

# CANADA'S YOUTH POLICY



# FOREWORD BY THE MINISTER OF YOUTH

Young Canadians are the most educated, connected and diverse generation this country has ever seen. They are changing our communities, challenging the status quo, and taking the lead on building a better, fairer, and more sustainable future.

I believe in the strength of young people and their power to create positive change. In 2015, I chose to become Minister of Youth to underscore my commitment to young Canadians and to make sure their concerns are at the centre of Government decision-making. To further my commitment to youth, I created Canada's first Prime Minister's Youth Council. The council is made up of a diverse group of young leaders who have different lived experiences and who represent communities from all regions of Canada. They provide me and the Government with advice on issues of importance to young Canadians.

I've met with young Canadians all around the country. Many are anxious about what the future may hold: they're worried about challenges with mental health, whether they'll be able to enjoy a good career in an increasingly competitive workforce, or afford a home in a costly housing market. Many are concerned that decision makers are not taking enough action to fight climate change and protect the environment for their generation and the next. Young people not only want leaders who raise and act on these issues—they want leaders who tackle these challenges in partnership with young people.

That is why, together, we developed Canada's first-ever youth policy. This policy reflects the values and priorities of young Canadians, gives young people a voice in matters important to them, and creates more opportunities for young people to build a stronger and more inclusive Canada.

I thank all young Canadians for their hard work and dedication in making Canada's first-ever youth policy a reality. We wouldn't be here without you.

The Right Honourable Justin  
Trudeau

Prime Minister of Canada and  
Minister of Youth



# INTRODUCTION

**“EVERY YOUNG PERSON SHOULD BE AFFORDED  
THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE THE BEST VERSION OF  
THEMSELVES.”**

**—YOUTH PARTICIPANT, 2018 YOUTH CONSULTATIONS**

Young Canadians are one of Canada’s most important resources. Youth represent one third of the Canadian population and reflect Canada’s entire diversity. They are a group of dynamic, vibrant and innovative individuals who are finding new ways to have their voices heard and effect the change they wish to see in the world.

Adolescence can be a period of vulnerability as young people transition from the dependence of childhood to the independence of adulthood. During this time, young people take control of their health and education, enter the job market and become independent members of society. Young people’s experiences can have lasting impacts on their future health, social and economic outcomes. When provided with appropriate supports, young people can reach their full potential, to the benefit of all Canadians.

As a country, we must respect and value young people’s opinions. Almost all government policies and decisions have an impact on young people’s lives and youth have the

right to influence these decisions, both individually and collectively.

Investing in youth is also in Canada’s social and economic interest. Multiple perspectives strengthen decision-making and policy development by encouraging innovation, creativity and change. Including the unique perspectives of young people will improve federal policies and programs, including youth-specific services. Canada’s economy depends on the participation of young people and empowering them to take part will diversify our economy, making it more competitive and sustainable. Furthermore, involving young people in political processes will help build trust in democratic institutions, in turn protecting Canada’s democracy.

Recognizing the significant contributions young people have to make, governments and organizations around the world have taken action to amplify youth voices. Youth policies are effective tools that provide a coordinated focus on improving youth outcomes and giving them a chance to influence decisions that affect them now, and will affect them in the future.

Canada's Youth Policy reflects the values of young Canadians and represents a whole-of-government approach aimed at improving youth outcomes and involving young people in federal decision-making. Supporting youth requires a collaborative approach, as the issues they face are complex and interconnected. The Government of Canada will continue to work with all levels of government, Indigenous leadership, youth-serving organizations and youth themselves to make sure young Canadians have the necessary supports, tools and opportunities to reach their full potential.

## YOUNG CANADIANS SHAPED CANADA'S FIRST YOUTH POLICY

In 2018, the Government of Canada launched a national conversation with youth. Young people discussed the issues that affect their lives, the types of supports they need to succeed, and the ways they wish to be engaged. Youth were encouraged to participate online, attend in-person roundtables, or host their own discussions and submit their ideas to the Government.

More than 5,000 young Canadians took part in the national conversation, resulting in more than 10,000 individual responses and 68 submissions from youth-led discussions and youth-serving organizations. Partnerships with youth engagement experts and local youth-serving organizations ensured the Government adopted a youth-centered engagement approach that resulted in the participation of youth with diverse identities, abilities, backgrounds, cultures and economic and language profiles.

Young Canadians then analyzed the responses from the national dialogue to shape key elements of the youth policy.

The Government heard loud and clear that young people want to have a say in decisions that affect their lives and impact their personal outcomes. Canadian youth identified six priority areas: Leadership and Impact; Health and Wellness; Innovation, Skills and Learning; Employment; Truth and Reconciliation; and Environment and Climate Action. Youth are particularly passionate about taking action in these areas.

Many young Canadians believe Canada's strength lies in its diversity and that the inclusion of all people leads to a healthier, more productive and more resilient country. They feel strongly that more work needs to be done to eliminate discrimination and structural racism, advance a culture of equity, and promote full participation of all young people in Canada.

The What We Heard report summarizes the findings of our national dialogue with youth and can be found online.







# VISION

The Government of Canada's vision is that young people be equipped to live healthy and fulfilling lives and feel empowered to create positive change for themselves, their communities and the world.

# OBJECTIVES

In order to advance this vision for young Canadians, the Government of Canada commits to:

## CREATING MEANINGFUL OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH VOICES TO BE HEARD AND RESPECTED

Young people are more likely to participate when they feel their voices are valued and they are contributing to change. The Government will actively seek young people's perspectives as it shapes federal priorities, policies and programs and will adopt engagement approaches that are relevant and meaningful to youth to ensure they feel safe, respected and heard. Federal departments will develop their own engagement opportunities for youth, which will include the participation of young people in working groups, advisory roles, or formal consultations.

## PROVIDING ACCESSIBLE SUPPORTS THAT MEET THE EVOLVING NEEDS OF YOUTH

Young people face a wide array of challenges and opportunities at different stages of their lives. They need access to appropriate and culturally sensitive supports that meet their evolving needs in order to be equipped to succeed in our rapidly changing world. The Government will work with young people to ensure supports remain relevant to their needs and are designed and delivered in ways that are accessible to them, in all of their diversity.

**“ALL CHILDREN AND YOUTH SHOULD FEEL LIKE THEIR EXPERIENCES, KNOWLEDGE, AND BELIEFS ARE VALUED BY ALL ADULTS.”**

**— YOUTH PARTICIPANT, 2018 YOUTH CONSULTATIONS**

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following principles will guide the implementation of the youth policy objectives:

## YOUTH HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE HEARD AND RESPECTED

Young people have the right to influence decisions that affect them now and will affect them in the future. Canada is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), a set of rights for young people up to 18 years old. The UNCRC reaffirms that young people “have the right to an opinion and adults have a responsibility to listen and take them seriously”. Canada stands behind the Convention’s commitments and vows to respect the voices of all youth.

## YOUTH HAVE THE RIGHT TO EQUAL ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITIES AND SUPPORTS

Canada is fortunate to have an increasingly diverse population of young people. The Government will apply principles of equality, including Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+), when creating engagement opportunities and supports for youth. GBA+ assesses how diverse groups of people experience government initiatives and considers many identity factors like sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, education, income, culture, geography and age. GBA+ considers young people in the design and delivery of government initiatives, including youth-specific programming. This aims to mitigate inequalities and ensure the Government is responding to the particular needs and circumstances of all young people.

## WHEN YOUTH REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL, IT BENEFITS ALL CANADIANS

Supporting youth and amplifying their voices will help build a stronger and more inclusive Canada. Government policies and the Canadian economy will benefit from the richness of young people’s diversity and their passion for innovation. Treating young people as equal members of society will strengthen social cohesion and help build stronger communities. Inclusiveness also leads to better decisions and can bring faster change. Stronger civic participation will also help build trust in democratic institutions, protecting Canada’s democracy.

# INDIGENOUS YOUTH

**“INDIGENOUS GROUPS  
HAVE THE LARGEST AND FASTEST GROWING  
YOUTH POPULATION, CANADA NEEDS THEIR  
ENERGY AND INPUT!”**

**– YOUTH PARTICIPANT, 2018 YOUTH CONSULTATIONS**

Indigenous youth are leaders of their communities and are the country's fastest growing demographic. They are a diverse group of young people who face unique realities and challenges. Too often, Indigenous youth grow up without access to clean drinking water, affordable food, adequate housing or quality health and education services. In addition, First Nations, Inuit and Métis youth continue to experience racism and discrimination and carry the intergenerational trauma of Canada's colonial history. These circumstances affect young people's ability to thrive and can have lasting impacts on their health, social and economic futures.

Indigenous youth have powerful voices that must be heard and respected. Their valuable perspectives

will strengthen priorities and policies, and help ensure they have access to sustainable and culturally sensitive supports and opportunities.

Canada's youth policy reflects the rights and principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action. Perhaps most importantly, the youth policy reflects diverse Indigenous youth voices from across Canada.

The Government of Canada values its relationship with Indigenous youth and vows to amplify their voices to ensure that decisions respect Canada's different cultures, traditions and values.



# YOUTH- IDENTIFIED PRIORITIES



YOUNG PEOPLE MADE IT CLEAR THAT A FEDERAL YOUTH POLICY SHOULD LEAD TO ACTION. THEY IDENTIFIED SIX PRIORITY AREAS: LEADERSHIP AND IMPACT; HEALTH AND WELLNESS; INNOVATION, SKILLS AND LEARNING; EMPLOYMENT; TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION; AND ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE ACTION. THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA OFFERS A WIDE RANGE OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES FOR YOUTH. EXAMPLES ARE HIGHLIGHTED THROUGHOUT THE POLICY.

# LEADERSHIP AND IMPACT

“WE ARE READY TO HAVE A SEAT AT THE TABLE, WE ARE JUST WAITING FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE HEARD.”

—YOUTH PARTICIPANT, 2018 YOUTH CONSULTATIONS

Social participation and leadership is an integral part of young people’s lives. Young Canadians are deeply involved in their communities and are ready to be the champions of a more fair, diverse and inclusive nation.

Youth participation in civic life, including government, is crucial to Canada’s continued success. Through meaningful service or volunteer opportunities, young people directly support the growth of their communities and develop a sense of belonging and responsibility they carry with them into adulthood. They also gain valuable personal and professional skills that will help them later in life.

Young Canadians want a culture that respects young people’s capacities and empowers them to effect positive change. They want youth engagement opportunities to be based on principles of active learning, diversity and relevance and are eager for opportunities to assume leadership roles in their communities and within organizations. Supporting young leaders and encouraging them to be socially and civically engaged will help build an inclusive and resilient nation.

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The [Canada Service Corps](#) was created to help young Canadians gain valuable life and work skills while giving back to their communities. This program is an example of how the Government is supporting the development of young leaders.

# HEALTH AND WELLNESS

When young people are physically, mentally and emotionally well, they are better equipped to handle life's challenges and opportunities. Access to nutritious food, clean water, safe environments and quality health and education services affects young people's overall health and wellness.

Mental health is a top priority for young Canadians who are advocating for better access to affordable and quality health services. Young people are working hard to help destigmatize mental illness and promote a society that prioritizes positive mental health.

Nurturing relationships with adults and mentors can help young people navigate the challenging period of adolescence and support positive mental and emotional health. These relationships can help youth find their voice and reinforce a culture that values young people and the significant contributions they have to make.

Physical health is also an important part of overall wellbeing. Participating in physical activity and sport during adolescence is important for physical, mental, and social development. The enjoyment of play and sports enriches young people's lives, promotes a sense of belonging and encourages a healthy lifestyle.

The Government of Canada is dedicated to upholding the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child commitment to provide every child with the highest attainable standard of health. The Government will continue to work with provincial and territorial governments to ensure that health care systems continue to meet the needs of all Canadians.

**“ ALL YOUTH SHOULD BE ABLE TO  
ACHIEVE THE BEST LEVEL OF HEALTH  
POSSIBLE TO THEM NO MATTER  
THEIR LOCATION AND IDENTITY.”**

**–YOUTH PARTICIPANT, 2018 YOUTH CONSULTATIONS**

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**Budget 2019 has committed to supporting a Pan-Canadian Suicide Prevention Service to provide people across Canada with access to bilingual, 24/7 crisis support from trained responders — one of many programs that supports the health of Canadians.**

# INNOVATION, SKILLS AND LEARNING

A foundation in education and learning is a significant protective factor against negative outcomes and is essential for young people to reach economic empowerment. Young people need help from the Government to gain the education, skills and work experience they need to succeed in the global economy.

All young people deserve access to affordable quality education, no matter their circumstances. Canada is among the most educated countries in the world; however, too many youth still face barriers that prevent them from graduating from high school and pursuing post-secondary studies or skilled trades programs.

The cost of post-secondary education is a concern for youth. They are worried about the amount of debt resulting from higher education and the time it will take them to pay off student loans. Many young people in Canada must move away from home in order to pursue higher education and costs can be significant. Lowering barriers to education will help young people prepare for the competitive job market and reach economic independence.

Learning goes beyond formal education. The job market is rapidly changing and employers are looking for new skills. Youth need access to a variety of learning opportunities and relevant tools to enhance their employability. Young people will also need access to continued learning to prepare them for the jobs of tomorrow. Supporting the development of digital and technology-based skills will help young Canadians become active participants and leaders in the digital economy.

Young people want to help foster a culture that values innovation, experimentation and entrepreneurial thinking. Canada is competing with countries around the world for the most talented people, the newest technologies and the fastest-growing companies. Young people have innovative ideas to solve global challenges and are eager to transform their ideas into reality. Supporting their ingenuity will help grow the economy and help Canada remain competitive on the world stage.

**“EVERY YOUNG PERSON  
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**—YOUTH PARTICIPANT, 2018 YOUTH  
CONSULTATIONS**

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The Government offers many initiatives to support skills development. As an example, the [Youth Employment and Skills Strategy](#) (YESS) helps young people, particularly those facing barriers to employment, gain the skills and work experience they need to make a successful transition into the labour market.



# EMPLOYMENT

Youth want a Canada with an innovative economy that creates opportunities for young people to explore their diverse passions and interests. They want all young people to experience economic opportunity and be able to take control of their lives.

Young Canadians need work experience in order to enter the job market and develop a successful career or business. Providing young people with more work-integrated learning opportunities, including co-operative education placements, internships and apprenticeships, will help them gain real-world work experience and prepare for the global job market.

Young Canadians are concerned about finding long-term quality employment. Job insecurity can affect when young people reach some of life's traditional milestones like paying off student debt, having a family, buying a home and saving for retirement. Providing young people with access to lifelong learning opportunities is important as the digital age continues to advance and we increasingly shift to a skills-based economy.

Changes in the workforce have resulted in a growing number of young entrepreneurs who are seeking new ways to have a positive impact on the economy. Fostering a culture that values creativity and experimentation will encourage young people to be innovative in the workplace, in turn creating more economic opportunities for youth and all Canadians.

Canada's economy depends on the participation of young people, especially as the aging population transitions into retirement. Helping youth overcome barriers to employment will help them reach economic success and further strengthen Canada's economy.

**“EVERY YOUNG PERSON SHOULD FEEL LIKE THEY CAN TAKE CONTROL OF THEIR ECONOMIC FUTURE, REGARDLESS OF UPBRINGING AND FAMILY INCOME.”**

**—YOUTH PARTICIPANT, 2018 YOUTH CONSULTATIONS**

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The [Federal Student Work Experience Program \(FSWEP\)](#) offers bilingual work placements for youth across the federal government. It is an ongoing student recruitment program with specific inventories for Indigenous youth, young women and youth with disabilities. This is one of many Government programs to help youth successfully transition to the job market.

# TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

Many young Canadians already understand the importance of reconciliation with First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples and they hope to be the generation that mends the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians. They understand that the history and contributions of Indigenous Peoples need to be better recognized and acknowledged by all Canadians, and are eager to be better equipped to fulfill their role in the reconciliation process.

Reconciliation can be achieved in different ways with different individuals, nations, groups and communities. Young Canadians believe reconciliation should be grounded in truth, respect and healing. They believe the process should involve listening to whole truths, acknowledging past and current injustices, and respecting Indigenous Peoples' rights, values and traditions. They understand that reconciliation is an ongoing process that must reflect Indigenous worldviews and the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

Advancing reconciliation among young Canadians will help break the cycle of discrimination and build a brighter future for Indigenous Peoples and Canada as a whole.

**“CANADA NEEDS TO WORK  
HARDER TO REACH  
RECONCILIATION AND  
EQUALITY FOR ALL.”**

**—YOUTH PARTICIPANT, 2018  
YOUTH CONSULTATIONS**

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In addition to other reconciliation initiatives, [Budget 2019](#) has committed to investing in a pilot program, delivered by Canadian Roots Exchange, to advance reconciliation by bringing together Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth to promote mutual understanding and respect.

# ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE ACTION

Environment and climate change is a top priority for many young Canadians who are advocating for increased protection and conservation of the environment. Youth are conscious of the negative impacts climate change has on individual and community health and recognize that they will be the generation to deal with the consequences.

Youth are eager to have more of a say in environmental decisions and policies in order to create a Canada that reflects their environmental values. They want a Canada that protects its natural environment and

addresses climate change in a process that emphasizes reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.

Young Canadians are motivated to find innovative solutions to environmental challenges, promote sustainable practices and lifestyles, and move towards a green economy in ways that respect the rights and values of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Youth want to see further immediate action to protect the environment so that they, and future generations of Canadians, can inherit a healthy world.

**“THE WELL-BEING OF THE PLANET WILL LARGELY AFFECT THE YOUTH OF TODAY AND OF FUTURE GENERATIONS, AS THEY WILL HAVE TO DEAL WITH THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE.”**

**-YOUTH PARTICIPANT, 2018 YOUTH CONSULTATIONS**

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The [Science Horizons Youth Internship Program](#) is one of many federal initiatives that supports green jobs for youth. Through this program, young people can gain work experience in STEM (science, technology, engineering or mathematics) with an environmental focus.

# MOVING FORWARD

Canada's Youth Policy is the first step in demonstrating action on issues important to youth. It is also an important way to better prepare Canada's economy for growth. This policy highlights six priority areas: Leadership and Impact, Health and Wellness, Innovation, Skills and Learning, Employment, Truth and Reconciliation, and Environment and Climate Action. The Government of Canada will continue to engage with youth across the country to ensure these priorities, as well as federal policies and programs, remain relevant and continue to meet young people's needs.

Starting in 2020, and every four years thereafter, the Government of Canada will release a report highlighting the state of youth in Canada. Where possible, the report will include specific data on First Nations, Métis, and Inuit youth in recognition of the distinct challenges they face and the need to address the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth outcomes. The State of Youth Report will create greater awareness of how youth are doing among all Canadians and will highlight Government of Canada initiatives across the identified priority areas to help raise awareness of programming available to youth.

Canadian youth feel it is particularly important that Canada's institutions reflect our country's rich diversity. In an effort to ensure that youth are represented across the range of federal organizations, the Government of Canada will continue to increase youth representation in Governor in Council (GIC) appointments made following the Government's open, transparent and merit-based approach to selection processes that seeks to identify highly qualified candidates who are reflective of Canada's diversity.

In order to achieve this, the Government will work with organizational heads, Chairpersons of Boards and decision makers to promote the importance of having youth GIC appointees in appropriate and available positions. Over the next five years, the Government of Canada will commit to having 75% of crown corporations include a young person on their board.

