

State of Youth Report

Submitted to Canada's Youth Secretariat and the Department of Canadian Heritage

By: Canadian Coalition for Youth, Peace & Security (CCYPS)

On December 22, 2020

On behalf of the members of the Canadian Coalition for Youth, Peace & Security (CCYPS) we would like to extend our thanks for an inclusive and open consultation process regarding the first State of Youth Report following the [2018 Canadian Youth Policy](#). Following our consultation session on the "Leading and Impact" theme hosted by the Students Commission on December 17, 2020, we wish to share additional feedback and recommendations on each thematic priority and overall progress.

Overall

We stress the need to recognize and mainstream [Youth, Peace and Security \(YPS\)](#) principles in the overall application of the National Youth Policy, in its implementation, funding, monitoring, and reporting. Mainstreaming YPS in Canada is fundamental to shifting our country from its current state of [negative peace to positive peace](#) - where all of us can thrive.

We believe that to ensure strong engagement from young people, grassroots and youth-led movements need dedicated support with significant financing and sustained resources, including in core funding, to ensure delivery of services, programming and assistance. This includes funding specific to grant development and for required reporting for those who are recipients of government funding, especially from youth-led organizations; with adaptability and flexibility in reporting requirements, keeping in mind the local capacities of organizations and youth groups. Funding and requirements should be context-specific and not overburdensome for local youth-led initiatives – a fundamental part of eliminating barriers to entry.

Investing in young people's economic initiatives and supporting organizations working in local communities for strong economic activities of young people is a significant contributor to the elimination of barriers to entry and reduced sexual and gender-based violence. As [COVID-19 has exasperated the digital divide](#), the State of Youth Report should include specific attention to the digital gap for those in lower income or rural communities, to ensure their access to potentially life-saving and life-changing information and technology. This can only be achieved by divesting from economic endeavours that perpetuate conflict in the Global South, for example by resource extraction, often used for technology development.

Canada's leadership in peace and security is commendable. However, there is a significant lack in the prioritization of the Youth, Peace and Security agenda across all policies, including domestic, and including a lack of explicit reference to YPS overall. We ask that the State of Youth report include recognition and amplification of the crucial role of young people in the peace and security agendas, including but not limited to peacebuilding (at home, including community-building), political participation, reconstruction, and building sustainable [positive peace](#). This is part of implementing [SDG 16 on strong and just institutions](#). This includes ensuring consistencies within other domestic policies and priorities, for example in terms of the meaningful inclusion of young people in decision-making.

We ask to include partnerships with young leaders in peace initiatives and ensuring the implementation of the SDGs; recognizing that youth should not be lumped into the same category as children as their experiences are unique and their contributions are different. This is essential to ensuring no one is left behind.

In line with enhancing youth participation, it is important to strengthen cross-sectoral cooperation to allow for greater synergies between different areas that matter for young people. Moreover, strengthening the links between policy, practice and research promotes an evidence-based approach to youth policy that is more transparent, effective and driven by improvement.

We stress the importance of recognizing and taking into account the reality that while all youth face age-based discrimination, Canadian youth are not a homogenous group and therefore, they may also face other forms of discrimination based on their gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, and socio-economic status. These forms of discrimination and systems of oppression, are massive barriers to youth's participation in all forms of life and can often lead to lack of trust in institutions, such as the police, educators, health care, and politicians. So long as this reality is allowed to continue, the state of Canadian youth will be far from acceptable.

Theme 1: Health & Wellness

We emphasize the importance of incorporating youth perspectives into central conversations concerning health and well-being and believe that people with flourishing minds and bodies build the foundations of a healthy society. Understanding that health and well-being are central to building strong and prosperous communities, we affirm that healthcare should not be accessible as a privilege. Instead, it should be unconditionally accessible to all who require it. Situating youth health and well-being within community-based interventions, which seek to strengthen youth individually, as a cohort and within a border community setting, ensures that individual needs are met.

Central to health and well-being efforts, Canada's government must ensure that health policies and practices are guided by anti-racist, anti-fatphobic and anti-oppressive principles, committing to building equitable, inclusive, comprehensive and safe spaces for the entirety of healthcare provisions and services.

Healthcare must respect and encompass all gender identities, sexes, disabilities, races and religions of youth patients. There cannot be a singular model of healthcare that is expected to fit all people's needs. In Canada, Trans youth consistently experience barriers to accessing healthcare tailored to their gender identities; most prominently reflected in the lack of access to hormone therapy rooted in systemic transphobia and discrimination by healthcare professionals. Further, health care provisions must inherently allot Queer youth autonomous access to decision-making regarding gender identity. Parental consent continues to present as a barrier to healthcare access for gender-Queer, Trans and non-binary youth. True well-being for young people cannot inhibit the ability to express or embody one's true self.

Intersectional mental health care must be readily available for young Canadians in all areas of Canada, fostering a welcoming and youth-inclusive environment with a particular focus on

those who have been impacted by violence. Assisting those during mental health crises is simply one component of holistic, trauma-informed, inclusive and effective mental health care. We call upon Canada's government to implement health care measures that eliminate barriers of social and physical structural violence faced by marginalized youth. Recognizing how racism, sexism, fatphobia, Islamophobia, anti-Indigenous violence, transphobia, homophobia and other forms of structural discrimination are actively preventing youth from seeking, accessing and utilizing mental health care, the government must take measurable action.

The lack of federal or provincial regard for upholding strong healthcare systems for Indigenous communities is historically reflected in multiple cases, including [Jordan's Principle](#). The Government of Canada must recognize the racism that exists in healthcare institutions in the southern part of the country in both rural and urban communities, as well as Northern Reserve Lands. The [death of Joyce Echaquan](#) was an unacceptable reflection of the inherent forms of anti-Indigenous racism that are ingrained within colonial healthcare systems. Barriers to Indigenous Youth accessing physical and mental health care, particularly for those living in Northern Territories and Reserve lands are unacceptable. Indigenous youth actively face racism incorporating a holistic approach to healthcare structures, which include the emotional, mental and spiritual aspects of health.

These discrepancies are reflected in the perpetration of continuous anti-Indigenous racism inflicted by colonial standards of healthcare and well-being. Incorporating and respecting Indigenous spiritual health, ensuring that healthcare is both physically and emotionally accessible for Indigenous youth and implementing health care that provides recognition and respect for Trans and Two-Spirit Indigenous youth is only a simple step in the long path to resurgence and reconciliation. Further, maternal healthcare for Indigenous women must be a priority for the Government of Canada. The forced relocation of Indigenous mothers prior to giving birth is not only unacceptable, but has dire health complications. Incorporating a holistic approach to health, including emotional and mental health must challenge racism and colonialism structured within the present health care systems.

New Canadians and those seeking asylum in Canada should unconditionally have access to appropriately congruent healthcare models, which reflect language preference, cultural considerations and be sensitive to what the patient would consider to be traditionally effective models of health. Understanding the domination of current healthcare structures are rooted within colonial idealizations of medicine and well-being, Canada must be easy to navigate for all, regardless of origin or immigration status.

Young women, non-binary and Trans youth experience sexual and gender-based violence at rates higher than cisgendered men. Ending gender-based violence is a form of necessary healthcare. We urge the Government of Canada to ensure that healthcare systems adopt and actively implement procedures that are survivor-centered and trauma-informed, following sexual or gender-based violence. The perpetration of sexual and gender-based violence are often reflected in the active deterioration of a patient's physical, cognitive and emotional components of health.

In seeking to understand the gaps in health and well-being, there is a dire need for age and gender-disaggregated data, particularly in connection to COVID-19 recovery. Youth compile some of the nation's most prominent frontline and essential workers, such as grocery clerks, young nurses and physicians, health care administrators, restaurant workers, and personal care

assistants, placing youth at an exacerbated risk of infection or exposure. Further research is needed in order to adequately measure the state of health and well-being specific to Canada and the diversity of Canadian youth. Implementing research projects which solely center on the progression of youth well-being, identifying existing gaps in social healthcare structures and rebuilding provincial/territorial healthcare systems to better reflect Healthcare systems must reflect the ever-changing needs of young Canadians.

Theme 2: Leadership & Impact

We ask for specific recognition and targeting of [intersectional analyses](#) in the implementation of Canada's Youth Policy. Intersectional consideration emphasizes dedicated initiatives for [Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour \(BIPOC\)](#) and other marginalized groups, including those living with visible and invisible disabilities, as both collaborators and beneficiaries. To strengthen increased intersectional considerations, we ask for the [de-tokenization](#) of young people by investing in programs and initiatives that highlight key contributions of young people in local communities and other social justice initiatives, including youth in political decision-making, civic engagement, and community development. Dedicated support, promotion and protection of the rights of gender and sexual diversity ([2SLGBTQ+](#)) groups should also be a priority in applying an intersectional lens for a truly inclusive youth policy – this is more than just about young women and men or other marginalized groups, it is also about gender diversity and expression.

We recognize that there has been a lot of progress to ensure that more young people can be involved and recruited in decision-making positions, especially on NGOs and not-for-profit boards. However, there has also been a large gap in terms of ensuring that representation to become sustained progress. Sustained progress for young people can look like increased funding and support for their own projects and initiatives for example, and should be prioritized.

The representation of young people often veers towards a monolithic approach: we need to recognize that not all youth have similar views and ideas, especially young people from different backgrounds, communities, and lived experiences. It is imperative that when we discuss youth engagement, we include the voices of all youth working in their own communities, not just “celebrity” youth whose work is widely recognized. The geographical location of youth's work — often localized and regional — can often be a barrier to their progress and engagement. Young people in metropolitan centres in Quebec and Ontario are often more likely to be invited to have access to engage in civic spaces. Ultimately, the lack of youth opportunities often creates a toxic and competitive environment between young people, when we should instead be striving to encourage collaboration. COVID-19 and the shift to online engagement have begun to open the door for many young people to engage with other young people across the country, and we must continue this progress.

Accessibility is a large barrier for young people's meaningful impact in leadership opportunities. Many young people face financial or linguistic barriers that limit their engagement — for example, Francophone youth whose voices are often not heard in English-dominated conversations. Other barriers for youth include not being taken seriously within older adult-dominated spaces — this, coupled with the [imposter syndrome](#) many young people face, can be a drastic limitation to their progress. We ask to explicitly challenge these barriers by giving young people meaningful roles and opportunities to influence positive change. Lastly,

it is integral that young people have equal access to information that can allow them to continue impactful change. Providing multilingual resources and translations in different languages can allow young people to engage in the languages they are most comfortable with. Many of the discussions surrounding policy and on governmental levels is dominated by lingo that is most familiar with those who have spent years in the sector, once again excluding young people who do not have the same experience. We must take steps to ensure that language is more accessible, especially for young people who are just familiarizing themselves in these environments.

We often hear that youth are the leaders of today, something we are strong believers of. We are calling for meaningful, tangible support so young people can continue implementing positive impactful change in their communities and beyond.

Theme 3: Innovation, Skills & Learning

As [COVID-19 has exasperated the digital divide](#), the State of Youth Report should include specific attention to the digital gap for those in lower income or rural communities, to ensure their access to potentially life-saving and life-changing information and technology. This can only be achieved by divesting from economic endeavours that perpetuate conflict in the Global South, for example by resource extraction, often used for technology development.

We ask for dedicated commitments to close the gap in access to education, [exasperated by COVID-19](#), especially for young people in rural or remote communities who do not have access to safe education facilities or online learning tools. Furthermore, it is vital to ensure support to policies that allow young mothers to return to formal or informal education, including considerations in the post-COVID-19 recovery plans. To support the implementation of [Sustainable Development Goal \(SDG\) 4 on education](#), we ask that specific support and funding to counter extremism and attacks to education be prioritized, this includes protecting education and strengthening support to skills-building initiatives.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of digital literacy and the positive use of digital technologies in connecting people, providing services and rethinking the ways in which education and vocational training is conducted. The transition to e-learning and virtual training during COVID-19 can be seen as an opportunity to rethink traditional approaches to training and development. The need to adapt to a changing reality as driving digital transformation while at the same time deepening the digital skills divide across people and sectors. The current crisis provides a window to prioritize information technology education/training and digital skills in an increasingly virtual world. This approach is also forward-looking as investing in digital skills means addressing current digital gaps and thus better preparing young people for the future workplace.

We call upon the Government of Canada to ensure that all people in all provinces and territories have stable and reliable internet connection. The lack of connectivity in remote, rural and Reserve lands proves to be a massive barrier to opportunities, learning and networking for young students and professionals. Stable internet, connectivity and access to data is a basic human right in our interconnected and technologically advanced world. Telecommunications must be better monitored by the government, so that all youth have access to internet, online programming and in many cases, education. Presently, Canada has

one of the highest monetary rates for tele-communication services, leading to further barriers for youth obtaining employment and furthering their careers, learning and improving their social well-being. Telecommunication rates, including wireless internet, basic technology such as devices and required accessories for learning or working, should be monitored and capped for young people by the Government of Canada.

Ensuring that all forms of communication are linguistically, visibly and audibly accessible, we highlight the need for a universal adoption of closed captioning on all videos, further inclusion of signing and implementing multilingual options, to ensure all youth are able to understand and benefit from technological advances, particularly given the heightened rate of online interaction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Young people's extensive use of technology for advocacy, mobilization, and movement-building has enabled our leadership potential, and this should be recognized as legitimate work.

Theme 4: Employment

Investing in young people's economic initiatives and supporting organizations working in local communities for strong economic activities of young people is a significant contributor to the elimination of barriers to entry and reduced sexual and gender-based violence.

The key role of decent work for all in achieving sustainable development is highlighted by [Sustainable Development Goal 8](#) which aims to "promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all."

Evidence shows youth employment to positively impact social cohesion, resilience and economic growth, however, it is important to approach young people's economic inclusion through the lens of their socio-economic rights and in terms of justice and equality when it comes to who is afforded opportunities for decent work.

It is important to avoid initiatives that create jobs for the sake of creating jobs and focus instead on meaningful, long-term industry development that will foster sustainable career paths in an ever-changing economy. Young people's economic inclusion must be understood as a component of a larger and complex reality, moving the conversation beyond just jobs to one that accounts for their stake in the wider economy and broader socio-political processes.

We highlight that qualifications for entry-level positions are often far too inaccessible for a wide variety of youth. Jobs should not primarily require university degrees and years of experiences for young people to enter the workforce, but rather consider the type of work, quality of candidate and recognize the lived experiences of the applicant. Common failure to incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing, often puts Indigenous youth at great disadvantage when applying for employment. Furthermore, many positions that are tailored to youth are unpaid internships or co-ops, which exploit youth labour for the benefit of the organization. Valuable and career altering experience should not come at the cost of being unpaid, overworked or undervalued. Youth additions to working teams often bring bright ideas, new perspectives and positive energy into an employment roll.

Further recognizing that the concept of volunteering is not always accessible for many youth in Canada, physically, emotionally or financially; and to have the time, capacity and ability to

give one's time is a privilege. We are disappointed with the lack of response to the [Government's COVID-19 volunteer program](#), directed towards youth. Many Non-Governmental Organizations did not receive their allocated funds, following the decision to cut ties with WE Charity in the months of July and August 2020. Smaller NGOs are not able to pay young people out of pocket and are heavily relying on government subsidies to reward youth for their hard work and given time. As a result, many young people received no compensation, as promised by the government and have had to alter their plans amidst the pandemic - which has further contributed to financial insecurity among young Canadians.

The COVID-19 has had a tremendous impact on young people, however, it has also shed light on the growing need for a universal basic income or guaranteed liveable income program. Young people continue to be the primary holders of precarious employment, lower paying salaries and victim to employment scarcity. These could be mitigated by the establishment of a basic income program.

The current mentality of many workplaces and overall society with regard to employment has also caused harm to young Canadians. For example, young people's high rates of burnout or increasing battles with mental health are aggravated by mentalities which assume young Canadians are lazy or must "pay their dues" is both patronizing and harmful to healthy workplaces. This is intensified for young people who are part of other marginalized communities, such as gender and sexuality diversity (2SLBTQIA+) or BIPOC.

Theme 5: Truth & Reconciliation

For Canada to truly prioritize Truth and Reconciliation, the [231 Calls-to-Justice](#) of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry Report must be prioritized and implemented immediately. Furthermore, we ask for the full implementation of all of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's [94 Calls-to-Action](#), including [Call-to-Action 66](#) which calls upon the Federal Government "to establish multi-year funding for community-based youth organizations to deliver programs on reconciliation, and establish a national network to share information and best practices."

The mass incarceration of Indigenous youth, racial profiling and lack of protection are troubling. There continues to be egregious mismanagement and lack of support for Indigenous youth aging out of care; human, sex, and forced trafficking; gang violence; and violence against Indigenous youth leaving First Nation communities to pursue educational endeavours. More national attention must be dedicated to such ongoing human rights abuses and violations, including the [recent inquiry into the Thunder Bay situation conducted by Senator Murray Sinclair](#).

Theme 6: Environment & Climate Action

Youth and Indigenous people have been leading the fight against climate injustice, but their contributions are still under-recognized and young people continue to be excluded from policy decision-making on climate issues. Many young people are leading advocacy for a more just and green economy, which would ensure a sustainable and safe future for all.



Youth climate activists are on the frontlines of public demands, including protests and claims. The government has a role to play in ensuring that their right to protest be respected and that their recommendations are heard and considered. We must end violence by police or other law-enforcing officials in protests and ensure the removal of records for those who have been arrested for protesting.

We ask for the full and meaningful participation of young people at every stage of the climate policy process; increased recognition of the important work of young climate activists in Canada and internationally, and; greater availability of government funding for youth-led, and specifically Indigenous youth-led, projects tackling climate change and environmental preservation.

This submission was prepared by the Government Advocacy Working Group of the Canadian Coalition for Youth, Peace and Security. It does not necessarily reflect the views of all its members.