The kids are not alright.
It's time for Canada to measure up!

2016 A landmark report on the state of Canada's children
Canada is one of the best countries in which to grow up. Kids who live in Canada have won the lottery. Canada takes good care of our youth. These are great statements and most people believe them, but sadly they are not always true.

Children First Canada undertook a national study on the state of children in Canada in conjunction with the Angus Reid Institute, and with the support of many of our partners. We surveyed adults as well as children, to better understand the current challenges facing kids and to gauge public support for action.

This report contains a summary of the key findings of that survey along with the results of additional research on the quality of life for Canadian children. Together, the results paint a startling picture about the state of childhood in our country and bust several myths about what it is like to grow up in Canada.
We want to start a conversation – in classrooms, at dinner tables, at water coolers, in boardrooms, in newsrooms, and in the House of Commons - about the state of childhood in Canada and of the urgent need for change. The data in this report should make all Canadians very uncomfortable. Parents and children, citizens and leaders, should be angry that our country is letting our children down. Canada is considered the fifth most prosperous nation in the world, but how can a country prosper if it leaves its kids behind? We can and we must do better. This report helps to point the way forward.

Investing in kids is the right thing to do, but it also makes good economic sense for today and for tomorrow: every single dollar invested in our children's early years saves nine dollars in future spending on health care and social services. What's critical right now is the social and political will to make it happen.

It is not enough to say that children are our future. Those words mean nothing unless backed up by concrete actions to invest in children right now. Today, there are more than six million children in Canada, and all of them matter.

Please join us! Together we can make this the best place in the world for our children to grow up.

Sara L Austin is the Founder and President/CEO of Children First Canada, a new national nonprofit organization with a mandate to be a strong, independent voice for all of Canada’s children. Sara’s commitment to children has earned her the prestigious Top 25 Women of Influence and the Top 100 Most Powerful Women of Canada.
Perception:  

Most Canadians think that this is one of the best countries on earth for kids to grow up. The survey found that two-thirds of adults ranked Canada within the top 10 countries to raise a child (26 per cent said top five, and 38 per cent said top five-to-ten). Yet this couldn’t be further from the truth.

Reality:  

Canada is the fifth most prosperous nation in the world, but children are not reaping the benefits. According to UNICEF’s global rankings for child wellbeing, Canada is in the underwhelming middle spot amongst affluent nations overall. That puts Canada behind leaders such as Scandinavian countries, but more surprising, behind countries that are less prosperous than us such as the Czech Republic, Portugal and the UK.  

Canada ranks 17th overall out of 29 nations for children’s wellbeing, and what’s even more alarming is that we drop to the bottom rankings on several key measures for kids’ health and safety.

How does Canada measure up?  

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Reality</th>
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<tr>
<td>2nd for educational achievement</td>
<td>1st for bullying and child poverty</td>
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<tr>
<td>3rd for low smoking rates amongst children/youth</td>
<td>21st for bullying and child poverty</td>
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<tr>
<td>7th for exercise</td>
<td>22nd for infant mortality</td>
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<td>15th for children’s material well-being</td>
<td>26th for child inequality</td>
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<td>17th overall for children’s well-being</td>
<td>27th for child health and safety</td>
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<td>28th for immunization</td>
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More than just numbers!  

Millions of children are falling through the cracks. They each have a name and their lives and futures are diminished each day by preventable causes.

1 in 5 children in Canada live in poverty - that’s 1.25 million kids in total

1 in 3 Canadians have experienced some form of child abuse. Child abuse and neglect costs Canada an estimated $21.5 billion annually.

1 in 5 children have considered committing suicide

1 child dies every nine hours due to preventable injuries.

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[1] Legatum Prosperity Index, prosperity.com/rankings  
Children from all walks of life are affected, but specific groups of children are particularly vulnerable, including: indigenous children, kids from single parent homes, refugee children and youth in foster care.

In fact, UNICEF ranks Canada as one of the most unequal places to raise a child, placing 26th out of 35 wealthy nations for “fairness for children”. [7]

One noteworthy finding from the study showed that non-parents show a higher level of support than parents when it comes to the prospects of creating more services for indigenous children and more services for 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.

“...I really believed that the greatness of the country and of our joint society ... is bound up in the possibility of raising a generation of First Nations who never have to recover from their childhoods, and a group of non-aboriginal children who never have to say they're sorry.”

- Cindy Blackstock

DISCRIMINATION & INEQUALITY

40% of indigenous children live in poverty
32% of immigrant children live in poverty
22% of children living in poverty are visible minorities
13% percent of non-immigrant and non-racialized children live in poverty

Percentage of poverty across races in Canada[8]

Approximately three-quarters of Canadians (73% of adults and 77% of children) say that young people in Canada need more support to safeguard their wellbeing and fulfill their potential.

Almost two-thirds of Canadians don’t feel we do enough to help people living in poverty in Canada.

Children and adults agree on the need for urgent action:

- Adults named mental health and prevention of child abuse as the two areas in most need of action.
- Half of all parents (50 per cent) say that a lack of money is hurting their children, and 45 per cent say that parenting is a bigger challenge than they were expecting.
- 4 in 5 adults (80 per cent) think that the cost of licensed day care is pricing out the families who need it most
- 6 in 10 adults (58 per cent) say they are worried about the next generation getting a good job or finding a satisfying career

Children ranked bullying, mental health and better support for those living in poverty as their top concern.

What adults have to say:

- One in five kids said they don’t feel safe and supported in school.
- One in five kids rated their friendships with their peers as fair, poor or very poor.
- More than one in three kids said the quality of after school programs available is either fair (26 per cent) or poor (8 per cent).

What kids have to say:
CHILDREN ON THE AGENDA: PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVING THE LIVES OF CANADIAN CHILDREN

We must invest in the health and safety of Canada's children. Children deserve a brighter future and we all win when children succeed. We need investment by the government and by every Canadian to make this happen.

Research shows that investing in early childhood directly influences economic, health, and social outcomes for individuals and society; conversely, adverse experiences in early childhood create deficits in skills and abilities that drive down productivity and increase social costs, adding to financial deficits borne by the public.\(^9\)

The good news is that Canadians care about the wellbeing of children and support the urgent need for change:

- Nearly nine-in-ten Canadians say that investing in children will pay off and save the need for additional expenditures in the future.
- Children and adults alike call for more support for youth mental health, greater action to prevent bullying, and more funding for families in poverty to increase the level of childhood wellbeing in this country. Adults also identified prevention of child abuse as a top priority.
- Canadians recognize that kids have a key role in driving change; three-quarters of kids (77 per cent) and almost two-thirds of adults (57 per cent) say that young people don’t currently have enough say on the big issues that affect them.

The research showed that there is less agreement when it comes to matters such setting limits on the physical punishment of children, as many believe this is still the prerogative of parents. This points to the need for greater public education about the short and long term impacts of physical punishment on children and on the need to equip parents with the knowledge and skills for positive parenting.

While Canadians may not always agree about what’s in the best interests of children, we need to be guided by the best evidence available and involve children in decisions that affect their lives.

The research also showed strong support for public policy changes to improve the lives of children, such as establishing a federal Children’s Commissioner, a Children’s Budget, and a National Strategy for Children.

A large number of Canadians also believe that the government should take the lead in setting laws that are in the best interests of children, even when it may be controversial. For instance, Canada is ranked 29th globally for its low immunization rates and 73 per cent of Canadians think there should be a law that mandates vaccinations for children.

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\(^{9}\) The Economics of Inequality The Value of Early Childhood Education, James J. Heckman, 2011
It's Time for Canada to Measure Up!

Here are some immediate steps that will help make Canada a world-leading country for kids to grow up.

Calls to action for government:

1. **Every child deserves a champion:** Establish a national children's commissioner – an independent official to raise the profile of children in Canada, promote the best interests of children with government and hold them accountable, and speak with and on behalf of children.

2. **Every child needs resources to thrive:** Publish a children's budget to track the national funding that is allocated and invested in evidence based solutions for children.

3. **Every child deserves a flying start at life:** Create a national strategy to improve the lives of Canada’s children and measure progress over time.

4. **Every child has rights:** Teach children and youth their rights and responsibilities, and ensure that Canada's laws protect the rights of children. If violations occur, ensure that children receive timely justice.

5. **Every child has a voice:** Involve children and youth in shaping public policies that affect their lives.

We’re calling on Canadians to put children first:

- **Raise your hand:** Volunteer with groups and organizations that are investing in kids – children's charities, children's hospitals, and schools to name a few.

- **Raise your voice:** Raise awareness within your school, workplace and community, motivate others to get involved, and speak up to hold the government accountable to protect the rights of children.

- **Raise funds for children:** Invest your own charitable dollars in organizations that help children and inspire others to invest in kids.
Our Council of Champions
We are proud to be announcing a Council of Champions for Children, a diverse group of leaders who share a common passion and commitment to drive measurable change for children.

Barbara Fallon (Fraser Mustard Institute, Univ. of Toronto); Dr. Cathie Scott (Policy Wise for Children & Families); Gwen Burrows (Sick Kids Foundation); Christine Hampson (Sandbox Project); Dr. Joan Durrant (Max Rady College of Medicine, Univ. of Winnipeg); Lisa Wolff (UNICEF Canada); Nichad Khanna (Student’s Commission); Rachel Gouin (Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada); Ron Enson (Ensom & Associates).

Our Partners
We are uniting and leveraging Canada’s leading children’s charities, children’s hospitals, research institutions, corporations and community leaders to speak with a united voice for Canada’s children. All of our partners contributed to this study and we are grateful for their support!

Our Youth Ambassadors
At the heart of Children First Canada are the voices of kids and we are pleased to have Youth Ambassadors who are working on the frontlines to make this a better country for all children.

A special thanks to the following individuals for their participation in the advisory committee for this report
Barbara Fallon (Fraser Mustard Institute, Univ. of Toronto); Dr. Cathie Scott (Policy Wise for Children & Families); Gwen Burrows (Sick Kids Foundation); Christine Hampson (Sandbox Project); Dr. Joan Durrant (Max Rady College of Medicine, Univ. of Winnipeg); Lisa Wolff (UNICEF Canada); Nichad Khanna (Student’s Commission); Rachel Gouin (Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada); Ron Enson (Ensom & Associates).

Donors
We are grateful for the support of our donors who are committed to helping make Canada the best place in the world for kids to grow up, and who generously funded this research.

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Our Partners

Our Youth Ambassadors

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Donors
Children First Canada has 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, we will take the lead in building public awareness and promoting public policies that ensure our children's wellbeing.

Put children first! Pledge online today.
Visit us at childrenfirstcanada.com