Kids in Canada: falling behind? Poll indicates concern youth aren’t getting the support they need

Joint study with Children First Canada surveyed adults and children on the state of childhood in Canada

November 16, 2016 – A new survey from the Angus Reid Institute – in partnership with Children First Canada – reveals both older and younger generations of Canadians are calling for more assistance for youth mental health, greater action to prevent bullying, and more funding for families in poverty to increase the level of childhood well-being in this country.

The public opinion poll measures the views of Canadian adults and children about the state of childhood in this country and indicates people are aware of, and concerned about, several challenges – particularly for those in low-income households.

The findings present a country with competing realities. While a generally encouraging picture of life for tweens and teens in Canada is reported on several metrics – their home, neighbourhoods and relationships – several other areas are sources of concern for many, and a desire for more engagement on their behalf with policymakers is evident.

While there appears to be consensus over what should be done, and while most Canadians say they support greater expenditure on children’s well-being, significant debates remain over where the money should come from, and who should oversee its distribution.

Key Findings:

- Income level greatly affects children’s satisfaction with respect to their homes and neighbourhoods, the activities they partake in, and their futures

- Adults and kids agree that support for anti-bullying, mental health and assistance for the poor are key priorities; adults also believe that investments in preventing child abuse are critical.

- Half of all parents (50%) say that a lack of money is hurting their children, while a similar number (45%) say parenting is a bigger challenge than they were expecting

CONTACT:
Dave Korzinski, Research Associate – Angus Reid Institute: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org
Shachi Kuri, Executive Director – Angus Reid Institute: 604.908.1693 shachi.kuri@angusreid.org
• Approximately three-quarters of adults (73%) and children (77%) say that young people in Canada need more support to safeguard their wellbeing and fulfill their potential

• One-in-three Canadians say policy measures such as establishing a Children’s Commissioner, a Children’s Budget, and a National Strategy for Children are necessary to improve the lives of children, while another half say each of these would be “nice to have”

PART 1 – Children’s views on their own lives

• Comfortable at home
• Good relationships with friends and family
• Happy at school
• Extracurricular activities – Some overscheduled, others want more
• If you had a million dollars...?
• Concerns about the future
• Post-secondary worries for low-income families

PART 2 – Parenting in Canada

• Financial worries loom large
• Daycare reliance and cost
• More support for parents or more personal responsibility?
• Government regulation or parental choice?

PART 3 – National policy and priorities

• Top priorities for young Canadians
  o Bullying
  o Mental health support desired by many
  o Post-secondary education most important among older kids

• Enough attention on children’s issues?
• How Canada compares to other countries: Perception versus reality
• What should be done to improve child well-being?
• Necessary programs according to adults
  o Other top priorities
  o Lower rated priorities
• Policy implementation

PART 1: Children’s views on their own lives

Much is said by advocates, adults, parents and educators about the lives of children - but what do they say for themselves? The Angus Reid Institute and Children’s First Canada went straight to the source,
surveying 831 children between the ages of 12 and 17, asking them a broad range of questions about their lives and views of issues in Canada. Children whose parents are members of the Angus Reid Forum were asked by their parents if they wished to complete the survey. It should be noted that many of the children’s responses were given under parental supervision.

Comfortable at home

Starting in and around the home, children age 12 to 17 report high levels of comfort. In fact, 88 per cent say their living quarters is either good or very good. Responses are similarly strong when children are asked to look outside their front doors and consider their neighbourhoods, and these views are held across the country.

It is notable, however, that the rating for both items tends to drop across income levels. This income effect is a significant and continuous trend throughout the data.

The percentage of children saying each of these elements – home and neighbourhood – is very good reaches a majority among those from high-income households, whereas just three-in-ten (30%) children from households on the lower end of the income scale are this pleased.
Good relationships with friends and family

Another area where Canadian kids appear to be quite content is regarding their personal relationships. This starts at home with their parents and extends outward to their immediate friend-circle. Asked to rate their parental relationship, nine-in-ten say it’s either good (47%) or very good (43%) for a total of 90 per cent positive. The youngest children in this grouping are most positive. Indeed, 12-year-olds are near unanimous (96%), though no group reports less than an 84 per cent rate of positive parental partnership.

And what about their friends? Here, Canadian children tend to report slightly more dissatisfaction. While four-in-five (81%) report that their social life is on the positive end of the spectrum, roughly one-in-five (19%) rate their relationship with friends as only fair, poor, or very poor. Overall, kids are ten per cent less likely to say their relationships with friends are very good.

This survey’s findings paint an encouraging picture painted of the interactions Canadian kids are having day to day. More than four-in-five (83%) report that they feel accepted and included by the people in their lives. And, if they need someone to talk to, nine-in-ten (93%) say there’s an adult they trust and would reach out to, or a close friend that would help them out (90%). These are important findings to note, as will be discussed later, mental health support is a concern for many kids, particularly as they get older.
Happy at school

The average Canadian student will spend **about 11,000 hours** of their life at school. With so much of their youth devoted to this institution, it is encouraging to note that children feel positively about school in general, though their enthusiasm again trends downward with reported household income.

Four-in-five kids say their school is either good or very good, but those from households with lower incomes are twice as likely than those in high-income homes to say their school is only fair. Children from higher-income families are also significantly more likely to say their school is very good:

Let's start by thinking about where you live. How would you rate each of the following:
(Your school, Children 12 - 17)

In terms of class instruction, younger students, particularly 12-year-olds, rate more highly both the quality of the teachers and the content that they’re being taught compared to older kids. However, it should be noted that no age group has a proportion larger than six per cent saying either of these aspects of their education rate poorly (see comprehensive tables).

Overall, one-in-four students report that their teachers are not doing a good job (27%) or that they’re less than satisfied with what they’re being taught (23%). It should be noted that most of these more pessimistic students rate these aspects of school as only fair, while few say they are poor.

Eight-in-ten (79%) students also report that they feel that their school is a safe and supportive place, while the rest (21%) rate this element of their life as less than good. This suggests that one-in-five students feels disconnected, either in terms of their support and safety, or the quality of the information they’re being taught. And while one-in-five may seem insignificant, this extrapolates to **more than one million children** across Canada.
Asked to account for these different elements, and rate their lives overall, children between 12 and 17 report high levels of contentment. This drops significantly for Canadians 18-44, before again rising for those over 55:

**Extracurricular activities – Some overscheduled, others want more**

But life isn’t just about school, and Canada’s kids have many other responsibilities. A majority of kids (57%) say they’re pretty comfortable with the amount of obligations and activities they have in their free time. However, the remaining group is split - one-quarter (26%) say they wish they more valuable activities to take part in during their time, while one-in-five (18%) say they’re over-booked and could use some time to unwind.
And while Canadian kids are keen on their schools, they’re less enthusiastic about the quality of extracurricular activities offered outside of the classroom. Fully one-in-three (34%) say that the programs available after school are either only fair (26%) or outright poor (8%).

Lower-income children are more likely to voice this opinion (see comprehensive tables) and they’re also significantly more likely to say that they would like to take part in more clubs, sports, or lessons, but their family can’t afford to enrol them. Indeed, for children in the lowest income bracket this is the majority experience. This suggests an absence of meaningful activities to enhance the lives of a great portion of the child population, and the loss of the spin-off benefits that physical and mental stimulation bring for half of the low-income group.

More than half (53%) of Canadian kids say they feel that they’re “under a lot of pressure these days”. This feeling is particularly strong among the older end of the group, 15-to-17-year-olds, who are dealing with the tail end of their school experience and preparing themselves for the next phase of life.
It appears that there is a tension in childhood between the pulls of necessary responsibilities and fun activities. Between sports, clubs, homework, and spending time with friends, it’s understandable that some Canadian children say they’re too busy in their free time, and this likely contributes to the amount of pressure they feel that they’re under.

If you had a million dollars…?

One interesting way to gauge the priorities of young people is to offer them the opportunity to give their community whatever they would like, regardless of price. With this in mind, the Angus Reid Institute and Children First Canada asked the kids to respond in an open-ended manner to the following question.

“If you had a million dollars to spend on things for kids in your community, what would you spend it on?”

Below are some of the creative and thoughtful responses from child respondents, while a larger list can be viewed here:

- I would want to make a community stage for kids. It would be free to use and any kid could book a time to do whatever they want on it. It would have lots of audience seating too. People would be allowed to ask for money from people coming to see the show for the tickets

- Helping kids with anxiety. I have anxiety and my parents have insurance so I can get the help I need. A lot of kids aren’t getting help because their parents can’t afford counseling and the wait list is really long

- The Food Bank, giving kids that don’t have enough money for school supplies, not enough money for grad or prom and not having enough money to even go out with friends to the movies or to Tim’s for a drink

- I would make things like hockey and soccer free. My mom and dad pay for as much as they can, but it is hard on them and I know it

- I would use the 1m to build houses for abused/homeless children and their families. I would not spend it on enjoyment. We already are extremely blessed in this community

Concerns about the future
As noted previously, Canadian adults are just as likely as children to give a good rating to their home, their neighbourhood and their schools. Children and adults diverge in their views on the financial uncertainties that await the next generation, however. Here, adults are much more pessimistic than kids.

Four-in-ten adults (42%) say they feel confident about the next generation getting a good job or finding a satisfying career – the other six-in-ten (58%) are worried about these prospects. Roughly the same proportion say that they have confidence in children’s potential to achieve their big goals in life – 46 per cent are confident, while 54 per cent worry.

Younger children, 12 to 14, are much more positive about the future, but this confidence declines with age, as seen in the graph that follows.

Interestingly, the outlook of adults also depends to some extent on the conditions those individuals experience in their own home, as confidence drops across household income levels:

Post-secondary worries for low-income families
Another area of concern for both kids and adults alike is post-secondary education – a key element of socio-economic mobility and opportunity. The average cost of tuition in 1990 across Canada was roughly $2,200 – about three times less than current average fees. This growth in costs has led to a situation in which three-quarters of adults (74%) and more than two-thirds (69%) of children say that it is “hard” for families like theirs to afford university.

As with many other issues, respondents from households with an income of $100,000 or more are less concerned about the financial challenges post-secondary programs pose – though a majority (59% adult, 54% children) still say they’re concerned.

Among low-income households the response becomes near-unanimous. Close to nine-in-ten (87%) kids and adults (85%) say that families like theirs will struggle to pay for post-secondary education. As will be seen later in this report, the affordability of education is very high on both children’s and adult’s priorities for youth in Canada.

![It is hard for families like mine to afford college or university: Those who Agree shown](chart)

In some respects, the bachelor’s degree has become the new high school diploma. As well, the positive effect of education on income in Canada have been well researched. And while a premium is placed on education in later aspects of life, this survey suggests that some of the trends that may leave children disadvantaged develop early on.

Consider that low-income children are less likely to report doing homework, reading, or taking part in lessons in their spare time than both income cohorts above them. This suggests that children who are already in a more vulnerable position compared to their peers may be continually disadvantaged due to lower engagement in important formative activities. Adolescents who read more regularly are proven to handle complex ideas more easily, understand the world at large better, and thrive in the classroom.
Similar trends – some even more pronounced – are evident in recreational areas. Lower-income children are barely half as likely to report they play sports in their free time and significantly more likely to rate the opportunities for recreation in their neighbourhood as poor:

We want an idea of what you do in your free time -- evenings and weekends. Please select any of the things on this list that you do regularly:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>&lt;$50K</th>
<th>$50-99K</th>
<th>$100K+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homework</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lessons - music/language, etc.</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These inequalities are signs of a country that is home to many disadvantaged populations, and whether Canada is doing enough for those worst off is a subject of much debate. Asked if everyone in Canada is treated equally, four-in-ten adults (43%) and half of children (52%) agree.

On the notion that Canada is doing its best for poor people, responses are nearly identical, with a substantial number of Canadians saying Canada doesn’t do enough to help those who struggle:
PART 2 – Parenting in Canada

Financial worries loom large

Part of the struggle many parents report having is that they were perhaps not as well prepared as they could have been for the challenges of raising children. Indeed, among both parents whose children are under 18 and those whose kids have reached adulthood, more than four-in-ten say that parenting has been more difficult than they thought it would be.

Adding to this difficulty is the fact that it costs an estimated $250,000 to raise a child in Canada to age 18. Perhaps this helps to explain the near unanimous agreement among Canadian adults that “today’s families are under a lot of financial pressure” – nine-in-ten (88%) respondents agree with this statement.

Against this backdrop, a startling finding emerges. Fully half of parents who have children under the age of 18 say that a lack of money is hurting their kids. This number rises to 55 per cent among middle-income earners, and six-in-ten among households earning less than $50,000:
There are also many Canadian parents who worry about their own parenting abilities. Fully one-quarter of them say they often worry about the job that they’re doing, while another half (49%) say this is sometimes a concern.

Looking at this issue through a different lens produces another noteworthy result. All respondents were asked to describe their own childhood, whether it was great, mostly good, a mix of good and bad, or difficult. The correlation between a poor childhood and difficulty parenting is apparent. About one-in-ten adults (9%) say they had a difficult childhood, and this group is also much more likely to say that parenting was even more difficult than they had anticipated compared to those who rated their childhood as more enjoyable:
Those who had more difficult childhoods also report more financial distress than their peers. Fully two-thirds (66%) say that a lack of money is hurting their children.

**Daycare reliance and cost**

Another common issue in the public discussion of child well-being is daycare. Three-quarters of adults say that too many parents are relying on daycares and schools to raise their children (76%). There are minimal differences in opinion across income levels or between parents and non-parents on these questions, but a generational gap is apparent. Older Canadians are more likely to say that daycare and school reliance has become a problem, compared to Millennials.

**Percentage of Canadian adults who Agree that:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While there are certainly many Canadians who say that parents should rely less on daycares and schools to raise their children, this does not mean that they do not perceive these services as having value.

Indeed, there is an even greater portion of Canadians who believe that the cost of licensed daycare is pricing out the families who need it most - four-in-five (80%) say that this is the case. This rises to 87 per cent in BC and 92 per cent in Atlantic Canada and drops to six-in-ten (62%) in Quebec, where the government offers universal, government subsidized day-care for children 4 and under.
More support for parents or more personal responsibility?

The government of Canada has made an effort, both in the preceding Conservative years, and in the current Liberal agenda, to reach out to lower income families through programs and tax benefits. Any help is likely welcome to the seven-in-ten parents (72%) who say that parenting is harder now than it used to be.

While Canadians overall are inclined to agree with the sentiment that parenting has become more difficult, they’re less receptive to the idea that more should be done by the government to help parents - here, the public is split. A slight majority (53%) say that there isn’t that much more that government should be doing for kids, and that it is up to parents to ensure their kids have a good childhood. However, this leaves close to half of Canadian adults, and almost six-in-ten (58%) 18 to 24-year old’s who say the government should be doing more.

There’s not all that much more the government should be doing for kids - it’s up to parents themselves
(Those who Disagree shown)

Government regulation or parental choice?

CONTACT:
Dave Korzinski, Research Associate – Angus Reid Institute: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org
Shachi Kurl, Executive Director – Angus Reid Institute: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org
A couple of specific issues often draw the ire of many parents, and make waves in the public discourse. The Angus Reid Institute and Children First Canada took this unique opportunity to compare the opinions of parents and non-parents alike for these issues – spanking, or physical punishment, and vaccinations.

On vaccinations, a large proportion of Canadians, about three-quarters (73%), say that this issue should be regulated by law, requiring all children to get the main vaccinations. Canada is reportedly under-immunized, ranking 28th out of 29 developed countries in a recent study, with an immunization rate of 84 per cent compared to 96 per cent in the United Kingdom, or 93 per cent in the United States. There are no differences in opinion between parents and non-parents on this issue, though there are generational variations. Older Canadians are less inclined to say this issue should be left up to parents:

While the law is seen as a valid resolution to the vaccination issue, the prohibition on the physical punishment of children is perceived as less appropriate to Canadians. Here, a strong majority – about six-in-ten (59%) – say that it should be up to parents to decide whether they spank or physically punish their children. Parents are slightly more likely to reserve this right than non-parents are to give it to them:
This issue garners increasing significance based on research looking at 50 years of data, involving over 160,000 children, that suggests children who are spanked more often are “more likely they are to defy their parents and to experience increased anti-social behavior, aggression, mental health problems and cognitive difficulties”. This data suggests that spanking “does the opposite” of what parents are hoping to do. Most Canadians at this time however, appear to desire the right to make the decision themselves.

PART 3 – National policy and priorities

Top priorities for young Canadians

Three quarters of Canadians (adults and kids) agree that children need more support, so the question is, what help is needed? Children and adults were presented with a list of issues that concern youth in Canada, and asked to choose which were the top priority as they see it. Each group of respondents was given the option to select up to three areas that they view as the most important, with three issues gaining similar levels of high support.

**What would you say are the biggest priorities for young people today?**

(Respondents select up to 3 issues from list of 15)

- **Bullying**
  - Children: 36%
  - Adults: 40%

- **Cost of college/university/tech school**
  - Children: 33%
  - Adults: 37%

- **Mental health/depression/anxiety**
  - Children: 32%
  - Adults: 36%

**Bullying**

For children, bullying tops the list. Four-in-ten (40%) choose this as a top area of concern, and research suggests that their focus is well-placed. One-in-seven children between the ages of 11 and 16 are reportedly victims of bullying, and these numbers are slightly higher for younger students. Adults are nearly as likely to say this is a top issue (36% do).

Importantly, bullying ranks as the top issue for parents with children under 18, as well as for respondents ages 12-14, as seen in the following graph:
Previous Angus Reid Institute research suggests why this would be such a high priority – three-in-four Canadian adults say they were bullied when they were a child, and half of today’s parents say it has happened to their kids. And while there are a multitude of organizations and events to promote anti-bullying – from the Red Cross, to Stop a Bully, to Pink Shirt Day – a lack of funding has reportedly been an ongoing problem in creating tangible programming that goes beyond awareness generation.

Mental health support desired by many

One issue that has received increasing attention in recent years both in media and in Canada’s schools is youth mental health. Due to a number of factors – including a reduction in the stigma surrounding mental health disorders – the number of children seeking help has risen substantially, particularly among those in the 10-to-17-year-old age group.

One-in-three children (32%) and four-in-ten adults (38%) say children’s mental health is a top concern. For adult respondents, this is the number one issue they would like to see more support for. The need for support is perhaps best exemplified by recent reports that a startling one-in-five children has considered suicide.

Asked directly whether they would like to see more mental health support, nearly half (45%) of children surveyed said they would personally like more support for their mental health. This sentiment is particularly strong among girls, where it reaches a fifty-fifty split:
Post-secondary education most important among older kids

As previously mentioned, the concern over being able to afford university or post-secondary training is top of mind for many Canadians. Children rate this as their second-most-important priority: Almost four-in-ten (37%) choose it, while one-third (33%) of adults do the same.

This issue is especially resonant with older children who are approaching the time in their life when they must make decisions about continuing education. While just 16 per cent of 12-year-olds choose affordability of post-secondary school as a top priority, this rises to six-in-ten (58%) within the 17-year-old group:

Several other issues receive high ranking as priorities, as shown in the following graph. Dealing with the issue of drugs and alcohol ranks particularly high among adults:
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Canadian Public Opinion Poll

CONTACT:
Dave Korzinski, Research Associate – Angus Reid Institute: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org
Shachi Kurl, Executive Director – Angus Reid Institute: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org

Enough attention on children’s issues?

This survey suggests that many children in Canada are suffering from a lack of access to programs or services – in many cases due to financial constraints.

But how do children and adults alike assess the state of children’s issues in this country? And what would they like to see done to improve the situations of those who report difficulties? For starters, half of children (49%) and four-in-ten adults say that Canadians do not give children and the issues that affect them enough attention. Parents with children under the age of 18 are less likely than children to say these issues are not getting enough attention, but more likely than adults who do not have any kids:
Among the groups more likely to say that more attention should be paid to children’s issues are lower-income households, as well as those saying they had a more difficult childhood experience (see comprehensive tables for adults, parents and children at the end of this release).

Interestingly, while most Canadians say their country gives children’s issues either the right amount or too much attention, an even larger group says that – though this may be the case – children in Canada need more support. Six-in-ten parents with children under 18 (64%) and children (63%) say that the youth could use some more support, while more than one-in-ten (15% parents with children under 18, 14% children) say that young people need a lot more support than they’re currently getting.

**Thinking overall about children here in Canada and the things that affect them, would you say that most young people are:**

- Need a lot more support: 15% parents with children under 18, 14% children, 11% adults without children
- Could use some extra support: 64% parents with children under 18, 63% children, 58% adults without children
- Are doing just fine: 21% parents with children under 18, 23% children, 29% adults without children
This finding clearly suggests that there is an appetite in Canada for more help when it comes to children and most Canadians are supportive of more expenditure on children’s issues. There is however, a split about where the money should be taken from.

When asked how additional children’s programs should be financed, parents and non-parents alike are most likely to say that money should be taken from existing government spending (45%) rather than adding more to budget totals:

![Bar chart showing the distribution of responses to how additional children’s programs should be financed.]

Canadians may have some level of disagreement regarding where spending should come from, and how much should be spent, but there is a high level of agreement on the productivity of such spending.

Nearly nine-in-ten (87%) say that investing in children will pay off and save the need for additional expenditures down the line. Indeed, much of the research done in this area supports this finding. For example, the total cost to address child abuse and neglect in Canada has been reported at more than $21 billion per year. Further, research suggests that each dollar invested in early childhood care can save up to $9 in the future.
How Canada compares to other countries: perception doesn’t meet reality

Canada is a country of great wealth when compared to global counterparts, but the reported state of children in Canada has been less than excellent. It is estimated that close to one-in-five children live in mental illness in this country. Further, in reports published by UNICEF, Canada places in the middle of the pack compared to other developed, wealthy nations on overall childhood well-being. The UNICEF index averages 26 indicators in five categories: Material Well-being, Health and Safety, Education, Behaviours and Risks, and Housing and Environment.

The Angus Reid Institute sought to compare Canadians’ perceptions of childhood well-being with some of these reported realities. First, Canadians were asked where they would guess Canada ranks compared to other wealthy countries on this issue. The largest number of respondents said Canada would rank in the top 10 (38%), while another one-quarter (26%) said they thought Canada ranked in the top 5. Only one-in-ten (11%) respondents correctly selected top 20 or middle of the pack, where Canada actually ranks:

Let’s think about how Canada compares to other wealthy countries like ours when it comes to children’s well-being. If you had to guess, would you say:

- Canada is in the top 5 countries for overall child well-being: 25%
- Not as high as that but in the top 10: 38%
- In the top 15: 18%
- In the top 20 (which would put us "in the middle of the pack"): 11%
- Top 25 or lower: 6%
After being shown Canada’s ranking, respondents were then asked how much of a priority improving this rating should be. One-in-four Canadians (24%) say they consider this to be a very high priority, while another six-in-ten (59%) say it should rank as “high.”

![Graph showing priority levels](image)

How much of a priority, if any, should Canada put on improving its rating for children’s well-being?

- Very high priority: 2%
- High priority: 15%
- Low priority: 24%
- Very low priority: 59%

Asked what they believe are the main reasons are for Canada’s relatively lower ranking on children’s well-being compared to the country’s overall wealth, Canadians highlight many of the issues already noted in this report. (Note: Respondents could choose up to four main causes, meaning totals will exceed 100 per cent.)

The number one factor Canadians see as contributing to this ranking is poverty. As noted previously, only four-in-ten adults (42%) believe this country is doing enough to help its poor people.

What do you think are the main reasons that Canada's ranking for children's well-being is significantly lower than Canada's overall prosperity ranking? Responses receiving more than 20% shown

- Poverty/inequality: 38%
- Parents have to work too much: 34%
- Indigenous/First Nations kids: 31%
- Kids are spoiled/distracted/lazy: 31%
- Education system/public schools: 30%
- Poor parenting: 26%
- Canadians aren’t aware/the problems aren’t visible: 25%
- Not enough money/governments are in debt: 21%

Another factor Canadians say hampers child well-being is their parents’ busy schedules. One-third (34%) of respondents say that parents just have too much work to focus on their children. Among parents with children under 18, this rises to four-in-ten (41%).
This sentiment is echoed in another question about what type of support parents would find most helpful, aside from extra money. Half (47%) say more flexible work hours would be a benefit, and another four-in-ten parents say more affordable childcare options would assist them:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flexible work hours</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordable childcare options</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better part-time work options</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After-school programs</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better recreation facilities nearby</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can't think of any/None of these</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting info/coaching</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three-in-ten (31%) Canadians point to the state of First Nations children as a reason Canada ranks lower in children’s well-being than in prosperity. A Human Rights Tribunal decision confirmed this sentiment in January of 2016 when it was determined that the government has discriminated against First Nations children by “failing to provide the same level of child welfare services that exist elsewhere in the country”.

Another 2016 report found that 60 per cent of First Nations children on reserve live in poverty, and in Saskatchewan and Manitoba these numbers reach seven-in-ten or higher. This, combined with a wave of teenage suicide attempts in recent years, has brought attention to this issue on a national level. It should be noted that the total number of Indigenous children in Canada would not be enough to skew national data, but in the minds of Canadians this is an issue that needs redress.

As will be seen in the following section of this report, more support for Indigenous children ranks highly on the list of children’s policy options Canadians view as necessary.

On education, Canadians evidently place equal blame for this country’s low UNICEF ranking on the education system (30%) and on the children themselves (31%). Three-in-ten say that Canada ranks lower due to kids being too spoiled or lazy, or because of a poor public school system. That said, while Canada ranks poorly on some areas of the Material Well-Being and Behaviour and Risks portions of the UNICEF index, the Great White North ranks second out of the 29 developed nations measured in terms of educational achievement by age 15. This suggests that blame put on poor schools or the effort of Canadian kids is largely misplaced, as these are part of Canada’s strengths, not weaknesses.

What should be done to improve child well-being?
Overall, a significant number of Canadians, both children (37%) and adults (41%) say that young Canadians lack the support they require to achieve their full potential. Along with the UNICEF report, this suggests that there is work that can be done to improve childhood well-being in Canada.

**Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**
"Young Canadians get the support they need to achieve their full potential"

- **Adults**
  - 41% Agree
  - 59% Disagree

- **Children**
  - 37% Agree
  - 63% Disagree

For children, the most important action they would like to see in their community is a stronger anti-bullying effort. This is the only item to exceed 40 per cent among both 12-14- and 15-17-year-olds, as seen in the following graph:

**Pick up to three that you think are most important for young people like you in your community today**

- **Stronger action against bullying**
  - 12-14: 48%
  - 15-17: 45%
  - Total: 42%

- **More support for kids in poor families**
  - 12-14: 38%
  - 15-17: 37%
  - Total: 38%

- **Improve the places kids can go to play sports and games**
  - 12-14: 31%
  - 15-17: 36%
  - Total: 34%

- **More mental health support for young people**
  - 12-14: 29%
  - 15-17: 36%
  - Total: 36%

- **More things for kids to do**
  - 12-14: 25%
  - 15-17: 40%
  - Total: 34%

Help for the poor is also highly valued by children, and it rates particularly high for kids from lower-income households. Four-in-ten (38%) overall say that more support for kids in poor families is important in their community, and this rises to half (49%) in homes on the lower end of the income scale.

**CONTACT:**
Dave Korzinski, Research Associate – Angus Reid Institute: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org
Shachi Kurl, Executive Director – Angus Reid Institute: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org
Children also see keeping busy as important to improving their communities. Two items – improving the places kids can go to play sports and games (36%), and more things for kids to do (34%) – each receive the support of one-third of children.

As previously discussed, many children – especially those ages 15-17 – view increased mental health support as important to improving their communities.

Several other options were presented, but were selected by fewer than one-third of children:

**Pick up to three that you think are most important for young people like you in your community today**

- More drug and alcohol abuse education for young people: 31%
- More focus on physical health: 28%
- Do more to prevent child abuse and neglect: 19%
- More support for indigenous children: 9%
- More support for immigrant and refugee children: 8%

**Necessary programs according to adults**

Children’s views on issues that affect them are certainly valuable – especially considering that three-quarters of kids (77%) and almost six-in-ten adults (57%) say young people don’t have enough say currently on the big issues that affect them.

Ultimately, however, it is adults who have a greater capacity to affect changes in policy through voting. This suggests that children’s lack of voice among policymakers may be something Canadians have a desire to address. However, while four-in-ten (43%) children would like to see the voting age dropped...
from 18 to 16, enthusiasm for this idea drops substantially among older groups. Only one-in-ten Canadians over 55 support this.

So, what do adults say is the best way to improve the lot of children in Canada?

Ranking proposals on a five-point scale, where 5 is necessary, 3 is nice to have, and 1 is unnecessary, several responses receive high support. By subtracting the percentage of respondents saying 1 or 2 from those saying 4 or 5, the Angus Reid Institute established a ranking score of top needs according to adults.

In your opinion, how necessary or not each one of these is for young people in Canada today?

Necessity Score shown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposal</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More mental health support for young people</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More programs to prevent child abuse and neglect</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More drug and alcohol abuse education for kids</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better programs to prevent child health problems like diabetes and obesity</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More financial support for families living below the poverty line</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better programs to prevent bullying</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mental health ranks at the top of list. Two-in-three (66%) adults say more mental health support for young people is necessary, while just 8 per cent say it isn’t needed (66 minus 8 nets a necessity score of 58). This mirrors responses from children as reported earlier, where 45 per cent said they would personally like more help on this front.
Other top priorities

High numbers of Canadian adults (64%) say that more programs to prevent child abuse and neglect are necessary. The Canadian Medical Association Journal reports that one-in-three (32%) Canadians experienced some form of child abuse, and that this abuse correlates highly with mental health disorders later in life. The costs associated with long-term impacts, both mentally and physically, are estimated to be upward of $20 billion. Just one-in-ten (9%) adults say an expansion of programs to prevent abuse is unnecessary.

Drug and alcohol abuse education rates third in necessity, driven largely by parents. While overall this issue garners a necessity score of 52, this jumps to 59 among those with children, and drops to 44 among non-parents. Mental health on the other hand, is also rated as a 59 for parents but receives a 56 among non-parents, pushing it to the top of the list.

Adults are also largely supportive of two measures that children rank very highly – more funding for families living in poverty, and programs to prevent bullying.

Lower rated priorities
There are six policy options that receive significantly less support, garnering them necessity scores of less than 33.

In your opinion, how necessary or not each one of these is for young people in Canada today?

Necessity score shown

- More services for indigenous children: 32
- More after-school recreation programs: 28
- Move ahead with a national child care program: 16
- Increase child tax benefits for families with kids: 15
- More early childhood and pre-school programs: 8
- More services for immigrant and refugee children: -4

The two areas where non-parents show a notably higher level of support than parents are the prospects of creating more services for indigenous children and more services or immigrant and refugee children. This suggests that, having no children of their own to prioritize, they are more likely to choose programs that affect a smaller percentage of Canadians, or new Canadians. Overall, services for immigrant and refugee children is the only option that receives more respondents saying unnecessary than necessary.

In your opinion, how necessary or not each one of these is for young people in Canada today?

Necessity score shown

- More services for immigrant and refugee children: -12
- More services for indigenous children: 32

Policy implementation

Canadians were asked about three different proposals that some people have suggested could help deliver the priorities they have outlined as most important. These examples are taken from other nations which, on a comparative basis, are thriving in children’s well-being metrics compared to Canada. As they are considered best practice within the advocacy community, these options were presented to Canadians with a description to gauge enthusiasm for each one.
• **A National Children’s Commissioner** who would raise the profile of children’s issues, promote their interests and speak on their behalf. This type of office has been established in more than 60 countries including Sweden, the United Kingdom and New Zealand.

• **A National Strategy for Children** which would outline objectives and monitor progress on issues related to childhood well-being and the funding required to achieve objectives.

• **A National Children’s Budget** which would be created so that Canadians can track what is allocated and spent on programs and policies for children.

There is strong support for additional programming in the areas mentioned in the preceding section, but as to which of these vehicles should deliver such policies, less common ground is found. In each of the cases presented, the largest number of respondents choose a ‘3,’ meaning they think the programs would be nice to have, but won’t go as far as to say that they’re necessary.

The second most popular response from Canadians is to say that each of these is “necessary”. Roughly one-in-three Canadians say this, a greater number than the approximately one-in-five who say each is “unnecessary”.

**What is your overall view of each of these proposals?**

![Chart showing responses to proposals](chart.png)

Using a necessity score to assess these options, A National Strategy for Children is the most palatable with a score of 15. Slightly less support is shown for creating a position for a National Children’s Commissioner, which scores a 10. These scores are all noticeably lower than the necessity scores for specific issues shown in the preceding section, due to such a large proportion of respondents selecting a 3 value. This suggests that Canadians are more positive than negative on each issue, but don’t feel as strongly about any option specifically.
The Angus Reid Institute (ARI) was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research organization established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.

Children First Canada is a national non-profit organization, mobilizing Canadians to care for, protect and empower children. They have a bold and ambitious vision to make Canada a world-leading country where all of our kids thrive. By harnessing the strength of the many organizations committed to improving the lives of Canada’s children, they will take the lead in building public awareness and promoting public policies that ensure our children’s wellbeing.

For detailed Adult results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, click here.

For detailed Children’s results by age, gender, and region click here.

For detailed results by Parental Status and Childhood Rating click here.