

Foresight Report



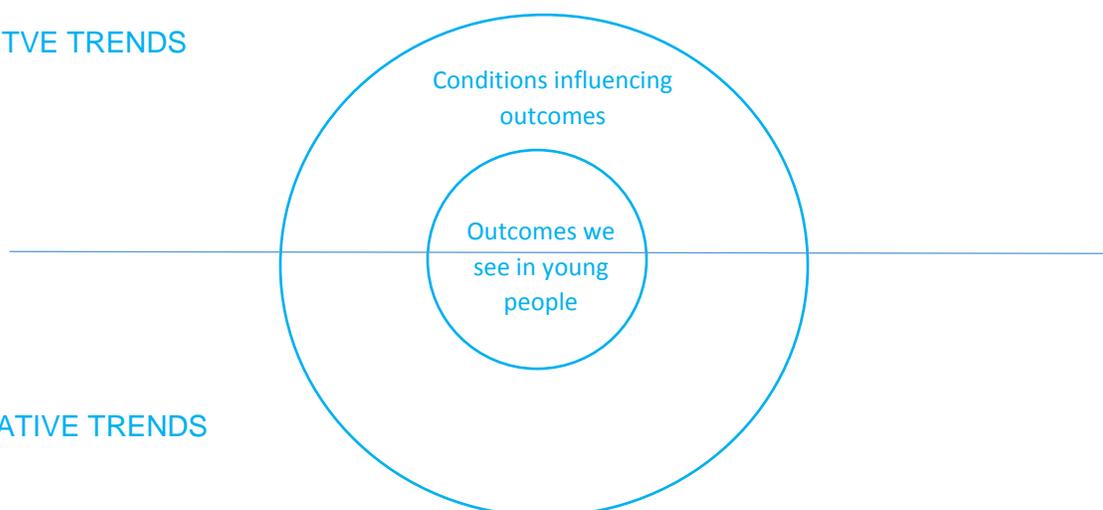
What's the state of children and youth in Canada?

To anticipate possible and desirable futures and support a more ambitious and comprehensive vision of child and youth well-being in Canada, UNICEF Canada is using Foresight. Scanning and pooling collective insights from experts and people with diverse vantage points is a type of Foresight technique.

Participants at the Sandbox Summit (6 April 2017) used “Trend Identification” to identify trends shaping the lives of young people, what is causing them, the signals we see them manifest, how pervasive they are, and the implications are for children and youth and for others. Participants began by describing:

- What seems to be improving in child and youth well-being
- What seems to be eroding or worsening in child and youth well-being
- Emerging issues they didn't see five years ago
- What they are most concerned with

POSITIVE TRENDS



NEGATIVE TRENDS

From these insights, eight key trends were identified – but among participants, five groups of twelve focused on the “screen time” trend. Many of the causes of these trends are similar and many involve technology in some way. There is rising concern about mental and physical well-being within a rapidly changing society, but signs of adaptability in many young people and a perceived increase in the response of services despite systemic barriers including the effective use of information and collaboration:

TRENDS INFLUENCING CHILD AND YOUTH WELL-BEING IN CANADA					
Description	Type or Cause	Signals	Rate of Adoption	Most Affected	Implications
1. Abundance of information – lack of impact					
Information is increasing exponentially and “duplicating” but is often conflicting unclear and not credible or curated to support knowledge and action	Social Technological	Information abundance and duplication Increase in the number of child-serving organizations Confusion among potential users	All	Parents Children & youth Non-experts	Confusion Isolation
2. Stifled creativity					
Children & youth don’t have	Social Technological	Structured activity	Many	Children & youth, especially ages 6-16	Lack of spontaneity; difficulties

opportunities for unscheduled play/leisure with other children	Environmental	Children's and youth time and space are over-planned and programmed			functioning outside of routines
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3. A focus on children's health

Growing number of organizations involved in diverse health issues/causes Government involvement in health promotion and protection (e.g., curbing food and beverage marketing)	Social Technological Environmental Economic Political Values	Number of organizations involved Number of Public Service Announcements Number of youth aware and involved	Some	Organizations and some youth – but not enough momentum nationally	Potential to help youth on diverse issues relevant to them, but scale is limited
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4. Screen time (x 5)

Technology is pervasive Generational gaps in knowledge and use of technology Young people aren't playing outside	Social Technological Economic Values	Increased access to Internet and social media Integration of technology into daily life – screen time increase, sometimes with dependency Pressure to have access everywhere, always Access determined by economic means More need for digital literacy and good modelling	Most or All	Ages 4-30, especially in urban areas Age 11 and up are particularly affected	Less sleep – more stress; less exercise – more obesity Misinformation, information overload, information silos/selective consumption and surveillance Kids distracted and sometimes at risk, but also more resourceful Strained relationships with parents, but youth have more online community and connectedness
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5. Diversity sensitivity					
With increased diversity, marginalization of some groups, online and in the world	Social Technological Political Values	Kids are divided by race in high school hallways Intolerance Cyberbullying	All	Current and next generation	Xenophobia, lack of acceptance of some on the basis of race
6. Increased stress					
Pressure and anxiety, including peer pressure Fear about the future – earning\$ Intense competition Brand/image of beauty, success	Social Technological Economic Values	Anxiety Depression Checking out Manic activity	Many to Most	Young people who are isolated, without peer, family and community support	Misdiagnosis of mental health
7. Systemic barriers					
Systemic barriers make it incredibly difficult for service organizations to support young people	Economic Political Values	Silos Inconsistency Waitlists Youth falling through cracks	Many	Those who are already marginalized	Crisis orientation vs. prevention Insufficient service even in crisis
8. Mental health					
Mental health support including mentorship, counselling, networking and education	Social Technological Environmental Political Values	Technology advances Civic engagement School curriculum	Many	Children from early development, young teens, parents/guardians	More awareness and focus Not enough availability of training/access for people in support roles to young people with mental health issues

These eight trends were drawn by participants from a much larger pool of trends they identified, below. Some of these trends are seen different ways; for instance, access to online information and community is a double-edged sword for relationships, health and freedom. Some see parent-child relationships improving and others perceive a decline, though the age of the child and social context might matter. Some perceive the negative impacts of rising income inequality at the same time as increasing inclusion and diversity. There is more access to information as well as misinformation for young people, caregivers and service providers are challenged to break through. There are divergent ideas about how services should be provided, such as the role of schools. It is clear that the physical, emotional, spiritual and mental health of children and youth are deeply interconnected, and there is much to do to align supportive practices, services and policies in a rapidly changing world. Participants were very focused on changes they see in children and their families, and the implications for services, while some perceived the impact of broader social and political conditions and pressed the need for the “system” to change as well as focusing on individuals to adapt.

NEGATIVE TRENDS

- *Over-scheduled kids*
- *Structured play*
- *Lack of outdoor time/play*
- *Sedentary behaviour*
- *Less walking*
- *Fear of letting children play increasing*
- *Concerns about injury – concussion*
- *Constant connection to technology – screen time*
- *Prevalence of social media*
- *Use of social media at younger ages*
- *Screen time interfering with play time*
- *Social media seems harmful to mental and physical health*
- *Too much information*
- *Stifled creativity, social skills*
- *Shorter attention span – scared to fail*
- *Cyberbullying*
- *Gaming addictions*
- *Addiction to technology*
- *Pressure to manage their “brand” on social media*
- *Unrealistic expectations of what life should be due to social media*
- *Kids are barraged by information but not sure how to evaluate it for “truth”*
- *Cost of organized sport*
- *Decreased physical activity*
- *Safety is important but is inhibiting activity – need a balance*
- *Decline in face-to-face communication skills*
- *Decline in the family dinner – to sit down and share, face-to-face*
- *Digital divide*
- *Lack of youth self-awareness and belonging*

POSITIVE TRENDS

- *Easier access to information (Internet vs. library)*
- *More information for digital literacy and citizenship*
- *Youth are tech savvy*
- *Youth are savvy and have more resources*
- *Kids are very digitally literate and connected*
- *More access to health information online*
- *Increased online collaboration (gaming, education)*
- *More awareness of mental health*
- *More autonomy*
- *More online connections*
- *Safety nets*
- *More likely that youth will ask for help*
- *More empowerment of youth, advocacy, networking and “worldliness”*
- *Youth are more sensitive and aware of identity politics*
- *Improving parent-child relationships*
- *Youth are not best friends with their parents – want to succeed on their own initiative*
- *Adults who listen to and understand youth*
- *More people care*
- *Increased awareness of importance of culture/identity*
- *Increasing inclusion*
- *Diversity awareness and relationships*
- *Accessibility awareness*
- *Acceptance of differences in gender identity*
- *Youth activism*
- *Youth engagement*
- *Youth more confident advocating for themselves*
- *Increased understanding of physical literacy*

- *Inability of adults to engage with youth*
- *Loss of community connection*
- *Lack of self-love*
- *Stress*
- *Expectations*
- *Anxiety*
- *Stress and anxiety in children under age 5 – less carefree*
- *Depression*
- *Indigenous youth suicide rate remains intractable*
- *Bullying*
- *Lack of youth resilience*
- *Children’s sleeping patterns are poorer – results in stress, educational issues*
- *Youth are more stressed with school and employment, pressure to earn*
- *Pressure to know what they want to “do” by grade 11*
- *Stress applying and getting accepted to post-secondary education*
- *Youth employment – focus begins earlier and is an opportunity cost*
- *Managing adulthood*
- *More allergies*
- *Anti-vaccination – parent misinformation*
- *Worsening obesity*
- *Disconnect from nature*
- *Climate change, air and water quality*
- *Parents are more worried*
- *Parents don’t teach basic life skills – do too many things for their children*
- *More single and dual working parents*
- *Living across two households – divorced/separated families*
- *Insecure employment leads to stress – fewer benefits*
- *Families feel isolated despite information and services*
- *Lack of change in children’s food environments despite knowledge*
- *Child care costs are higher than ever*
- *Need for better child welfare systems*
- *Lack of coordinated mental health efforts*
- *Behaviours worsen without support and tools*
- *Difficult for kids to access counselling (e.g. 1 year wait)*
- *Lack of change/innovation in schools despite what we know about well-being*
- *Off-loading of health/mental health to schools*
- *Lack of priorities in the school system*
- *Fewer opportunities for sport at school*
- *Lack of investment by governments in school nutrition*

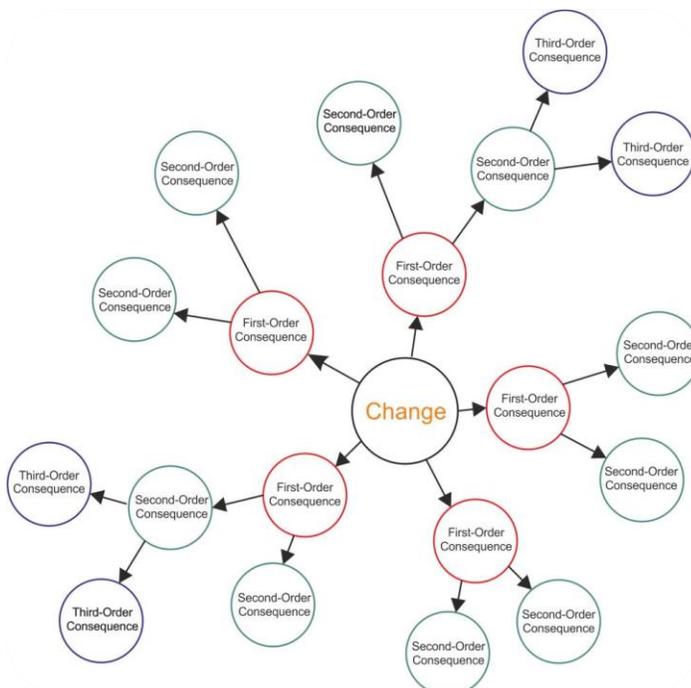
- Increase in physical activity
- Focus on injury prevention
- Diminishing stigma of mental health
- More concern about mental health
- Easier to teach health
- Mindfulness, meditation and the use of calming the mind
- Inclusive community programs
- Communities starting to work collaboratively
- More mental health awareness in school curricula
- School systems recognizing need for mental health accommodations
- More organizations supporting mental health
- Use of technology in service provision
- More access to affordable physical activity
- Accessible outdoor playgrounds
- Return of board games/traditional play/family time
- Better school food programs
- Slight improvement in obesity rate
- Value of early learning
- Now able to apply for funding with other service organizations
- Slightly lower child poverty rate
- Canada Child Benefit
- Housing First policy
- Availability of resources
- Higher civic engagement
- More awareness of a broad child well-being crisis in Canada
- More of a global perspective and connection

NEUTRAL/UNDETERMINED TRENDS

- Kids’ experiences are not the same as their parents
- Kids are growing up faster
- Relationships are changing with social media
- Bullying is more of a problem and more of a focus
- Parental engagement with their children
- Abundance of resources

- Duplication of services
- Addiction to/abuse of opioids
- Food deserts – no easy access to healthy food
- Skewed body image and expectations
- One-dimensional athletes – too many kids focused on one sport, full-time
- Limited sport participation for youth with less skill
- Increasing complexity of needs
- Exclusion of Indigenous peoples
- Few gains in equality
- Islamophobia
- Lack of holistic well-being
- Negative adult influences
- Tightening of regulations, rules, “no-fun police”
- Influence of pop culture
- Marketing to children – consumption of sugar
- Hypersexualization of young girls
- Dramatic divide in income
- Increase in income inequality
- Growth of temporary, low-paid, part-time work
- Rise of start-up culture
- Navigating the new definition of “career”

Foresight techniques have many variations and applications for policies, programs, services and other decisions and actions. There are techniques for building on trend analysis, as well as different approaches to anticipating and planning for the future.



UNICEF uses Foresight with the participation of children and youth, who will live longest in and with the future.

For more information and ideas:

UNICEF, 2016. *Adolescents Shaping their Future: A Foresight Toolkit* (by request)

<http://www.teachthefuture.org>