes
- Enables coordination across federal departments and jurisdictions
- Aligns policies, programs, and investments affecting children and youth
- Improves accountability through reporting and evaluation
- Supports collaboration with provinces, territories, Indigenous partners, and civil society

Current Context: Why This Matters

Key challenges affecting children and youth in Canada include:

- **Rising complexity of need:** Increasing prevalence of chronic illness, mental health challenges, and medical complexity
- **Fragmented systems:** Families must navigate disconnected health, education, and social services
- **Access gaps:** Approximately [1 in 10](#) children and youth do not have a primary care provider
- **Persistent inequities:** Outcomes vary significantly across income, geography, and identity
- **System capacity constraints:** Long wait times and limited coordination across sectors

Together, these challenges point to the need for a more coordinated and strategic national approach.

International Examples

Many peer countries have implemented national child strategies to improve outcomes and coordination:

- **New Zealand** – [Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy](#)
- **Ireland** – [Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures](#)
- **Finland** – [National Child Strategy](#)
- **Scotland** – [Getting It Right for Every Child \(GIRFEC\)](#)

These strategies share common elements:

- Clear targets and outcomes
- Cross-government coordination
- Dedicated accountability mechanisms
- Alignment of policy and funding
- A strong focus on equity

Legislation Context and Timeline

The call for a national strategy for children and youth in Canada is not new and has been raised consistently by researchers, civil society, and policymakers.

In 2015, the Liberal Party platform adopted the [commitment](#) to establishing a Child Commissioner's Office, but the Office did not materialize.

Recent legislative developments include:

- 2012 – Bill C-420 (41-1) submitted by MP Marc Garneau (Lib)
- 2015 – Bill C-701 (41-2) submitted by MP Irwin Cotler (Lib)
- 2019 – Bill C-441 (42-1) submitted by MP Anne Minh-Thu Quach (NDP)
- 2019 – Bill C-451 (42-1) submitted by MP K. Kellie Leitch (Con)
- 2020 – Bill S-217 (43-1) introduced by Senator Rosemary Moodie
- 2020 – Bill S-210 (43-2) introduced by Senator Rosemary Moodie
- 2024 – Bill S-282 (44-1) introduced by Senator Rosemary Moodie
- **2025 – Bill S-212 (45-1) introduced by Senator Rosemary Moodie**
 - **Passed the Senate with unanimous support and is now before the House of Commons. Second reading is expected in September 2026.**

Conclusion

Canada's current approach to supporting children and youth is fragmented and constrained by gaps in coordination, capacity, and accountability.

Bill S-212 provides a structured, legislated opportunity to address these challenges. By establishing a National Child and Youth Strategy, it can help align efforts across governments and sectors, strengthen system capacity over time, and support measurable improvements in outcomes for children and youth. The bill's unanimous passage in the Senate underscores the broad recognition that coordinated national action is needed to improve the health and wellness of children and youth in Canada.