Building a Youth Policy for Canada - What We Heard report

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1. Summary of findings

In February 2018, the Government of Canada launched a national dialogue with youth to help shape the country's first-ever Youth Policy. A diverse cross-section of young Canadians discussed priorities, leadership, youth engagement and the role of government across 10 themes that were organized under three issue clusters:

1. **School, jobs and housing**
   - Economic opportunity, innovation and money
   - Education and employment
   - Rural, remote and northern communities

2. **Engagement and empowerment**
   - Civic engagement and youth impact
   - Gender equality, inclusion and accessibility
   - Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples

3. **Your health, your community, your world**
   - Canadian identity, immigration and international experiences
   - Environment and climate change
   - Physical and mental health
   - Service and volunteering

The dialogue elicited more than 10,000 individual responses conveyed through a range of innovative electronic and in-person consultation methods, including the *Have Your Say* online booklet, which generated the lion's share of input.

Overall, the dialogue was marked by enthusiasm and thoughtfulness. It is also worth noting that many participants based their opinions and suggestions on personal experiences with issues such as discrimination, marginalization and crisis.

In essence

The salient priorities in the eyes of participants are education and employment, physical and mental health, and the environment and climate change. At the same time, and perhaps more significantly, it is apparent that young people see a tight and complex interconnectivity between issues, as evidenced by their discussion of the socio-economic and environmental determinants of health, and the importance they place on addressing the root causes of problems like homelessness.

The ideas advanced during the dialogue stress inclusion, opportunity, participation and diversity. In economic terms, this way of thinking emphasizes the long-term return on investment (ROI) that societies can expect when they remove barriers and create opportunities to give all young people a chance to succeed on their own terms, regardless of socio-economic status, gender, region, ethnicity, level of ability, etc.: "The path to our collective future relies on every member of society being able/given the opportunity to reach their full potential." This approach to policy-making has the virtue of being both the right and the smart thing to do.

School, jobs and housing

Participants express a significant amount of anxiety and pessimism about the amount of economic opportunity for young people. From a quantitative standpoint, they worry about the number of jobs available to them. The quality of jobs is equally troubling, with many describing current or anticipated struggles with meeting expenses, such as rent and student loans re-payment, while working in Canada's expanding and precarious "gig economy."[1] Indeed, some feel that compared to their parents' and grandparents' generations, theirs will lag in reaching some of life's traditional milestones, such as buying a home, having children and saving for retirement. Lack of affordable housing is often highlighted as a primary concerning issue.

In terms of solutions, many participants call on governments to improve access to post-secondary education (PSE), particularly for those who face financial and other barriers. Specific policy ideas include tuition-free PSE, lower tuition, student loan relief/ forgiveness, and more assistance with the non-tuition-related aspects of PSE, such as lodging, transportation and child care. Some also believe that students would benefit from a closer "alignment" between curricula and labour market needs, for example, through expanded opportunities for experiential learning (e.g., co-ops, internships, apprenticeships, work placements, summer job programs, business/entrepreneurial mentorships). It is also felt that this type of practical experience would better equip graduates with the classic "no experience-no job, no job-no experience" conundrum.

Participants' discussion of inequities and related suggestions often centre on regional disparities, or more specifically, the relative scarcity of opportunity and services youth see in rural or remote communities, including Indigenous communities. But descriptions of youth out-migration, the scourge of addiction, and the relative inadequacy of hard and soft infrastructure, are sometimes mixed with optimism about the future; for example, based on the potential for rural community revitalization that some see in Canada's robust and growing agri-food sector.

One of the most common, and perhaps the most straight-forward, suggestion for helping youth to successfully transition from school to work, is to improve their financial literacy. Often speaking from personal experience, participants contend that this knowledge is key to managing the type and size of debt-load that young people are often saddled with early in life. Many also draw a strong link between financial literacy (or acumen) and entrepreneurship.

Engagement and empowerment

One of the most prevalent views to emerge from the consultation is that youth participation in civic life, including government, is crucial to Canada's continued success. Two reasons underpin this belief. First, participants think that youth should be significantly involved in forming policies that will affect them today and well into the future – this seen is a matter of fairness. Second, they feel that youth can inject fresh perspectives and vital energy into the policy-making processes – this is seen as a matter of efficacy.

The problem of youth apathy and disengagement, as exemplified by low electoral participation rates, is not lost on participants. As part of the remedy, they suggest more youth outreach and the creation of new opportunities for youth participation in civic life, based on principles such as assured listening, diversity and relevance. Examples thought worthy of emulation include the Prime Minister's Youth Council (PMYC). More broadly, many participants want the K to 12 school curricula to devote greater attention to civic education and engagement. Similarly, there is some support for lowering the voting age to 16 years, in part to make the political process more accessible and relevant to youth.

Gender equity, inclusion and accessibility forms a specific consultation theme, but these issues are discussed throughout the dialogue. Participants agree that societies that promote equality of access and the full participation of its citizens and immigrants are much healthier for it. While Canada is viewed as having made progress in this area, there is a clear sense that much more needs to be done, and, that governments have a key role to play in raising awareness, passing and enforcing legislation, and leading by example (e.g., as a model employer). Working to ensure that Canada's institutions (e.g., federal and provincial criminal justice systems) reflect the country's rich diversity is viewed as especially important.

Discussions of discrimination and inequality often touches on the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and other Canadians. Consensus emerges on the need to rectify current and past injustices, not only out of decency, but also as key to maintaining the country's prosperity through the full participation of Indigenous Peoples in Canada's economy. Participants believe that improvement can be achieved through awareness-building and education in schools and through the media. They also see an immediate need for governments to address stark disparities between Indigenous Peoples and other Canadians in a broad range of areas, such as access to housing and clean drinking water and in the glaring overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples within Canada's prison population.

Your health, your community, your world

This cluster encompasses the broadest range of issues. It also prompts the greatest variety of opinions, especially around immigration levels and the nature of Canadian identity. With respect to the latter, competing views surface, with some conceiving of Canadian identity as something to be "preserved," while most others are viewing it as

fluid and continuously evolving. Notwithstanding variations in participants' conception of Canadian identity, there is strong agreement that some of Canada's main strengths lies in its diversity and welcoming attitude to newcomers; two qualities that participants believe have contributed to Canada's relatively harmonious way of life and enviable level of prosperity (e.g., Canada as magnet for international talent and students). There is also consensus on the need for governments, and Canadians as a whole, to keep helping immigrants to successfully integrate into society, for example, by removing of barriers to education, housing and employment and by promoting diversity and acceptance as core Canadian values.

In terms of more specific suggestions, some think that Canada's immigration rules should be changed to allow international students to more easily stay in our country after they graduate. Several participants also speak positively about the value of international experience and suggest that governments and other stakeholders create more opportunities in this area. In a similar vein, several participants highlight the benefits of community service and volunteering (e.g., work-relevant experience, more refined worldview) and recommend that governments help raise awareness of volunteering opportunities.

Many participants identify environmental sustainability and climate change as major concerns, often linking environmental degradation with negative health and economic impacts. Many of the suggestions for governments centre on fostering environmentally sustainable sources of energy and other green technologies. In addition, some say that governments should redouble their efforts to raise awareness and change behaviour around energy conservation, recycling and other actions that individuals and businesses can take to reduce their environmental footprint. Many also encourage governments to reward environmentally responsible action and disincentivize damaging ones through legislation, the tax system and programs.

Finally, mental health is a prominent topic of the dialogue, with participants often stressing two aspects of the issue. First, there is strong agreement that access to mental health services for youth needs to be significantly improved, particularly in rural areas of Canada and for certain segments of the population (e.g., Indigenous and LGBTQ2+ youth). Second, many highlight the importance of destigmatizing mental illness, as a way of securing more funding for services and to encourage youth to access such services.

2. Chapter 1: Objectives and methodology

2.1 Context and objectives

The Government of Canada (the "government") has embarked on a national dialogue with Canadian youth to create Canada's first-ever Youth Policy. Led by the Youth Secretariat of the Privy Council Office (PCO), this national dialogue has: identified issues important to youth; examined the supports that enable youth to become the leaders of tomorrow; uncovered how youth want to be involved in decision-making; and identified specific actions that the government can undertake to improve the lives of young Canadians. As part of this consultation, the government is committed to reporting back to Canadians on the findings of the consultation. Hill+Knowlton Strategies was tasked with collecting and analyzing all public input and reporting back on the findings in this report.

2.2 Project scope: Sources of input

The consultation was designed to gather feedback from young Canadians, including youth from different income groups, rural and remote areas, Indigenous Peoples, newcomers, youth from all cultural communities, and youth from more challenging social circumstances.

The scope of analysis for this consultation includes the following data sources.

Online consultations with Canadian youth

Online *have your say* booklet: The largest volume of input came from this stream of engagement. Input was gathered through an online deliberative survey, which gathered qualitative and quantitative input. Youth and adult allies were invited to share feedback on their top 3 issues, however, were able to answer questions on as many issues as they liked. Participants were also invited to share some demographic information, including: gender, province, type of community and self-identified Indigenous, racial, disability or sexual orientation status, age bracket.

Online discussion forum: Participants on youthaction.ca and jeunesenaction.ca were invited to share their feedback on a threaded style online discussion forum. The discussion forums were divided into pre-determined topics based on the policy themes outlined in the *have your say* booklet. Topics included: "your health, your community, your world," "school, jobs and housing," "engagement and empowerment," along with an area where participants were invited to share their own topic.

Online video comment submissions: Participants on youthaction.ca and jeunesenaction.ca were invited to share video comments. Similar in structure to the online discussion forum, participants were able to upload videos to the three pre-determined topics.

Dialogues with Canadian youth

In April 2018, on behalf of the Government of Canada, Hill+Knowlton hosted **in-person dialogues** in Thunder Bay, Quebec City, Calgary and Yellowknife, which were co-hosted by a youth facilitator and attended by area youth. During each event, input was collected through worksheets and a video activity. The video from the session was directly uploaded to youthaction.ca or jeunesenaction.ca. Youth and adult allies were invited to download a conversation guide from youthaction.ca and jeunesenaction.ca and hold their own dialogues. Youth and youth allies were invited to submit the results of their conversations online. Stakeholder organizations working with, and providing services to, youth were invited to do the same.

8897
Online have your say booklet responses

159
Online discussion forum comments

61
Online video submissions

68
Youth-led roundtables and Stakeholder submissions

Text version:

Number of youth responses graphic

- 8,897 online *have your say* booklet responses
- 159 online discussion forum comments
- 61 online video submissions
- 68 youth-led roundtables and Stakeholder submissions

This graph depicts the number of youth responses received online through either the *have your say booklet,* discussion forum comments or video submissions, as well as the number of youth-led roundtables and stakeholder submissions.

2.3 Analytical approach

Several technology-based analytical solutions were considered for the analysis. Each option has its own strengths and weaknesses, including a lack of analytical capability or a superficial analysis of qualitative data. In the end, we concluded that the complexity of the issues, as well as the richness and depth of participants' input, warranted the use of analysts over software.

Our analysis, as well as the reporting of results, reflects the organization and themes used on youthaction.ca and jeunesenaction.ca:

1. School, jobs and housing
2. Engagement and empowerment
3. Your health, your community, your world
4. Other issues important to Canadian youth

2.4 Who we heard from

Online *have your say* booklet

Youth who participated in the online *have your say* booklet consultation were asked basic sociodemographic information about themselves prior to proceeding to the questions. The information below presents an aggregate profile of respondents who provided the 8,897 *have your say* booklet responses.

Of the individuals who completed the online *have your say* booklet:

In English and in French		
	Completed it in English	**Completed it in French**
Percentage	88%	12%

This table depicts the percentage of individuals who completed the online *have your say* booklet in English and in French.

Male, female, non-binary or preferred not to say			
	Identify as male	**Identify as female**	**Identify as non-binary**	**Prefer not to say**
Percentage	39%	57%	2%	2%

This table depicts the percentage of individuals who completed the online *have your say* booklet who identified as male, female, non-binary or preferred not to say.

Urban, rural, or remote community			
	Live in an urban community	**Live in a rural community**	**Live in a remote community**
Percentage	77%	20%	3%

This table depicts the percentage of individuals who completed the online have *your say booklet* who lived in an urban, rural, or remote community.

Age group						
	Are under 16 years old	**Are 17 to 20 years old**	**Are 21 to 24 years old**	**Are 25 to 28 years old**	**Are 29 to 32 years old**	**Are over 32 years old**
Percentage	20%	18%	19%	15%	15%	18%

This table depicts the percentage of individuals who completed the online *have your say* booklet per age group.

Youth-led roundtables

Individual sociodemographic information of participants was not collected during in-person youth roundtables. However, the location of each roundtable and the attendance of participants in each category was recorded. The following graphs compare age and location of residence of participation or roundtables.

Roundtables per age group					
	Under 16	**16 to 20 years old**	**21 to 25 years old**	**26 to 30 years old**	**Over 30 years old**
Percentage	38%	68%	53%	22%	17%

This table depicts the percentage of roundtables that included participants per age group.

	Individuals per province and territory												
	Live in Ont.	**Live in Que.**	**Live in B.C.**	**Live in Alta.**	**Live in Man.**	**Live in N.S.**	**Live in Sask.**	**Live in N.B.**	**Live in N.L.**	**Live in N.W.T.**	**Live in P.E.I.**	**Live in Nvt.**	**Live in Y.T.**
%	47%	13%	12%	9%	6%	5%	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%

This table depicts the percentage of individuals who completed the online *have your say* booklet per province and territory.

	Roundtables per province and territory												
	In Ont.	**In Que.**	**In B.C.**	**In Alta.**	**In Man.**	**In N.S.**	**In Sask.**	**In N.B.**	**In N.L.**	**In N.W.T.**	**In P.E.I.**	**In Nvt.**	**In Y.T.**
%	30%	10%	17%	7%	5%	2%	3%	3%	3%	5%	0%	5%	2%

This table depicts the percentage of roundtables that were hosted per province and territory.

3. Chapter 2: Detailed findings

When responding to the *have your say* booklet online, participants were asked to identify their top three topics of interest and to answer a set of questions for each. Participants had the opportunity to examine as many or as little topics as they wished. As shown below, **youth education and employment**, **physical and mental health**, and **environment and climate change** are top of mind for young Canadians.

Have your say booklet	
	%
Youth education and employment	56%
Physical and mental health	50%
Environment and climate change	44%
Economic opportunity, innovation and money	37%
Gender equality, inclusion and accessibility	35%
Canadian identity, immigration and international experiences	32%
Civic engagement and youth impact	28%
Service and volunteering	20%
Reconciliation	20%
Rural, remote, and northern communities	15%
Additional topics	17%

This table depicts the topics that were top of mind for young Canadians who completed the online *have your say* booklet.

When hosting in-person dialogues with youth, youth and youth allies were encouraged to discuss as many topics as they wished. As shown below, physical and mental health, and youth education and employment are top of mind for young Canadians.

Youth roundtables	
	%
Youth education and employment	38%
Physical and mental health	43%
Environment and climate change	23%
Economic opportunity, innovation and money	9%
Gender equality, inclusion and accessibility	22%
Canadian identity, immigration and international experiences	22%
Civic engagement and youth impact	18%
Service and volunteering	0%
Reconciliation	18%
Rural, remote, and northern communities	10%
Additional topics	14%

This table depicts the topics that were top of mind for young Canadians who participated in youth roundtables.

3.1 School, jobs and housing

3.1.1 Economic opportunity, innovation and money

3.1.1.1 Online *have your say* booklet

The topic of economic opportunity, innovation and money generated a lot of comments (1,015) and most tend to focus on multiple aspects as shown in the exhibits below. This points to the interconnectedness between education, employment and financial matters. The topic examines issues related to employment opportunities such as youth unemployment, meaningful or precarious work and opportunities available in rural, remote and northern communities; and much of the focus is on ensuring equitable experiences for all youth and stimulating the economy outside urban centres. Comments also often relate to the impacts of high debt levels and low levels of financial literacy. Specific to this topic, comments express various views on policy-related

matters, like tax reforms and economic policies, addressing socio-economic determinants – health, housing, poverty – and policies under other jurisdictions.

Participants were invited to provide their feedback to this topic by responding to the following two questions:

1. Why are the topics of economic opportunity for youth and/or money on your mind?

2. What specific actions could be taken, or should we continue to take, to improve economic opportunity and innovation amongst young Canadians?

Question 1: Why are the topics of economic opportunity for youth and/or money on your mind?

Most comments express views on the uncertainty and insecurity of youth's futures (9 per cent), whether related to employment opportunities (33 per cent, including entrepreneurship (9 per cent), the impacts of the high cost of living (18 per cent) and debt (14 per cent), the lack of financial literacy (17 per cent) and other policy-related matters (18 per cent).

Topics of economic opportunity, innovation and money	
	%
Focus on issues related to employment opportunities for youth	33%
Various views on policy-related issues	18%
Focus on the source and impacts associated to the high cost of living	18%
View that there is a lack of financial literacy among youth	17%
Concerns with high debt loads and socio-economic impacts	14%
Concerns about the uncertainty of earning a living wage	13%
Focus on the importance of economic opportunity and money (with little or no elaboration)	10%
Focus on the lack of opportunities for youth entrepreneurship and innovation	9%
View that youth's futures are uncertain	9%
Other	4%

This table depicts the topics of economic opportunity, innovation and money that were top of mind for youth who completed the online *have your say* booklet.

Comments also express concern with the uncertainty of earning a living wage (13 per cent) and its impact on delaying student debt repayment, entering the housing market and saving for retirement. Overall, precarious economic opportunities and money issues create a lot of concern and anxiety for youth, with some pointing to direct mental health impacts.

Importance of employment opportunities

Most comments express the view that misalignment between education and labour market demand have led to market saturation and poor employment prospects; this is also impacted by demands for higher qualifications and/or the level of students graduating with higher qualifications, the "market is saturated with over-qualified individuals who cannot find employment" or "are forced to work in ways that are precarious, either as contactors, part-time workers or freelancers." Some comments reference the desire for meaningful, well-paying jobs, but highlight the concern about earning a living wage and related impacts.

> "I am deeply, deeply concerned about the future facing young Canadians, many of whom are currently in or facing precarious employment and a future almost guaranteed to be less financially stable and prosperous than their parents […] Knowing that youth in Canada are facing higher student loans and much higher cost of rent and housing, the likelihood that any person under 40 in the current generation will be prepared to support their own children with school and housing, or prepare for retirement is highly unlikely and this needs to be addressed **now**."

Other concerns raised in the comments include: limited economic opportunities in rural, remote and northern communities; perceived poor outcomes for marginalized groups; and physical and mental health impacts.

> "Regional disparities across Canada lead to an imbalance in the opportunities presented to many young Canadians. Many parts of this country lose their best and brightest youth to more prosperous areas, leaving behind an aging population, a decreasing tax base, and degrading infrastructure."

A group of comments also focus on the benefits and importance of promoting entrepreneurship and innovation. More specifically, this is seen as a way of being able to stimulate the economy in rural, remote and northern communities, as well as a way of encouraging youth to pursue other employment options. However, comments do acknowledge current barriers in starting a new business, like red tape, lack of awareness of available programs, and the need for investment.

> "As a young Canadian who will have to get a foot on the ground in Canada in the next couple years, it is important to me that the government does everything possible to make it easy for young people to begin earning a living. It is

especially important to me that young people have the opportunity to start their own businesses without a lot of red tape and pre-emptive costs."

Uncertain economic viability

A large group of comments view money very highly, whether the idea of earning a living wage, contributing to Canada's economy, managing high debt loads or just simply having a solid financial understanding. Money is also an important source of anxiety and one that often leads to impacts on physical and mental health. Comments point to the changing economy as the source of much of this uncertainty.

> "Prices are higher than ever in Canada today. Many people my age may struggle to find high-paying jobs after school. This makes it very difficult to afford the high prices or rent, groceries (especially trying to eat healthily), or starting a family and purchasing a car and a house."

Adding to the financial stress is the burden of student debt. "Additionally, too many young Canadians are graduating with crippling amounts of student debt, which prevent them from actualizing their full economic potential." As such, many point to financial literacy as an important tool for future prosperity.

> "We lack tools and advice relating to the economy, whether it's about personal finances or the global market. And yet, this is the knowledge we should be talking about from a young age, since money is central to our lifestyle."

Question 2: What specific actions could be taken, or should we continue to take, to improve economic opportunities and encourage innovation amongst young Canadians?

Comments speak to the need of addressing the generational shift in thinking about the meaning of economic opportunities.

Improve economic opportunities and encourage innovation among young Canadians	
	%
Need for greater financial literacy among youth	24%
Need for an integrated approach to address youth employment - with government and industry partners	24%
Need to address policy-related issues	23%
Create the conditions to encourage entrepreneurship, innovation and commerce	22%
Help ease the financial burden on young Canadians	19%
Provide more experiential learning opportunities	19%
Ensure equal access to education	12%
Focus on the importance of economic opportunties (with little or no elaboration)	5%
Restructure student debt repayment	4%
Need for skills training for the knowledge economy	3%
Other	4%

This table depicts specific actions that youth who completed the online *have your say* booklet would like to see to improve economic opportunities and encourage innovation among young Canadians.

While directly linked to employment prospects, the traditional paths to financial freedom and economic stability/contributions, are no longer viable and require a new approach to understand the effects and desired outcomes. Top comments speak to the importance of addressing financial literacy to ensure that youth are well-prepared for the future (24 per cent). Similarly, easing the financial burden is also seen as an important step in ensuring youth can contribute to the economy (19 per cent), including restructuring student debt repayment (4 per cent). With regards to employment, comments refer to the importance of developing an integrated approach to youth employment (24 per cent), or ensuring the right tools are in place to allow for greater entrepreneurship (22 per cent) and experience-based learning (19 per cent) – all said to allow youth to pursue different paths to employment. The government is said to also have a role to play in addressing various policy-related issues (23 per cent), such as a "comprehensive tax review"; addressing socio-economic determinants – health,

housing, poverty; developing a "basic income" framework; grants, subsidies and other funding to help community organizations and support small- and medium-sized businesses; and developing strong partnerships to address policies under provincial and territorial jurisdictions, e.g., education curriculums. Ensuring equal access to education (12 per cent) and developing skills training for the knowledge economy, e.g., STEM-based learning (3 per cent) are also seen as factors to better prepare youth for the new labour market and help grow the economy.

Money is knowledge

Financial literacy is key to ensuring a bright future. Most comments point to the need to teach youth about basic finances, e.g., budgeting, doing their taxes, saving, borrowing, as well as more complex economic pillars, e.g., tax structures, trade, global economy, investments, etc. Combined these are said to allow for more independence and growth. Although knowledge is key, help from government to ease the financial burden on young Canadians is still a priority discussed among comments, including:

- Providing greater tax breaks and other financial incentives;

- Increasing minimum wage or ensuring a living wage/basic income;

- Making it easier to access the housing market or affordable rentals: "It's virtually impossible right now to find a quality affordable house for myself and my spouse, both of us recent graduates, without being renters;" and

- Making it easier or more forgiving for young Canadians to repay student loans.

Stimulating economic opportunities

Equally as important is ensuring the continued growth of Canada's economy, through sustained employment and new business startups. At the outset, comments express the view that working with government and private sector partners is necessary to address gaps and opportunities moving forward, as well as ensuring a special focus on fostering economic growth in rural, remote and northern communities. Other ideas include: incentivizing the hiring of young Canadians through tax breaks and other financial subsidies; lowering attrition; and better aligning post-secondary education with labour market demands. Similarly, creating the conditions to promote entrepreneurship are also seen as a viable option for economic growth. Coupled with strong financial knowledge, removing barriers such as regulatory or financial burdens, as well as fostering the development of sandboxes and incubation spaces are concrete actions that could be taken by the government. Finally, ensuring youth have access to various learning opportunities, both formal and informal, are key to preparing them for the future.

3.1.1.2 Online discussion forum and video comment submissions

Youth homelessness is a key theme in this topic, as is affordable housing in high density areas such as Vancouver and Toronto. The consensus is that there should be

programs to help homeless youth with access to education and training for jobs to help them get off the street.

Youth want to contribute to solving the problem, but the right conditions need to exist to make it easier for them to engage, both at a grassroots and organizational level e.g. awareness, available resources, etc.

> "I cannot imagine being a youth and not having a warm, safe place to live. Help for homeless youth and promotion of resources is crucial. As a full-time public servant, I would be very interested in donating, or volunteering with programs that help homeless youth, but I currently don't know of any."

Housing costs for low-income earners and single-parent families are also a concern in online video submissions. Some suggest creating housing hubs near public transportation that also provide childcare services to ease the burden on single parents and low-income earners with the goal of creating the conditions and opportunities, which will help them earn a higher income and move on from the hub.

3.1.1.3 Youth roundtables

For many young Canadians, the tuition costs of post-secondary education and the financial burden associated with student debt hinders their financial well-being.

> "Students have a hard time either going to post-secondary or paying off student loans after they've gone."

Quebec City participants advocate for increased access to affordable and safe housing for Canadian youth. One participant highlighted the lack of housing for youth who suffer from health-related challenges and the requirement for subsidized housing.

> "Access to subsidized housing for young people with health problems (mental or physical) and in a financially unstable situation."

Other participants note that many young Canadians lack the necessary financial literacy skills and tools to manage their finances and debt load effectively. To that end, participants from several roundtables identify the need for greater education in financial literacy, noting that youth need education that is "practical, especially financial literacy and life-skills courses."

For some roundtable participants, the lack of meaningful employment opportunities is an issue that affects many young people across the country; particularly for young Canadians who face a "lack of opportunities in rural communities." The lack of meaningful jobs can affect the ability of young Canadians to purchase healthy food or work supplies. Participants from one roundtable also note the challenges associated with gaining work experience, such as "being asked by employers to have relevant job experience, but never getting a chance to gain experience." The lack of meaningful employment opportunities can also prevent young people from obtaining medical insurance or paid vacation time; perks that are standard in other parts of the world (e.g., the European Union).

Participants identify several important actions that could be taken to increase employment opportunities for youth, foster innovation and support economic development across Canada. These include:

- Creating the necessary conditions to foster youth entrepreneurship;

- Focus on educating young Canadians on technology and other skills they will require to compete in the economy of the future: "youth education should prepare young Canadians to enter today's job market with strong work ethic and social responsibilities";

- Incentivize the hiring of young Canadians, particularly for youth who find it "hard to get into an employment position";

- Mentorship, training and networking opportunities for Canadian youth so that youth "have a chance at different job positions" and are more likely to be offered opportunities by employers;

- Supporting more job opportunities in rural and remote areas for young people, such as supporting investment in "technological advancement" to transform older industries;

- Training programs for students from northern and remote communities that would allow young people to study "trades that allow them to work in their community" and create a sustainable future for their communities; and,

- Teaching financial literacy in schools (e.g., on taxes or investing) and incentivizing youth to begin saving for retirement.

3.1.1.4 Stakeholder submissions

Stakeholders submitted a variety of practical ideas about how to improve housing conditions for youth across Canada. Largely, they say that governments should build and expand affordable housing for youth and their families, offering a range of housing models to meet the needs of diverse populations, including immigrants and refugees. They also suggest that governments create emergency relief funds for youth and their families experiencing crisis or facing eviction; increase accessible housing options for youth with disabilities; significantly reduce waitlists for public housing; penalize landlords for discrimination; and remove mandatory attendance in school, programs, or employment as a condition of access to youth housing. One group advises that governments should invest in and expand youth housing options as an alternative to foster care, particularly for Indigenous youth, LGBTQ2 youth and visible minority youth.

Youth homelessness prevention is a theme discussed by some stakeholders, who say that federal, provincial and municipal governments should all take a proactive approach to addressing the root causes of youth homelessness, which include a combination of structural factors, system failures and individual and relational factors. In general, these stakeholders ask for better co-ordination between the government departments, ministers and policies, which deal with this issue, and that youth be engaged meaningfully on all policy development, planning, and implementation processes related

to preventing youth homelessness. One further suggestion includes conducting a national research study focused specifically on youth homelessness.

Social assistance is discussed by a small number of stakeholders, who say governments should better fund programs and assistance for at-risk or vulnerable populations, including youth. Other suggestions include removing policies, which prohibit recipients from saving income or working while receiving social assistance; offering income supports to youth involved with child welfare services up to the age of 25; and enabling youth under the age of 16 years old to access services/supports without parental signatures.

Tax fairness is also addressed by a few stakeholders, who primarily asked that governments impose tax or financial penalties on corporations who cause environmental damage. Additionally, they suggest that the tax system be simplified and become more transparent; that the government increase corporate taxes; and that more tax incentives be implemented for communities
to address climate change at the local level.

3.1.2 Education and Employment

3.1.2.1 Online *have your say* booklet

The topic of education and employment examines issues such as the socio-economic impacts of youth unemployment and the financial burdens of post-secondary education and the rising cost of living. The general sentiment is that given the competitive and changing nature of the labour market, higher levels of education accompanied with some type of skills-based experience is required to penetrate the job market. However, post-secondary education can be inaccessible at the outset, only providing the opportunity to certain socio-demographic brackets. In addition, existing barriers to gain commensurate experience before entering the job market are leading to higher youth unemployment rate. These factors are said to delay youths influence on Canada's socio-economic growth (e.g., starting a family, entering the housing market, investing, saving for retirement, etc.). Youth education and employment received a total of 1,206 comments.

Participants were invited to provide their feedback to this topic by responding to the following two questions:

1. Why are the topics of youth education and/or employment on your mind?
2. What specific actions could be taken, or should we continue to take, to improve education and employment for youth in Canada?

Question 1: Why are the topics of youth education and/or employment on your mind?

Most comments express the view that providing youth with employment opportunities is to the benefit of Canada's economic growth (28 per cent) and list issues such as, the

high rate of youth unemployment, the lack of available entry-level positions or meaningful, long-term employment. Comments also focus on the financial burdens associated with the cost of post-secondary education and its associated impacts (24 per cent), as well as the importance of education in preparing youth for the future (24 per cent), e.g., experience-based learning, informal and formal education, or post-secondary education (6 per cent). Overall, comments express the sentiment that school is important to get a job, but that adulthood – starting a family, buying a house – is often delayed due to high debt levels. A portion just speak to the importance of education and employment by providing little or no rationale (17 per cent) or add to their comment by sharing a personal or familial experience (15 per cent). Relatively few comments focus on the impacts of the changing labour market, e.g., automation, STEM learning, precarious and contractual employment, (6 per cent); and the lack of financial literacy and associated economic impacts, e.g., saving for retirement, managing debt (6 per cent).

Education forms the basis of everything

Education and employment	
	%
Focus on the importance of providing employment opportunities to young Canadians	28%
Focus on the cost of post-secondary education and related socio-economic impacts	24%
Focus on the role of education in preparing youth for the future	24%
Focus on the importance of education and employment (with little or no elaboration)	17%
Shared a personal or familial experience	15%
Focus on the impacts of the changing labour landscape	6%
Focus on the lack of financial literacy among young people	6%
Focus on the importance of post-secondary education to gain valuable experience and enter the workforce	6%
Other	5%

This table depicts the topics of education and employment that were top of mind for youth who completed the online *have your say* booklet.

The top three recurring themes highlight the interconnectedness between education, employment and economic stability. While most comments speak to the importance of giving youth employment opportunities, education is often referred to as the foundational requirement – education is everything and will ensure Canada's prosperous future.

> "Everything depends on education… children are the generation of tomorrow!"

Comments also point to many barriers:

- Access to higher education: cost of tuition, cost of living, distance from home, etc. "What about transportation costs? Food? School supplies? These are all basic necessities for students."

- Access to the job market: a degree no longer guarantees employment, the changing labour market, lack of employment related to field of studies, etc. "Youth are facing massive amounts of debt when they finish university yet are having a hard time transitioning into the labour market. It is increasingly difficult to find full-time employment with decent benefits. Having a degree or higher education no longer secures higher paying jobs that it used to."

- Access to "adulthood": youth graduating from post-secondary institutions will take longer to start their lives due to large amounts of student debt: "Student debt is getting to the point where, for some, it will become a lifelong burden and will hold back an entire generation of young workers from achieving their full potential."

- Growing the economy: a highly educated population with bleak employment opportunities and rising debt levels can only hinder Canada's economic growth. "Without job security and with an unsurmountable amount of debt, how are we expected to be able to spend money/grow the economy?"

To alleviate some of these barriers, comments often refer to other forms of education as contributors to personal and professional development. Comments describe the importance of: hard and soft skills development; internships; volunteering; job exploration and job shadowing; mentorship; apprenticeships; and experience-based learning. Comments also highlight that the existing focus on post-secondary education should be shifted to making education – in general – accessible and comparable across the country. The rationale is that educating youth starts at a young age and all youth should have access to the same opportunities.

Question 2: What specific actions could be taken, or should we continue to take, to improve education and employment for youth in Canada?

Most comments focus on ways to reduce the financial burdens of post-secondary education, including the consideration of additional factors, like the cost of living (32 per cent). However, comments still acknowledge the importance of education in preparing youth for the future, and most point to the need for additional resources (25 per cent), alternative forms of learning (22 per cent) and greater financial literacy (8 per cent). Comments also express the view that the government has a responsibility to create the conditions for greater youth employment (24 per cent), whether through the promotion

of alternative employment options, like entrepreneurship and start-ups (5 per cent), better aligning post-secondary education with the demands of the labour market (7 per cent), like STEM learning (2 per cent), or encouraging a future in trades (5 per cent).

Improve education and employment	
	%
Help to alleviate the financial burden of post-secondary education and its societal impacts	32%
Invest in and enhance all levels of education	25%
Create the conditions to allow for more youth employment opportunities	24%
Need for more co-operative and experience-based programs for students	22%
Need for greater financial literacy education	8%
Align post-secondary education with the demands of the labour market	7%
Need for greater education and awareness of alternative employment opportunities	5%
Encourage students to pursue a career in trades	5%
Promote STEM education to meet the demands of the changing labour market	2%
Other	9%

This table depicts specific actions that youth who completed the online *have your say* booklet would like to see to improve education and employment for youth in Canada.

Alleviating the financial burden of post-secondary education

The financial burden of post-secondary education is said to have a negative socio-economic impact not only on youth, but all Canadians; and comments stress the immediate need for action.

> "In a way that's (under-qualified university applicants) similar to what caused the 2008 housing crisis, I think the government is encouraging the growth of a student debt bubble that may burst soon."

Comments describe several ways to make post-secondary education more financially bearable, including, most importantly, the idea of capping tuition fees, or making post-secondary education free/publicly funded. Other ideas include:

- Restructuring government loan programs, e.g., not based on parental income, repayment structure, reduce interest charges, etc.;

- Additional/different grants, scholarships and bursaries, or merit-based financial aid – some prefer this idea in lieu of increasing loans/debt levels;

- Increasing the student tax credit, e.g., based on the cost of the program, ensuring it goes to the students, not the parents. "This would enable new graduates to have a much better start once they finish school";

- Paid internships; and

- Consideration of the cost of living as an additional financial burden for students. This is said to be especially prominent among youth from rural, remote and northern communities, or those from various socio-economic or familial backgrounds.

Enhance all levels/types of education

As previously mentioned, comments value all types of education and stress the importance of this foundational piece as the key to forming Canada's future leaders.

> "The government should support world-class elementary and high school education throughout all communities. Focus should be placed on providing all Canadians with the basic education that prepares them for the future."

Comments call for more investment in all levels of education (primary, secondary and post-secondary), as well as better integration and access across the country. Specific areas listed as requiring additional resources include:

- Education assistants, especially for youth with disabilities (physical, learning or invisible);

- Co-operative, experience-based or alternative learning programs e.g., Katimavik, EXPLORE;

- Financial literacy, career/entrepreneurship or technology courses;

- Cultural education, i.e., specific to Indigenous youth; and

- Immersion programs, i.e., French and English.

Comments also call for better integration between education and the labour market, like investing in STEM education or new technologies, like artificial intelligence. They also express the view that youth should better understand employment relative to their field of studies.

Create the conditions to grow employment opportunities

Most comments highlight the importance of planning and developing strategies for the current and future needs of the labour market, as well as how to better prepare students to enter the workforce. While some do emphasize the need to promote alternative

employment opportunities and entrepreneurship, and support a diverse economy, most comments focus on the importance of ensuring an easier transition from school to workforce. Some comments peg the responsibility on ensuring better alignment between education and labour market on the government by increasing engagement with the public and private sectors, post-secondary institutions, and unions. Others prefer financially-based solutions, like subsidies or other incentives for co-op programs, internships and apprenticeships. Comments also describe several other actions, including: transition programs; municipal/local programs; expanding the Federal Student Work Experience Program (FSWEP) or Young Canada Works (YCW); and targeted programs for marginalized youth.

3.1.2.2 Online discussion forum and video comment submissions

The main concern shared by most youth participants is the rising cost of tuition and the debt load incurred by students. These challenges increase the level of stress after graduation and place additional pressure on key milestones such as getting married, buying a house and having children.

In addition to cost concerns, participants also highlight the availability of well-paying jobs and the number of unpaid internships available as problematic. Participants are also concerned with the supports available for those who either eschew or cannot go to college or university. Recommendations included job search support in schools and community transitions while students are still in school.

> "How are low income Canadians supposed to get a job if they can't even afford tuition? You need a university education for almost any job these days. Tuition should be more accessible for those who can't afford it. This would benefit all Canadians, not just those eligible for assistance."

As with the online comments, tuition costs and debt load are main concerns raised in the online video submissions. There are several calls for Canada to implement free tuition for post-secondary education. International participants suggest streamlining the visa application process. Another video suggestion focuses on including youth on education boards as they are aware of the shift taking place in the workforce of the future and should have a say in shaping the education system.

3.1.2.3 Youth roundtables

Youth resoundingly underscore the importance of quality education opportunities for all Canadian youth so that they can access quality jobs or further post-secondary education. However, it is widely acknowledged that not all Canadian youth are provided with equal opportunity to access such opportunities. As specifically identified by participants in Thunder Bay, "people should be coming off reserves with an equal education." A lack of proper education can leave young people feeling unprepared for the job market, or without access to economic opportunities. To help prevent this, participants from several roundtables discussed the need for:

- Further education for "on-reserve" education to bring it up to Canadian standards;

- Support for "job mentoring" and other career skills training programs across Canada; and

- Help to facilitate more post-secondary education for Canadian youth, including financial assistance opportunities.

Youth also noted that post-secondary education remains inaccessible for some younger Canadians who are unable to afford tuition or living costs, or who struggle with managing school and work.

> "All youth should have a reasonable opportunity to access education at a price that they can afford."

This is particularly important for francophone and Indigenous youth who, as discussed by several participants, often have to move considerable distances to pursue postsecondary education.

> "Many francophone youth have to move away for access to French-language post-secondary education."

Other conversations among youth-led roundtables focus on ensuring Canadian youth are prepared for the job market and the realities of a "precarious economy," including the need for more "apprenticeships" or paid internship positions, trade school or college openings, or "job retraining" opportunities. Similarly, participants across several roundtables raise the adverse impact that minimum wage can have on young people, particularly as they try to "provide for their families" and manage student debt.

Actions identified by youth participants on this front include:

- Reducing costs for post-secondary education for young Canadians and students in general. For instance, helping young people with "rental defrayment" or instating more "tax subsidies" for post-secondary students;

- Studying the effects of minimum wage on the economy and whether it could be tied to "age or dependency" or "inflation and the cost of living" to make it more of a liveable wage for young Canadians;

- The establishment of more merit-based financial supports, such as scholarships, for students who are economically disadvantaged, or come from rural, remote or northern communities: "Federal funding for scholarships that are specified for Indigenous students and students who live in rural and remote northern communities";

- Support for northern and Indigenous students who move away to pursue post-secondary education, such as the program at Memorial University, which helps northern students transition to the post-secondary environment; and

- Restructuring of student loans, including more bursaries for economically disadvantaged students and the provision of more "interest-free student loans" or tuition rebates for students who are studying out-of-province.

A number of roundtable participants from across the country also recognize the importance of elementary and secondary education and its influence on outcomes later in life. Specifically, participants discussed how their learning environment can affect performance: "classrooms need to be more inviting and exciting" and provide "different environments for different types of learners." For some participants, this also includes reinforcing training standards for teachers so that they can create a "positive environment for students."

Other points of discussion centred on the need to ensure equality in education across the country so that "youth have access to equal education." This includes the need for more investments in rural, remote and northern schools to bring their quality of education in line with southern schools. Other ideas discussed by youth include putting a renewed focus on extra-curricular programs so that "all schools at least have access to music, drama and athletic programming," putting greater emphasis on "practical" curriculum such as "financial literacy and life-skills" courses, or enhanced curriculum in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics to better position students for success in STEM-based professions.

Participants from one roundtable also discussed the learnings of other models of education, citing the CEGEP model from Quebec as a model of education, which has done a good job at achieving academic success and providing supports that help students "make decisions that are really important for the rest of their lives."

3.1.2.4 Stakeholder submissions

Stakeholders presented a broad range of ideas and suggestions related to education. Many talked about ensuring all Canadian youth have access to quality education, including post-secondary, no matter where they live or how much money they have. Some suggested implementing additional grant programs for certain groups, like new immigrants, refugees, or low-income youth, while others say governments should further reduce the overall cost of education (e.g., tuition, housing). In addition to costs, a lot of stakeholders weighed in on how educational curriculums should be modified to better reflect modern society and Canadian values.

Expanding lessons on the history of Indigenous culture and Canada's colonialist past, the history of feminism and feminist principles, financial literacy, various gender and sexual identities (i.e., to dismantle negative stereotypes), healthy teen relationships, the concept of sexual consent, and responsible social media use are just of a few of their many suggestions. Broadening "learn-to-code" programs, particularly for girls and young women, is another frequent recommendation.

Some groups say governments should guarantee more funding for bilingual education, and a few suggested implementing mandatory volunteerism programs in schools on a national basis.

On youth employment and the economy, several stakeholder groups advocated for raising minimum wages across the country, as well as expanding paid work experience programs for young people (i.e., paid internships). Some say governments should specifically develop workstream programs for youth and others recovering from addiction or suffering from mental health issues.

Other stakeholder ideas included investing in innovative employment opportunities (e.g., in the tech sector); expanding employment programs for newcomers to Canada and their parents; eliminating workplace discrimination; expanding federal youth employment programs dedicated to bilingualism; and expanding the Summer Jobs Program to a year-round initiative. One group says the government should encourage older Canadians to retire as soon as they are CPP-qualified to make room for younger generations in the workforce.

3.1.3 Rural, remote and northern communities

3.1.3.1 Online *have your say* booklet

The topic of rural, remote and northern communities focuses on the general disparities faced by these communities, whether related to service delivery, employment and economic opportunities, general infrastructure or the cost of living. To address these issues, comments stress the need for greater investment to ensure equal access and the sustainability of rural, remote and northern communities. Some also call for a targeted strategy to foster a sustained agricultural sector. This topic received a total of 305 comments. Participants were invited to provide their feedback to this topic by responding to the following two questions:

1. Why is the topic of youth living in rural, remote and/or northern communities on your mind?
2. What specific actions could be taken, or should we continue to take, to support young Canadians living in rural, remote and northern communities?

Question 1: Why is the topic of youth living in rural, remote, and/or northern communities on your mind?

The focus of this topic highlights the disparities faced by rural, remote and northern communities, especially as it relates to service delivery and availability such as healthcare and other government services (40 per cent), including the iniquities faced by Indigenous communities (12 per cent) and ability to deter substance abuse and crime (8 per cent). Lack of employment opportunities (30 per cent) and the socio-economic sustainability (28 per cent) of their communities, including the cost of living (22 per cent) is equally important. Relatively few comments point to the lack of available resources afforded to rural, remote and northern communities (10 per cent), including infrastructure money (8 per cent).

Issues of rural, remote and northern communities	
	%
Concerns about service delivery and/or availability	40%
Focus on the lack of employment opportunities for young people	30%
Concerns about the socio-economic sustainability of communities	28%
Concerns about the high cost of living	22%
Focus on the inequities faced by many Indigenous communities	12%
Focus on the perceived lack of funding provided to rural, remote and northern communities	10%
Focus on the poor transportation infrastructure	8%
Concerns about the socio-economic impacts of drug and alcohol abuse, and crime rates	8%
Other	12%

This table depicts the issues of rural, remote and northern communities that were top of mind for youth who completed the online *have your say* booklet.

Disparities faced by rural, remote and northern communities

By far, concerns about the lack of service delivery and availability in rural, remote and northern communities are top of mind. Some point to the importance of equal access to services as way of ensuring all communities can benefit from greater quality and availability of services, especially as it relates to health care and substance abuse.

> "I feel that the Canadian government should be focused on equalizing resources allocated to these communities. They should provide additional incentives for medical professionals to reside in rural, remote and northern communities."

Some comments also focus on the iniquities faced by Indigenous communities, including poor physical infrastructure and safe drinking water, and highlight the importance of equal access to ensure the sustainability of their communities.

> "First Nations communities in this country have a right to the same services and benefits as any citizen in populated areas."

Ensuring the socio-economic sustainability

Key to ensuring the socio-economic sustainability of rural, remote and northern communities is by stimulating the creation of employment opportunities. It is said that this would give youth a reason to stay in their communities and contribute to the local economy. However, most point to the realities of out migration and the need to go elsewhere to make a living, which has an impact on the tax and population base, as well as preserving the local culture.

> "Rural communities are disappearing… no support for facilities in remote communities or job development. Everyone is moving to the city."

> "I live in a rural community, and it's important to me that rural communities continue to have opportunities and resources. I understand that sometimes relocation is necessary, but the unique cultures and businesses of these small communities are essential to preserving the local culture."

> "Our rural, remote and northern communities are quickly dying out as more and more people more to urban cores. Small communities aren't able to sustain themselves anymore because they are not generating enough funding to invest in their communities when people leave."

A portion of comments also focus on the changing landscape of agriculture and farming. Some point to the aging workforce and highlight concerns that youth are not taking over quickly enough – others also highlight the need for more sustainable farming practices.

> "Agriculture is one of the most important industries in the country, and it is one that requires more attention."

> "I come from a small community, which is facing issues concerning an aging generation of farmers that are being adequately replaced."

Question 2: What specific actions could be taken, or should we continue to take, to support young Canadians living in rural, remote and northern communities?

Rural, remote or northern communities	
	%
Need for greater economic opportunities for young people	35%
Invest in physical infrastructure	35%
Invest in education	35%
Enhance physical and mental health supports	21%
Improve food prices and availability in northern and remote communities	21%
Improve technology infrastructure	19%
More opportunities for reconciliation with Indigenous communities	2%
Other	8%

This table depicts specific actions that youth who completed the online *have your say* booklet would like to see to support young Canadians living in rural, remote or northern communities.

The focus is on providing more resources to rural, remote and northern communities to:

- Stimulate the economy (35 per cent), e.g., more training and employment opportunities, fostering entrepreneurship, "revitalize our communities" and "encourage economic development in northern Canada."

  "People don't want to leave their small communities, but don't have opportunities to support themselves financially."

- Enhance the physical (35 per cent) and technology infrastructure (19 per cent), e.g., water treatment, roads, broadband, cellular service.

  "Investment in infrastructure, many small communities still don't have access to cellphone and/or internet coverage."

  "Government can have a role in providing necessary backer in public-private partnerships to build transportation infrastructure to support a robust northern economy."

- Enhance the quality and availability of educational institutions (35 per cent), i.e., to increase graduation rates and contribute back to the local economy.

> "Support healthy eating and a strong local education system so youth are not having to leave their communities to get a good education. Even possibly offer education online to let youth not have to spend time travelling elsewhere."

- Enhance physical and mental health supports (21 per cent), e.g., better retention of health care providers, improved health care facilities.

> "Many of the services available in cities, which many of us take for granted, are not easily accessible to all Canadians and that is a serious problem. There needs to be a real conversation that leads to action about problems like this."

- Improve food prices and availability of nutritious foods (21 per cent).

> "Change the structure of Nutrition North in consultation with northern community needs and explore opportunities for the migration of sustainable technologies and infrastructure to these remote communities. Make food accessible."

3.1.3.2 Online discussion forum and video comment submissions

Some video submissions suggest updating the criminal justice system to reflect the multiculturalism of the country by adding rules regarding the makeup of juries to reflect the accused's cultural or social background (i.e., Indigenous representation on jury benches when Indigenous individuals are on trial or the victims of crime).

Another main concern of those making video submissions is access to mental health supports and resources, including in schools and in rural, remote, and northern communities.

> "I am from the NWT, and I can tell you federal policies surrounding the North created by the South have failed us many times. There is a growing international and national interest in the North and we need to be a part of these discussions. Our issues need unique solutions and considerations. Hopefully, a federal youth policy will not be one that excludes northern contemporary issues. We are here, we exist, and your choices affect us."

3.1.3.3 Youth roundtables

Participants from Quebec City and Yellowknife further highlight that many Canadian youth lack access to the necessities of life, including housing or clean drinking water. In Yellowknife, participants discuss the role that "innovation" could play in renewing community infrastructure in northern communities and the potential to bring clean drinking water to these communities. Further, participants also note the utility of applying a "human rights approach" to ensure all communities have equal access to clean drinking water.

3.2 Engagement and empowerment

3.2.1 Civic engagement and youth influence

3.2.1.1 Online *have your say* booklet

The topic of Civic Engagement and Youth Influence examines issues of youth apathy, engagement in the decision-making process, youth voice and required actions such as encouraging youth engagement or providing additional resources to community organizations. Civic Engagement and Youth Influence received a total of 774 comments.

Participants were invited to provide their feedback to this topic by responding to the following two questions:

1. Why are the topics of civic engagement and youth impact on your mind?

2. What specific actions could be taken, or should we continue to take, to support and enhance civic engagement and youth impact?

Question 1: Why are the topics of civic engagement and youth impact on your mind?

The strongest view is the idea that youth want to be involved in shaping the decisions, which affect them because they are the future leaders and can bring new and fresh perspectives to the policy and decision-making table – as shown through the top three themes in the exhibit shown to the right. A smaller number of comments focus on youth apathy (16 per cent), which is often tied to the view that decision-makers have a responsibility to be good role models (3 per cent), or describe actions that could be taken or enhanced (18 per cent), which is examined in the second part of this topic. Relatively few comments focus on various policy-related issues (5 per cent) and often provide examples of what could be done, such as lowering the voting age or reforming the Canadian Pension Plan (CPP), the importance of providing community organizations with adequate resources, like funding or focus on policy issues that fall under other jurisdictions, like the mandatory volunteer hours in Ontario.

Civic engagement and youth influence	
	%
View that Canadian youth should be involved in the political and decision-making process	37%
Focus on the importance of education and awareness building	25%
Emphasis on youth being the future leaders of Canada	19%
Provided examples of specific actions that could be taken or enhanced to support civic engagement and youth influence	18%
Focus on the source and impacts of youth apathy on civic engagement	16%
Focus on various policy-related issues	5%
View that decision-makers have a responsibility to be good role models	3%
Other	8%

This table depicts the issues of civic engagement and youth influence that were top of mind for youth who completed the online *have your say* booklet.

View that Canadian youth should be involved in the political and decision-making process

This theme encompasses a few underlying views, including the importance of being the next generation, a focus on how government players have a key role in fostering youth engagement and an emphasis on fostering new and bright perspectives. Overall, comments challenge "the idea that youth don't care about the world today" and want to be involved in the decision-making process. However, comments highlight some barriers to participation, including the lack of meaningful opportunities or lack of awareness of available opportunities. In ensuring the process is truly meaningful, comments highlight the importance of diversity and inclusivity in the decision-making process. Although some acknowledge that much has been done to engage youth, like the Prime Minister's Youth Council (PMYC), comments highlight that these initiatives need "to be fleshed out and expanded" to include the voices of all age brackets and socio-economic, religious and ethnic backgrounds.

> "We need a proper cross-section that better represents ALL youth, not just one small bit of it. We aren't being heard because no one really has any thoughts [on how] to let us have a chance to speak."

Youth also feel a sense of responsibility in ensuring youth voices are equally heard in decision-making. For most, the rationale points to the need to ensure sustainable policy

development meets the needs of current and future generations, like the impact of environmental policies.

> "I believe it is crucial that this generation recognize the power and voice that we have and use this to its advantage in order to benefit the country in the future."

Comments also express the view that youth can be strong catalysts for change and that they often bring different perspectives to light that may otherwise have gone unnoticed.

> "With their enthusiasm and their engagement, they can put their elders in contact with themes or issues that they would otherwise have ignored."

Focus on the role of education and awareness-building

This theme also encompasses a few different views, including the role that education and awareness play in personal development and growth, the importance of formal education, as well as the role of awareness in driving change. Most comments express the view that education and awareness is key to ensuring youth have the tools to shape theirs and Canada's future. Comments highlight that exposing youth early on to active participation and how society operates would allow them to be more engaged and informed decision-makers.

> "I believe civic engagement, but especially youth impact, is extremely important in the development of the minds and ideas of people. Growing up, you should be taught how to step foot into society, and start being able to build ideas that will have an impact on the future, by being able to grow your ideas at a young age and form your motives."

> "Understanding the system under which we live and work can be crucial for us to conceive ways of bettering it once we take up our shots within the workforce."

Other comments express the view that while only general awareness is an asset, some do focus on the role of formal education in shaping civically-minded youth, as well as the need to make it more interesting. Some comments also highlight that while there is often interest in getting involved, youth don't usually follow-through due to lack of knowledge or competing priorities.

> "There has not been enough education on Canada's different political parties, how to vote, how to decide which one to pick, and a reflection on one's values and beliefs. Many high schoolers I know, feel lost and do not feel capable of that responsibility because they haven't learnt enough about themselves and the people running due to a lot of school on their plate."

> "Everyone feels change is needed, but feels hopelessness when trying to fund solutions, which leads to lack of engagement due to lack of knowledge and tools to find the solutions."

Emphasis on youth as the future leaders of Canada

Most comments expressed the view that youth are the leaders of tomorrow and have a role to play in shaping their future. Comments highlight the opportunity to create change and the importance of the generational shift in policy and decision-making. Youth feel a responsibility in ensuring they are the driving force behind the change they want to see in Canada's future.

> "If Canadian youth do not participate in their communities, who will stand up to voice what they want to see happen in their area and have decisions made that benefit their lifestyles."

> "I think it is becoming more and more apparent that youth should be involved in shaping their future. We no longer should have to live in environmental and economic conditions, which have been solely determined by our parents and grandparents."

> "Young people represent the future and the future is being built today."

Others highlight youth's role in sustaining diversity and growing the Canadian identity.

> "Being involved or engaged in our community is essential to furthering acceptance, co-operation and happiness."

> "Raising civically minded youth is important for sustained economic and socio-cultural growth, and to safeguard the diversity of Canada going forward."

Focus on the source and impacts of youth apathy on civic engagement

Comments that highlight youth apathy do so by providing little or no rationale. Those that examine the issue a little deeper, express the view that even if youth are actively engaged, their voices or votes do not provide as much weight as older generations.

> "I believe in my personal opinion that one of the main factors why youth choose not to focus on civic engagement is because it seems that even if we can speak, we have no voice."

Others focus on the importance of having good role models to look up to. Comments express the view that negative government and political actions can have an impact of youth disengagement.

> "Inuit youth have a bad impression of leaders, many leaders become corrupt and are not advocating for the people."

> "Younger generations have become too disillusioned with the hypocrisy in our government and as a result they don't participate in the democratic process."

Comments also highlight the need to focus on interests that are important to youth to lower youth apathy; or engage on platforms that attract young Canadians.

> "It seems to me that young people are not interested in traditional politics. They want to contribute to society in other ways, especially by being involved directly

with causes dear to them or by promoting change in their daily lives to make their lives consistent with their values (tolerance, environmental protection, etc.)."

Question 2: What specific actions could be taken, or should we continue to take, to support and enhance civic engagement and youth impact?

Comments list several ways to enhance civic engagement and youth influence, with most pointing to the need to ensure inclusivity, diversity and accessibility as shown through the top four themes in the following exhibit. The rationale is that ensuring opportunities are accessible and inclusive will allow more youth to get involved as well as help build awareness and interest in civic engagement. Relatively few comments focus on addressing various policy-related issues (8 per cent), with the most prevalent being lowering the voting age to 16 and electoral reform. Similarly, some comments also express the view that addressing socio-economic determinants, like poverty, could have a positive impact on youth apathy (7 per cent); or focus on the need to ensure transparency, accountability and inclusivity in decision-making, i.e., being a good role model (7 per cent).

Examples of initiatives undertaken by other organizations (4 per cent) are highlighted in the analysis.

Support and enhance civic engagement and youth impact	
	%
Various actions to ensure decision-making is inclusive of all youth voices	41%
Need for greater education and awareness building	24%
Various actions to encourage youth engagement and interest in politics and civic action	24%
Provide greater support to youth organizations/programs	16%
Need to address various policy-related issues	8%
Need to address the socio-economic determinants impacting youth apathy	7%
Need to ensure transparency, accountability and inclusivity in decision-making and political speech	7%
Shared examples of initiatives undertaken by organizations (specific/non-specific to youth)	4%
Other	8%

This table depicts specific actions that youth who completed the online *have your*

say booklet would like to see to support and enhance civic engagement and youth impact.

Ensuring decision-making is inclusive of all youth voices

Comments focus on two interconnected views, including the importance of relationship-building and the need to remove barriers to participation. Generally, they support a more inclusive and diverse process, and one that is accessible. Comments highlight the importance of relationship-building through increased and sustained engagement. This is said to ensure that youth voices are truly heard.

> "Show young people that they are taken seriously; listening is great, but it doesn't mean much to youth if action doesn't follow. Share the outcomes of engagement and the difference it is making."

Other comments describe several ways for youth voices to be better represented at the decision-making table, including:

- Expanding the PMYC to include 1) "various subcommittees, and representation in other areas of the government" 2) "a larger group" 3) the "opportunity [for more people] to join in."

- Implementing proportional representation or similar approach to ensure the hardest reached are involved, including: Indigenous youth, those from low income and various socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, those with disabilities and those from rural, remote and northern communities.

- Working with provincial and territorial partners, as well as those from the MUSH sector (municipalities, universities, schools and hospitals), and other not-for-profit organizations to establish youth councils/advisers and promote youth representation on their boards.

- Working with parliamentarians to establish youth councils across all federal ridings; or establish a shadow cabinet at the provincial/territorial and federal levels.

Others prioritize improving access to existing engagement opportunities by removing barriers to participation, including:

- More accessible information and improved online platforms. The United Nations Volunteer portal is also suggested as a great platform to exemplify.

- Better targeted communications channels: "get on more/newer social media! Go to where Canadian youth are to make a real impact. Snapchat, Instagram, etc." "Stream your debates on Twitter or YouTube where young people spend time."

- More engaging, interest-specific content: "Exploring alternative or creative ways to engage youth citizens, such as through the internet or on issues that pique their interest, have shown youth engage when opportunities are accessible."

- Making it personal: "It always comes back to 'What's in it for me?' […] Keep that in mind when consulting youth!!"

Need for greater education and awareness-building

Most comments focus on the need to provide greater civic education in schools. The view is that educating youth early on could benefit civic engagement and voter turnout.

> "Better education about electoral systems, governance, political parties, the impact of the media and the importance of critical thinking during campaigns from a younger age. If students were exposed to this knowledge as early as Grade 8, everyone would benefit from the resulting increased youth voter turnout."

Comments list several ways to enhance youth's knowledge of civil society and the political process, both formal and informal, including:

- Working with government and other partners to establish informal learning opportunities: mentoring/volunteer programs, information booths (e.g., Elections Canada booths), or partnerships;

- Public education/awareness campaigns targeted at youth; and

- Working with provincial and territorial partners to update/review school curriculums, including early education and a consistent approach across the country: "Revamp the civic courses offered in high schools," "the encouragement of provincial curricula (harmonized) on how to become involved in the parliamentary system."

A small group of comments also express the view that increased awareness could be achieved through enhanced consultation and/or engagement initiatives, as well as making the topic of civic engagement more engaging. Comments highlight how "youth need to be encouraged to speak up, and need opportunities to do so," like youth councils, town halls, wider consultation processes, workshops, conferences, etc.

Fostering youth engagement in politics and civic action

Comments are very supportive of lowering the voting age to 16 years old with the view that this could ensure continuity from when youth learn about politics to when they are able to actively participate. It was also said to be an outlet where youth can have their voices heard.

> "Having an actual voice would provoke much more enthusiasm and interest in engagement."

Some comments also expressed the view that making voting more accessible could lead to higher engagement levels – from the voting stations to the campaign platforms. Others highlight the need to align election periods to university or college semesters, in addition to formalizing voting stations on campus.

> "Continue the on-campus voting pop-up pilot, which enabled so many students across the country to vote in the past federal election."

Other ideas include: making voting mandatory; allowing 16-year olds to pre-register for voting; partnering with youth organizations to help empower youth; and providing quality internships in political contexts, e.g., parliamentary/constituency offices, committees, etc.

Supports and relationship-building is key

Most comments express the view that additional resources are required to support existing youth organizations, especially those working toward empowering youth and promoting civic engagement. It is said that additional support would allow these organizations to strengthen the work they do in their communities. Fostering relationships with these organizations through formal or informal partnerships would also allow the government to tap into a wealth of expertise and ensure resources are adequately allocated and efforts not duplicated.

> "The provincial and federal government needs to tap into these resources before creating a new youth group. We have a Youth Advocacy Committee and an active Young Professionals Network and then our MP and MPP started a youth board without consulting either group."

Outreach and building a bridge with provincial and territorial counterparts is also said to be important to ensure the federal government can leverage existing initiatives at various levels
of government.

> "Collaborate with Youth Voice Ontario. They are running a platform for youth engagement in policy already and you could learn from them."

Funding is also highlighted as a way to support youth's entrepreneurial spirits. Comments varied from support for social enterprises to smaller initiatives and projects.

> "Set up more funds (following the model of Ontario's Summer Company and SpeakUp grant structures) to encourage students to create their own organizations for whatever they are interested in."

3.2.1.2 Online discussion forum and video comment submissions

Youth would like to be more involved in the decision-making process for policies, which will affect them now and in the future. Suggestions to increase engagement include lowering the voting age to 16 years old and increasing funding for local organizations, which encourage youth participation in the political process. Other suggestions include increased mentorship opportunities and a focus on providing greater opportunities to youth living in rural, remote and northern communities. Several individuals who submitted videos on this theme are concerned about the acceptance of youth in the decision-making process.

"Youth don't always have a say in the laws and acts that will affect us in the future. We should be involved in that process; for example, we may not be affected by taxation now, but that doesn't mean we won't be in the future. We should be considered when the government plans to increase/decrease taxes for people being immediately affected."

"I think a lot is being done at the local level, like leadership programs or various youth groups, and think it might be hard for the government to actually do anything like that. But the youth council was a really cool idea! Maybe more grants could be available for those local organizations that are already making a difference and getting young people involved!

3.2.1.3 Youth roundtables

Engagement with youth on important decisions and issues is an important topic, particularly for youth in Thunder Bay who note that "government needs to listen to what youth councils are saying." Other opportunities to further engage with young people across Canada, including:

- Establishing "monthly youth council forums" and more youth-led conferences;

- Encourage the private and not-for-profit sectors to have youth representation on their boards;

- Mandating youth representation on boards and federally regulated organizations; and

- Lowering the voting age since "younger youth should have a say in the issues that impact them."

Input from roundtables also include the importance of ensuring youth have an active voice in politics and the issues that affect them and their peers.

"Young people simply want to be taken into account on decision-making bodies, to feel that their voice matters."

For participants at two roundtables, a perceived lack of civic engagement and low voter turnout are important issues for young Canadians that need to be addressed, since many "young people are more likely to vote if they feel a strong sense of belonging to their community."

Youth also acknowledge other ways of being involved in their communities such as volunteerism or civic engagement. The benefits of volunteerism as identified include help for local organizations and communities, but also provide youth with valuable experience so that they can have a "better idea of what you may want to do and/or what kind of jobs (they) want to avoid in the future and post-secondary."

Participants discussed and identified improvements, which would make it easier and more accessible for young Canadians to pursue volunteer opportunities and civic engagement, such as:

- Establishing a portfolio of volunteer opportunities online to make it easier for young Canadians to find opportunities (e.g., through an online portal or website);

- Providing more opportunities for mentorship to promote "a community of students with the same interests";

- More "prizes or other motivation/incentives" to get youth involved in their communities;

- Increasing opportunities for all Canadian youth by making them more physically accessible and helping with transportation logistics (e.g., providing pickup or dropoff services for youth);

- Educating youth on the importance of civic engagement so that they understand "their potential in creating change." This could take the form of civics classes, or similar changes to school curriculum;

- Mandating quotas for youth representation on government and crown corporation boards: "Quotas for young people on the boards of directors of Crown corporations;"

- Following the Quebec model and formalizing a structure for youth voices through the creation of a "youth secretariat, youth policy and inclusion of youth organizations in decision making;" and

- Ensuring greater opportunities for youth to participate in national youth forums or dialogues, which bring together a variety of people, such as the youth policy roundtable.

3.2.1.4 Stakeholder submissions

A number of stakeholder submissions explore the topic of youth civic engagement, including lowering Canada's voting age to 16 years old. Many feel that federal, provincial/territorial, and municipal governments should engage young people in earnest to develop community-specific strategies for encouraging youth participation in civic matters and volunteerism. One group suggests implementing a "youth friendly" federal grants program to encourage civic engagement, particularly for young people living in rural, remote, and northern communities. The development of a national online community hub for youth volunteers was also recommended, which would help connect youth with mentors, contain grant information and applications, job opportunities, etc.

Significant attention was paid to ensuring that any youth engagement activities, programs, or strategies be inclusive of minorities and marginalized groups (e.g., Afro-Quebecer youth), be offered in both French and English nationwide, and be grounded in the general principles of diversity and respect.

3.2.2 Gender equity, inclusion and accessibility

3.2.2.1 Online *have your say* booklet

The topic of gender equity, inclusion and accessibility examines issues, like equity in the workplace, negative impacts of discrimination and finding ways of making policy and decision-making more inclusive of all voices, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, and ethnic or religious backgrounds. Gender equity, inclusion and accessibility received a total of 862 comments. Participants were invited to provide their feedback to this topic by responding to the following two questions:

1. Why are the topics of gender equity, inclusion and accessibility of youth on your mind?

2. What specific actions could be taken, or should we continue to take, to support and promote gender equity, inclusion and accessibility for all youth in Canada?

Question 1: Why are the topics of gender equity, inclusion and accessibility of youth on your mind?

Gender equity, inclusion and accessibility	
	%
Focus on the importance of gender equity and countering gender biases	40%
Focus on the realities faced by the LBGTQ2 community	30%
Focus on the importance of gender equity, inclusion and accessbility (with little or no elaboration)	18%
Focus on the realities faced by marginalized groups and visible minorities	18%
Focus on the existence of gender-based violence, sexual assault and harassment	16%
Focus on the importance of addressing the gender pay-gap	16%
Focus on the realities faced by those with disabilities	10%
Focus on the importance of reconciliation and inclusion of Indigenous peoples	7%
Other	9%

This table depicts the issues of gender equity, inclusion and accessibility that were top of mind for youth who completed the online *have your say* booklet.

Overwhelmingly, equity, inclusion and accessibility are viewed as universal issues – it transcends gender, sexual orientation, ethnic and religious backgrounds, etc. Comments acknowledge recent gains, but call for more improvements, like access to resources and services, as well as awareness-building and acceptance. This is an important topic for youth and comments examine the different disparities within society, as shown in the following exhibit. There is also a strong feeling that youth may be more vulnerable to these societal and familial pressures.

Focus on the importance of gender equity

Comments express the view that gender equity is about ensuring balance: equal representation, balance of power, balanced discussions, etc. It is a universal issue that affects more than just women. For some, this means that men should also be involved in the discussion to help shape a balanced future. For others, its ensuring that all genders (female, male and non-binary) are empowered to reach their full potential. Generally, gender balance is viewed as a win-win and allows for different voices to be heard in the policy and decision-making processes.

> "We need to promote appreciation for women AND men in order to have a society that respects on another. Both sides need to feel value and respected in order to have meaningful discussion and form a unified front on gender equity."

A large group of comments also acknowledge that Canada has come a long way, but agree there is always room for improvement. Comments point to the existing disparities and emphasize that "limitations increase for Indigenous, immigrant and LGBTQ2 women." They emphasize that as Canada looks to the future, the issue of gender balance will gain even more momentum and lead to positive change. "Equal representation for women and visible minorities are also issues that Canada has made strides on, but I haven't seen this addressed in a broader policy context that could result in long-term change."

Focus on the multiple faces of discrimination

While most comments express the view that inclusivity and diversity is important, with little or no rationale, some do focus on the different realities faced by the LGBTQ2 community, visible minorities and people with disabilities (visible or invisible). Others focus on gender-based violence and intimidation as an extension of discrimination with often criminal implications, as well as more institutionalized issues, like the gender pay-gap.

Most comments describe a personal or shared experience of discrimination and point to the lack of systemic awareness and acceptance as the source of most behaviour. The behaviour also extends to what is considered "societal norms" and discrimination even though unintended in some cases, by institutions and government practices.

> "Give the option of a third gender or non-binary on legal documents."

> "It doesn't become apparent how inaccessible Canada is until you need your community to be accessible."

> "Gender bias is still an ongoing issue in nearly every aspect of employment, marketing, commerce, attitudes and practice. The wage gap for women in the workforce (both private and public sectors) has moved only slightly toward equality; there is still room for much improvement."

Although some do acknowledge recent gains, most express the need for improvement, particularly with access to resources and services, as well as balancing gender biases. Comments emphasize that inclusivity and accessibility issues are universal, but can have a greater negative impact on youth who may be more vulnerable to societal and familial pressures.

> "Because the policies and society, in general, makes (gender) minorities, especially youth more vulnerable to be negatively affected by the lack of access to resources."

> "I believe that all people should be held equal – regardless of gender, sexual orientation, level of ability or race. I am continually frustrated by the systemic and pervasive discrimination that women, people of colour and LGBTQ+ individuals face in daily life."

> "Indigenous issues are especially prominent (access to resources, equal education opportunities, ease of political engagement, for example) and one that often seems to get set aside because the impacts of these disparities are out of sight for most Canadians' everyday lives."

Question 2: What specific actions could be taken, or should we continue to take, to support and promote gender equity, inclusion and accessibility for all youth in Canada?

Most comments emphasize the importance of sustaining an open dialogue to foster education and awareness (53 per cent). It is seen as a way to empower marginalized communities and promote inclusivity and acceptance, especially as it relates to promoting reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples (7 per cent), as well as give a voice to the minority (13 per cent). A relatively smaller group of comments focus on the need to address systemic disparities through policies, regulations and other legislative means (20 per cent). This could be accomplished by building stronger ties with provincial and territorial counterparts, and the private sector (16 per cent), by incentivizing equal representation in the workforce (11 per cent), enforcing and punishing discriminatory behaviour (11 per cent), providing additional resources to community organizations (9 per cent), making hiring and pay practices more transparent (5 per cent) or addressing a variety of other policy-related issues (9 per cent), like parental leave and reproductive health.

Support and promote gender equity, inclusion and accessibility	
	%
Need for greater education and awareness building to promote equality and discourage discrimination	53%
Ensure equality and inclusivity are integrated into policies, laws and regulations across all levels of government	20%
Need to work with provincial and territorial partners, as well as the private sector to address issues of equality and accessibility	16%
Provide more opportunities for engagement	13%
Incentivize the representation of women, members of the LBGTQ2 community, visible minorities and people with disabilities in the workplace	11%
Need for monitoring and enforcement mechanisms to counter discriminatory behaviour	11%
Provide additional support to new and existing organizations	9%
Address policy-related issues	9%
Need for enhanced measures to address reconciliation and recognizing the rights of Indigenous peoples	7%
Make hiring and pay practices more transparent and egalitarian	5%
Other	11%

This table depicts specific actions that youth who completed the online *have your say* booklet would like to see to support and promote gender equity, inclusion and accessibility for all youth in Canada.

Need greater education and awareness to promote equality and inclusivity

Comments describe the importance of education and awareness to counter discrimination at the individual and institutional levels. Sustained dialogue, consultations and targeted programs, which encourage empowerment are favoured approaches to continue to promote change and assist in a universal culture shift.

> "The most important action is keeping the dialogue going. The government has and will hopefully continue to be actively engaged in public dialogue promoting gender equity, inclusion and accessibility. Canada can't ignore this topic if we shine a bright light on it!"

"Educational opportunities through social media are important to provide the context behind minority groups. Addressing Canada's historical past with Indigenous Peoples is vital to this effort."

Some comments also focus on the need to promote and encourage women to get into traditionally male-dominated fields, like the trades or STEM; or alternatively, encouraging men to pursue a female-dominated career. The general sense is that regardless of gender, individuals should be encouraged to pursue "careers that will enrich society" as a whole. Finally, several comments emphasize that greater attention is required to address workplace discrimination, either through formal channels, like sensitivity training, or informal initiatives, like campaigns to promote cultural change.

Addressing equity, inclusivity and accessibility by legislative means

A large portion of comments focus on what governments – all levels – could do at a policy level to promote equity, inclusivity and accessibility. The key sentiment is that better integration is required between different levels of government, as well as establishing relationships with the private sector, to better meet societal demands of tolerance and acceptance. Comments describe several ways this could be achieved, including:

- Implementing a universal accessibility plan within the public and private sectors (e.g., subsidies/funding, regulations, etc.);

- Providing additional resources to community and not-for-profit organizations so they can better meet the needs of their members;

- Consider revising gender-based identification on government documentation and during information gathering, like surveys;

- Establish better monitoring and enforcement mechanisms against discriminatory behaviour (e.g., gender-based violence, inequalities in the workplace, racially motivated violence, harassment, etc.);

- Greater effort to address the gender pay gap and disparate hiring practices across the public and private sectors;

- Incentivize the representation of women, the LGBTQ2 community, visible minorities and people with disabilities (both visible and invisible) in the workplace; and

- Promoting tolerance and acceptance through school curriculums.

3.2.2.2 Online discussion forum and video comment submissions

While gender equality is very important, many consider not enough is being done to include LGBTQ2 and other marginalized populations. It is also suggested that greater effort is required to involve youth with disabilities in the decisions that affect them.

"What can government do to better combat discrimination suffered by youth based on a disability or their age, gender, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation? You can include autistic adults in the conversations about autism and autism approaches. Out with the old system that is NOT working, and in with the respectful approaches that are consistent with neuroscience research and sensory needs for autistic children."

Some video submissions discuss access to homeless shelters for transgendered youth as they are particularly vulnerable and may not be able to access shelters that represent their true gender. For example, a transgender woman may not be able to access a woman's shelter but would feel uncomfortable/in danger in a male shelter.

Further video submissions say the government should require businesses of a certain size to publish a report on their gender pay gaps to help close those gaps and inform a national discussion about inequality.

3.2.2.3 Youth roundtables

There was considerable discussion across several roundtables on an inclusive society, where youth, regardless of background, geography or culture, can access the same opportunities. This sentiment was summarized by a Quebec City participant:

"Young people are concerned about various issues, such as gender equality and the inclusion of all genders."

Diverse mechanisms are discussed to achieve this inclusivity. For instance, in Thunder Bay, participants discussed how education is required to eliminate racism and foster inclusivity for Indigenous and immigrant youth.

"Education on inclusion allows people to be a part of larger group and feel equally engaged."

Similarly, participants in Calgary discussed how immigrant youth could better adapt to Canadian society, suggesting a "mentorship program for new Canadians to help them ease into Canadian society." For participants in Yellowknife, the lack of awareness among Canadian youth about northern issues is highlighted (e.g., the lack of awareness around the electoral systems in the Territories). One participant from Yellowknife describes how "as a northerner, I don't really feel Canadian and don't identify with Canada." Means of mitigating this sentiment as identified by Yellowknife participants include cultural exchange programs for youth in Southern Canada, or through enhanced education on northern issues.

Youth also discussed the topic of engagement and empowerment. Most areas of discussion centre on the inclusion and engagement of all youth in society.

Many identify this theme as important considering the need for greater protection of marginalized youth and equal opportunities for all youth, including LBGTQ2 youth, newcomer and refugee youth, and youth with a physical disability.

"Although we have come very far in including everyone into society in the last century, there are still prejudices against certain societal groups that many youth and adults cling to."

Some youth mention the push for inclusivity should take the form of "a social and cultural movement [rather] than a legal and political one," while others indicate that acceptance and inclusion could be accomplished through government policy, such as stronger "accessibility legislation" or "mandatory training" for employers or service providers.

Youth who examine the need for a greater "cultural shift," highlight the following courses of action to promote inclusivity:

- Promoting the use of "unconventional gender roles," for instance including a male actor in a traditionally female role in an advertisement or promoting immigrant youth. Some youth feel this would be a key part of "continuing the discussion," and important in order to ensure that equity and inclusion are topics that are "spread to more people";

- A number of comments centre on specific gender equality measures, such as "paid parental leave for all parents" or "government funded daycare for all children," so that women receive "equitable treatment and access to opportunities" in the workforce. Other ideas from participants focus on the workplace, such as enhanced rules or education for employers around hiring practices, as "studies have shown that managers have an inclination to hire a man over a woman";

- Measures to ensure that youth with physical disabilities receive equitable opportunities are also discussed, including "more programs to help disabled youth enter the workforce and make the best of what they are able to do"; and

- The integration of accessibility principles into architecture and design "to ensure equitable access and participation for all" are considered in urban planning and architectural design.

Participants from two youth-led roundtables discuss the barriers faced by racialized and Indigenous youth, including systemic discrimination and racism: "racism exists in Canada." They identify how economic, cultural and religious discrimination can negatively influence the way Indigenous and racialized youth access services in their community. They also highlighted how empowerment and "being proud of who you are" are important factors for marginalized youth to achieve their full potential. Specific measures identified by youth include:

- More clubs and bodies (such as a multicultural club) where young people can share their experiences and learn from one-another;

- Opportunities for youth to engage with decision-makers to make their voice heard and appreciate their perspective, in light of a perceived lack of diversity among decision-makers: "there's too few folks of colour at the decision-making tables to move policy";

- Education and awareness on inclusion and other cultures to help stem the tide of systemic racism, such as adapting "school curriculums to reflect today's society";

- Giving youth a say in modernizing the justice system to focus on rehabilitation and inclusion and to counter the "racial profiling" of youth in the criminal justice system.

- Making it easier for newcomer youth to access services, for instance, offering more services in other languages so that newcomer youth can overcome language and cultural barriers; and

- A greater "acceptance of international certifications" such as education certificates or job credentials to help newcomer youth find meaningful employment opportunities.

3.2.2.4 Stakeholder submissions

Gender issues are identified by several stakeholder groups as important areas of focus for Canada's Youth Policy. On the topic of women in the workplace, they say that governments should mandate and enforce pay equity, encourage fair hiring practices, and increase the length of parental leave. With regard to women in government, stakeholders suggest implementing gender parity in all branches and adding more women in leadership roles – especially in traditionally male-dominated fields, like security and defence.

On women's health, they largely focus on eliminating taxes and/or costs altogether for feminine hygiene products and birth control, as well as ensuring access to safe, accessible, free abortion services with legislated safe zones around clinics. It is also noted that governments should be doing more to protect and support the victims of sexual assault, as well as work to prevent sexual assault at the outset by educating men and boys on consent and healthy masculinity.

Additionally, stakeholders say government-led and -funded leadership programming for young women should be inclusive and representative of visible minority and Indigenous women and girls and involve the participation of women elders and other senior women. Expanding programs to promote women and girls in STEM and the trades, as well as tandem programs encouraging boys' entry into professions, like nursing and other traditionally "female" professions, is also of importance.

Ways to improve the lives of Canadian youth with disabilities are suggested by several stakeholders, whose ideas are largely based on directly consulting disabled youth on any policy, program, or strategy which might affect them, and on adopting a more people- and needs-based approach to accessibility policy. These stakeholders recommend removing barriers to education, meaningful employment, government services, transportation, health care, and more for youth with both visible (e.g., physical) and invisible (e.g., learning, hearing) disabilities.

It is also suggested that social assistance rates for people with disabilities and chronic health issues be increased, and that services for disabled youth be extended beyond

the traditional cutoff age of 18 years old in order to relieve the pressures of self-advocacy and ease the transition to adult-specific services. Finally, stakeholders say the federal government should organize a youth advisory forum, panel, or task force to advise on the accessibility of the eventual Youth Policy.

Some stakeholder groups examine the issue of better integrating government supports, services, and policies when providing feedback on the Youth Policy. Accountability is a key issue for these stakeholders, who ask that governments – at all levels – implement accessible mechanisms through which children and youth, as well as caregivers and advocates, can report government system failures, violations of children's rights, and failures of individuals with authority to respond ethically, adequately, or equitably to rights violations. They also say that collaboration and co-ordination between government services and systems should be improved to reduce the barriers faced by youth and their families when accessing government supports and services. One group suggests harmonizing data and assessment tools to ensure youth who exit the health, foster, and/or corrections systems do not end up transitioning into homelessness, while another said government services for youth with disabilities must be delivered in a more accessible manner.

3.2.3 Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples

3.2.3.1 Online *have your say* booklet

The topic of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples examines issues like the importance of addressing past injustices and promoting the inclusivity of Indigenous voices in policy and decision-making, especially as it relates to protecting Indigenous rights and fostering an approach to self-governance and a sustainable future for Indigenous communities. Key to success is building awareness about past injustices and existing realities, as well as rebuilding strong relationships with Indigenous leaders and communities at large. Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples received a total of 465 comments.

Participants were invited to provide their feedback on this topic by responding to the following two questions:

1. Why is the topic of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples on your mind?
2. What specific actions could be taken, or should we continue to take, to engage youth in furthering reconciliation in Canada?

Question 1: Why is the topic of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples on your mind?

The majority of comments express the view that as a nation, we need to address past injustices committed against First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities to ensure Canada's collective prosperity (57 per cent). The impact of these past injustices is said to have led to systemic racism (23 per cent), including the lack of Indigenous representation in positions of power (4 per cent), and the degradation of Indigenous

livelihoods and on-reserve living conditions (19 per cent), as well as an over-representation of Indigenous Peoples in Canada's justice and child welfare systems (8 per cent). The overall sentiment is that reconciliation is long overdue, and now is the time to rebuild the ties with Indigenous Peoples.

Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples	
	%
Focus on the importance of addressing past injustices	57%
Focus on the importance of addressing systemic racism towards Indigenous Peoples	23%
Focus on the importance of enhancing the on-reserve living conditions of Indigenous Peoples	19%
Shared a personal or familial experience	9%
Concerns about the over-representation of Indigenous Peoples in Canada's justice and child welfare systems	8%
Focus on the lack of representation of Indigenous Peoples in decision-making roles and processes	4%
Other	7%

This table depicts the issues of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples that were top of mind for youth who completed the online *have your say* booklet.

Importance of addressing past injustices for Canada's collective prosperity

Comments describe how now is the time to right the wrongs of past generations and a lot must be done to "repair the relationship" with Indigenous communities, including "broad, systemic, as well as individual, tailored change." Generally, comments express the view that the "path to our collective future relies on every member of society being able/given the opportunity to reach their full potential." It is also said to be a way for government to demonstrate concrete and meaningful action on these priorities – an important value for young Canadians.

> "A conflict that seems to be unresolved for decades could become an example of a government that is not just promoting peace, but also taking concrete action. Admitting Canada's errors is highly symbolic and a value of importance to young Canadians."

Comments also describe the importance of addressing current disparities resulting from the wrongs committed toward Indigenous communities. These include systemic racism,

which has led to an over-representation of Indigenous Peoples in the justice and child welfare systems, as well as an under-representation of Indigenous leaders in decision-making roles. This resulted in poor living conditions on-reserve and an unsustainable socio-economic and cultural future.

> "The disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada across nearly all measures of well-being are despicable. Anti-Indigenous rhetoric, stereotypes, discrimination, hatred is rampant. Canada's historic and continued treatment of Indigenous peoples is more than a stain on our country, it is woven into the very fabric of our nation and is indistinguishable from its existence."

Question 2: What specific actions could be taken, or should we continue to take, to engage youth in furthering reconciliation in Canada?

By far, education and awareness are key elements in ensuring Canada can move forward with reconciliation (54 per cent) – both through formal channels, like in school curriculums, and more informal means, like reducing the stigmas through awareness campaigns; or events to help build a cultural bridge between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities (22 per cent). Equally as important is the need to rebuild strong relationships with Indigenous communities by fostering engagement and allowing for more autonomy in governance (42 per cent). Fewer comments point to the importance of investing in physical infrastructure and services (22 per cent) and stimulating the economy (13 per cent) to improve the on-reserve living conditions and livelihoods of communities. Comments also express the importance of addressing more institutionally-based issues as a means of demonstrating concrete actions of reconciliation, including: restructuring the criminal justice and child welfare systems (8 per cent); implementing the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (the "TRC") (8 per cent); and investing greater resources into the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry (2 per cent).

Engage youth in furthering reconciliation in Canada	
	%
Need for greater education and awareness building	54%
Rebuild a strong relationship with Indigenous Peoples across all levels of government	42%
Invest in physical infrastructure and other services on reserve	22%
Promote Indigenous culture to help build relationships and a cultural bridge	20%
Provide more economic opportunities for young people living on reserves	13%
Restructure the criminal justice and child welfare systems	8%
Work towards implementing the recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission	8%
Commit more resources to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls	2%
Other	2%

This table depicts specific actions that youth who completed the online *have your* say booklet would like to see to engage youth in furthering reconciliation in Canada.

Education and engagement are key drivers of change

Most comments express the view that a peer-to-peer dialogue is required to strengthen the bond and rebuild the relationship with Indigenous communities – prioritizing communication and engagement would dissuade the "more paternalistic" system for a truly meaningful process allowing for the co-creation of a path forward. Indigenous youth are said to be the key drivers of valuable outcomes.

> "Focus on the initiative to co-develop with Indigenous Peoples across government programs, including all levels of government. Young people are definitely trailblazers to foster friendship, gain perspectives and develop long-lasting relationships. For some, it's also important to respect the rights of all Indigenous Peoples, including status and non-status Indigenous Peoples, as well as those living on and off-reserve."

Comments also express the view that a lot can be done from an education and awareness-building point of view, including:

- Restructuring the Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada website to be more interactive and user-friendly.

- Invest in community initiatives that focus on promoting Indigenous culture and fostering relationship-building, e.g., "fund regional and local initiatives that encourage communication and exchange with Indigenous Peoples (pow wows, seminars, discussion weeks, co-development, etc.);" and

- Invest greater resources in updating school curriculums and tools available for educational purposes, e.g., "develop teaching tools (books, videos) relating to this theme so that teachers can discuss it in class (turnkey tools) and share them with provincial partners."

Overall, comments describe the importance of real concrete action to not only foster the relationship with Indigenous communities, but also to connect with youth on an issue of importance.

> "Walk the talk – youth can sense disingenuousness and will quickly disengage if they perceive empty promises, so back up reconciliation talk with real action and be an example of respect and honest effort to make change."

3.2.3.2 Online discussion forum and video comment submissions

Many participants identify reconciliation as vital to repairing the current political climate and suggest ideas to start the healing process. There is also a concern that access to services is currently inequitable and that more would be required to ensure equal access. In online video submissions, Indigenous youth call on the government to include them in the reconciliation process. They also say funding needs to be earmarked to educate the broader public about the cultural differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples, and to share how the residential school system affected families, as well the existing coping challenges.

> "I think a lot more could be done to connect the youth from Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. Perhaps a pen pal program between students? It would be a great learning opportunity and help kids connect with kids from different backgrounds, with different views, and living in different circumstances/environments. I think it would also be fun!"

> "Reconciliation is extremely important to me. How Indigenous Canadians have been treated ever since Confederation has been shameful. For example, Indigenous communities should have the same services that non-Indigenous communities have. Right now, Indigenous youth must overcome enormous challenges to succeed in life. It's not fair and it must change."

3.2.3.3 Youth roundtables

Many roundtables discuss the needs of Indigenous youth and the impacts of intergenerational trauma, specifically on issues related to reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples and the role that Canadian youth can play in re-building this relationship. As

one roundtable notes, reconciliation in this way "means forgiveness, healing, respect." Another roundtable notes that "there can be no reconciliation without truth" and while there has been work to date to improve the relationship with Indigenous Peoples, more needs to be done.

To that end, participants point to the importance of education and awareness in ensuring Canadian youth can better understand "the trauma and pain that has been engrained in Indigenous identity, and the impact it has on current generations." Education is also key to preserving Indigenous cultures among Indigenous youth. Similarly, celebrating the "successes and achievements" of Indigenous Canadians may help Indigenous youth reconnect with their culture and work to preserve it.

Other actions to enhance reconciliation, include:

- Creating more opportunities for Indigenous Canadians to "share their culture" with other Canadians and more broadly "share their Indigenous identity with the world";

- Incorporating traditional Indigenous healing practices into modern medicine, including "traditional medicines," and incorporating Indigenous teachings into modern mental health care for Indigenous youth;

- Fostering a more positive relationship between young Indigenous Canadians and authorities in their community (e.g., a community-based program for the RCMP to "build relationships with Indigenous young people directly");

- Providing additional resources and supports to communities that have been directly affected by Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), such as "supported safe spaces for women and children" or more community-based support workers; and

- Reforming the child welfare system, including establishing a "transition plan for youth who are aging out of the system," along with programming for parents who are at risk of having their children taken from their home.

3.2.3.4 Stakeholder submissions

Themes around Indigenous youth and reconciliation underpin much of the stakeholder input we received. Several groups advocate for governments to engage and respect Indigenous communities on environmental policy and protections, to drastically improve clean water and food security in all Indigenous communities (e.g., end water boil advisories), and to guarantee Indigenous youth access to quality, culturally-relevant education no matter where they live (e.g., in the North).

Indigenous health is another key priority, including ensuring access to culturally sensitive mental and physical health services in all Indigenous communities. Stakeholders also feel governments should fund accessible safe spaces or friendship centres for Indigenous youth in rural, remote, and northern communities, especially for LGBTQ2 Indigenous youth, and provide free transportation to and from those facilities.

Additionally, they suggest that an Indigenous-led strategy and intervention plan to address sexual violence be developed for remote and northern communities, that a youth homelessness prevention strategy specific to Indigenous youth be included in any national homelessness strategy going forward, and that governments provide additional investments to support Indigenous-led reforms of child protection, as outlined in the TRC Calls to Action.

3.3 Your health, your community, your world

3.3.1 Canadian identity, immigration and international experiences

3.3.1.1 Online *have your say* booklet

The topic of Canadian identity, immigration and international experiences relates to themes that include multiculturalism, official languages, shared values and Canadian pride and youth exchanges and study abroad opportunities. A large component of this theme also relates to the experiences of newcomers to Canada, like immigrants and refugees, including the community supports they receive and level of acceptance they feel. Canadian identity, immigration and international experiences received a total of 950 comments.

Participants were invited to provide their feedback to this topic by responding to the following two questions:

1. Why are the topics of Canadian identity, immigration, and/or international experiences on your mind?

2. What specific actions could be taken, or should we continue to take, to improve Canadian identity and support immigration and international experiences for youth in Canada?

Question 1: Why are the topics of Canadian identity, immigration, and/or international experiences for youth on your mind?

Participants commented on the importance of Canadian identity the most (35 per cent), while discussing ideas related to the perceived lack of support systems in place for newcomers to Canada (20 per cent) and the positive effects of international experiences on the personal development of young Canadians (20 per cent) somewhat less often. They also said education and awareness about issues related to Canadian identity, immigration and/or international experiences are important (18 per cent) and some explained they are concerned about these issues because of personal or familial experiences with immigration to Canada (13 per cent). Others expounded on a wide range of view pertaining to immigration policies (13 per cent) and a small number of participants discussed the importance of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples to Canadian identity (4 per cent).

Canadian identity, immigration and international experiences	
	%
Importance of Canadian identity	35%
Perceived lack of supports for newcomers and refugees, including international students	20%
Important for the personal development of young Canadians	20%
Importance of education and awareness	18%
Personal or familial experience with immigration	13%
Diverse views regarding immigration policies	13%
Importance of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples	4%
Other	6%

This table depicts the issues of Canadian identity, immigration and international experiences that were top of mind for youth who completed the online *have your say* booklet.

Importance of the Canadian identity

Most frequently, youth are concerned about these issues because the idea of Canadian identity is important to them. Many comments describe that they think we need to continue improving upon the current "vision" of Canadian identity – upholding multicultural values, making our society more welcoming to diverse newcomers, and closing societal and economic gaps for vulnerable populations. On the other hand, some comments express the view that the Canadian identity is being "eroded" or "forgotten" because of increasing multiculturalism and that education about Canada's history and traditions should be increased and emphasized. Several comments support the idea that more should be done to educate Canadian youth about our country's history, with an intentional focus on Indigenous history, the impacts of colonialism and reconciliation. A few comments also express the view that Canada should better distinguish its identity from the United States. A smaller number focus on the need to expand the bilingual aspect of Canada's identity, and ensure that all youth are given the opportunity to learn French as-a-second-language no matter where they live.

> "I think Canada, like the world at large, is at a crossroads in how it engages with citizens and with less fortunate would-be immigrants and refugees. In turn, how we choose to engage and confront these challenges – and how we choose to treat this people – will greatly inform our identity as a nation."

Lack of support for newcomers and refugees

Another important issue is the lack of support for newcomers and refugees once they arrive in Canada. Comments typically refer to mental or community supports to counter negative attitudes in the community (e.g., explicitly anti-immigrant sentiment, general disinterest in engaging/befriending newcomers, and additional support for refugees fleeing traumatic circumstances, etc.), although some refer to "support" as immigrant services and programs, which are ineffective and/or underutilized.

Those who are first- or second-generation immigrants often say they would have benefitted from more robust relationship-building programs in schools and communities to foster two-way cultural appreciation and encourage feelings of belonging. Others mention bolstering immigrant employment services and simplifying government services applications/processes. Several people noted that there is a distinct lack of mental health support available for new immigrants and refugees, which is particularly important for the latter group (e.g., for refugees fleeing traumatic circumstances).

> "First- and second-generation immigrants have shown higher rates of psychiatric disorders. I feel like this has a lot to do with the inclusiveness of our society as a whole, and that with more awareness and better resources, we can better support minorities of youth in Canada."

Important for the personal development of young Canadians

A similar proportion of comments express the view that international experiences are important for the personal development of young Canadians. Many point to the opportunities to learn abroad and among different cultures and a way to provide Canadian youth with a more informed, holistic perspective of the world, which can lead to increased empathy, inclusiveness and flexibility. At the same time, these international experiences instill a greater appreciation for Canadian identity (e.g., multiculturalism) and the many freedoms and benefits Canadian citizens are afforded (e.g., quality of life, safety). Several comments also note that international experiences are essential to equipping Canadian youth with many of the unique skills needed to succeed professionally in an increasingly globalized economy. Several cited exchange programs and international internships as invaluable opportunities for Canadian youth, which should be increased and made more accessible (e.g., less expensive).

> "In this globally interconnected world, I think it is important for youth to have international experiences, to better understand and learn from other cultures, to learn to be flexible and adapt to living in different ways, and to develop a mentality of inclusiveness and acceptance of perceived differences."

Questions 2: What specific actions could be taken, or should we continue to take, to improve Canadian identity and support immigration and international experiences for youth in Canada?

Many different ideas were raised, including various actions related to immigration policies (27 per cent), engaging youth and the public on issues related to Canadian identity (26 per cent), creating and encouraging more international experiences for

Canadian youth (25 per cent), enhancing supports for immigrants and other newcomers to Canada (25 per cent), and increasing education and awareness-building around these issues (24 per cent). Additionally, a few comments addressed the need for enhanced measures to increase reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples (five per cent) and to engage marginalized groups (five per cent).

Canadian identity and support immigration and international experiences for youth in Canada	
	%
Various actions related to immigration policies	27%
Engaging on issues related to Canadian identity	26%
Create and encourage more international experiences for Canadian youth	25%
Enhanced supports for immigrants and newcomers to Canada	25%
Education and awareness building	24%
Need for enhanced measures to increase reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples	5%
Engagement of marginalized groups	5%
Other	8%

This table depicts specific actions that youth who completed the online *have your say* booklet would like to see to improve Canadian identity and support immigration and international experiences for youth in Canada.

Various actions related to immigration policies

Actions most commonly cited among comments relate to immigration policies, although their specific suggestions are wide-ranging and include a variety of perspectives. For example, most comments express the view that Canada's immigration policies should allow for more immigrants and refugees, and that the government should redesign immigration application processes to be more streamlined, accessible and fair. Specific focus is paid to immigration options and procedures for international post-secondary students, who should automatically qualify for permanent residency or at least be fast-tracked through the system. Several comments suggest increasing funding for immigrant and refugee settlement programs, health services and education to make the transition to Canadian society more seamless. However, a slightly lesser number hold the opposite view: that Canada's immigration policies should be "tightened," be more selective and/or reduce the intake of immigrants and refugees overall. These comments

largely express the view that the government should focus on improving the social and economic situations of current Canadian citizens, rather than expanding immigration.

> "Continue to accept immigrants. Encourage programs and provide bursaries that allow youth to travel to other parts of Canada and the world. Provide assistance for those international students who wish to study in Canada."

Strengthening the Canadian identity

A similar proportion of comments express the view that actions for youth and all Canadians should have greater exposure to Canada's multicultural underpinnings and the diverse cultures reflected in society. A lot of people suggest governments undertake this education through promotional campaigns and by funding community programs in all regions to facilitate cultural understanding – all with the intention of increasing Canadians' pride in our multicultural identity. Expanding Indigenous participation in the development of these educational campaigns/programs is also suggested by a significant number of comments, which believe that failing to acknowledge Indigenous history and culture as a primary component of our national identity would be disingenuous and regressive. Several people also suggested expanding access to French education in all regions of the country to unite youth from coast-to-coast in the tradition of bilingualism.

> "Discuss the ways in which immigrants have contributed to our countries, why they are needed, and why they are coming here in light of circumstances in their homes beyond their control. Discuss why discrimination against immigrants or non-Canadians is unacceptable. Discuss the marginalized peoples in our history, like people of colour, LGBTQIA+, Indigenous Peoples, etc., and how they are part of what makes up Canadian identity, too, and should not be excluded from our historical narrative."

Creating and encouraging more international experiences for Canadian youth

Several comments suggest creating and encouraging more international experiences for Canadian youth, including international volunteer and/or employment opportunities, educational exchange programs both in Canada and abroad, and exchange partnerships with other countries. Extending the age of international study and work visas beyond the age of 30 is suggested by a few people, and many express the view that existing and future educational exchange opportunities should be better promoted to youth and better funded (e.g., more bursaries, stipends, etc.). A lot of comments stress that Canada should create deliberate exchange pathways with various countries, to make youth travel to and from those places more streamlined. Overall, the sentiment is that by increasing youth mobility across Canada and the world, would imbue young people with a greater appreciation for diverse cultures and for Canadian identity.

> "Establish exchange agreements with foreign countries to provide opportunities for experiential learning abroad. For example, Germany and Ghana have an agreement to allow German students to teach in Ghanaian schools."

Enhanced supports for immigrants and newcomers to Canada

Many comments recommend increased funding for community groups and NGOs that work with new immigrants and refugees to provide language training, work placements and other transition services. A few comments mention implementing immigrant and refugee support groups, especially for immigrant youth, which would provide families and individuals the resources necessary (e.g., counselling, health services, etc.) to ensure a happy and healthy start to life in Canada. Several comments note that changing the system wherein foreign credentials are recognized in Canada is important, in that it would allow more immigrants and refugees to find work in their specific professional fields (e.g., medicine, law).

Education and awareness-building

A slighter smaller group express the need to teach youth about the many diverse cultures, which make up Canada's multicultural population, to increase understanding, solidarity, and compassion for newcomers. On Canadian identity, several comments support further engagement of youth in civic and policy matters, as a means to involve them in decision-making processes at the community level to federal policy. A few comments also recommend expanding French-language training for youth across the country, as well as expanding Canadian history courses to better include the stories of Indigenous Peoples and visible minorities. Regarding international experiences, several comments agree that existing international work, volunteer and educational programs for youth should be better promoted and better funded to encourage more youth to participate.

Fewer respondents suggest:

- Enhancing measures to increase reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples at both high (i.e., federal) and local levels (e.g., in schools) to acknowledge the lasting negative impacts of settler colonialism; and

- Engaging marginalized groups by creating formal advisory committees on federal policy and implementing cultural experience programs or demonstrations.

3.3.1.2 Online discussion forum and video comment submissions

Some are concerned with the recent changes to the national anthem, while another express that youth should be exposed to more international experience through travelling to gain a better appreciation and understanding of other cultures. Video submissions suggest greater funding for the arts is key as a way to explore and define our identity as Canadians.

Additionally, a few video submissions say the government should change the process for transferring skills from one country to another, such as fast tracking medical equivalency exams for doctors coming from other countries. Finally, one video submission advises Canada to increase overseas development assistance; Canada is

known for helping the world and should continue and increase its support to developing nations.

> "Travelling outside of Canada is one of the most important things younger Canadians can do. It can expose people to different cultures, languages and ways of life that you can't get at home. I would encourage everyone to take advantage of programs or opportunities to get out there and learn about the world!"

> "The responsibility of the government is to uphold the values of the people; those values are represented by the national anthem. It is not the place for the government to change or modify our anthem. The anthem is for the people, not the prime minister. Change the anthem back."

3.3.1.3 Youth roundtables

Individuals across the country who participated in youth roundtables identify several characteristics, such as "generous," "welcoming," "appreciative of the outdoors" and "peaceful," that they deem as inherently "Canadian traits." Discussions on Canadian identity is particularly topical for many Canadians who have immigrated themselves from elsewhere, or who are the children of immigrants to Canada. Through their lived experiences, many youths note that "immigrants should have a good first experience arriving to Canada," and in turn, should have access to supports that would provide them opportunities to better "integrate into Canadian society." Specific measures to help facilitate the integration and success of international students and young immigrants to Canada, include:

- Improved "support for workplaces that employ young immigrants" and international students;

- Guidelines or policies to ensure the "proper representation of Canada's diversity" in workplaces and public domains;

- School-based "education on equality, acceptance, and the importance of diversity";

- Peer-based supports that could help youth "integrate into school" life;

- Acceptance of foreign credentials, including employment and education certifications, so that "the education, expertise and experiences of newcomers to Canada" are recognized by Canadian society; and

- More financial supports for international post-secondary students who feel "that they are being discriminated against in terms of access to funding opportunities or scholarships."

While young Canadians may view the Canadian identity as a positive trait that espouses and cherishes a diversity of people; youth from three different roundtables discussed the need to "celebrate multiculturalism" and educate all Canadians on the importance of "equality, acceptance, and the importance of diversity." This could include international

experiences and education for Canadian youth to connect with other cultures and help guide "sustainable community development" in other countries. Specific actions discussed by participants include:

- More "education on international politics" and cultures to increase the awareness of political climates outside of Canada";

- A specific push to help Indigenous youth attend international gatherings such as the World Indigenous Games;

- Promotion of traditional elements of Indigenous heritage and culture, including "dancing, drumming and traditional medicines"; and

- Facilitate international travel for young people in Canada, such as making it easier to obtain a passport in rural, remote and northern communities, or through the provision of international volunteer opportunities.

3.3.1.4 Stakeholder submissions

Some stakeholders discuss issues related to immigration, citizenship and refugees when providing input for the Youth Policy. A common theme deals with barriers currently facing newcomers and their families, like the protracted and often inefficient way new Canadians' professional experience/qualifications are adapted to the Canadian context, often resulting in underemployment and financial hardship. A lack of professional settlement assistance and perceived injustices in the points-based application system are also raised as barriers, as well as limited access to health and mental health services.

Stakeholders suggest implementing further community-support programs for newcomers, free second-language courses and further employment assistance (e.g., connecting new immigrants and refugees with Canadian small businesses) as practical ways the government can improve the situation of new Canadians, including immigrant and refugee youth. Finally, it is noted that Canadian citizenship should never be revoked once granted (i.e., preventing deportation) and that overall immigration policy should prioritize family reunification.

Some guiding principles for the federal Youth Policy are recommended in several stakeholder submissions. The most frequent recommendation is to prioritize educating Canadian youth on their legal and human rights, as well as how to access legal supports if their rights are violated. Several stakeholders reference the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as an important basis for the federal Youth Policy. Additionally, it is advised that the government: listen to youth in earnest; ground the Youth Policy in anti-racist principles (e.g., have diverse youth and adults write the policy and include an analysis of how its solutions/policies will affect racialized young people); include the Calls to Actions from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; and incorporate the principles of responsibility, compassion, inclusion, honesty, youth choice, youth voice, and self-determination into all aspects of the new Strategy.

A small but avid group of stakeholders discuss the issue of bilingualism and francophone rights as it relates to the Youth Policy. They say the Youth Policy must work with community partners to foster a generation of youth who are proud of their language, culture, accents, and dialects; increase efforts to encourage personal bilingualism across the country; and encourage the availability of French services offered by governments and the private sector nationwide (i.e., not just in Quebec). It was also advised that the federal government do more to guarantee funding for French immersion and francophone schools, since current earmarked funding is often diverted elsewhere at the provincial/territorial level.

3.3.2 Environment and climate change

3.3.2.1 Online *have your say* booklet

The topic of environment and climate change encompasses a variety of themes, from expanding sustainability to developing clean technology and encouraging recycling. Maintaining Canada's rich biodiversity and protecting natural habitats are also included in this topic, as well as natural resource development and green innovation. Environment and climate change received a total of 1,251 comments.

Participants were invited to provide their feedback to this topic by responding to the following two questions:

1. Why are the topics of environment and/or climate change important to you and your peers?

2. What specific actions could be taken, or should we continue to take, to help youth further protect the environment and combat climate change?

Question 1: Why are the topics of environment and/or climate change important to you and your peers?

Environment and climate change	
	%
Focus on ensuring a sustainable future	37%
Importance of the environment and impacts of climate change (with little or no elaboration)	25%
Focus on the balance between the economy and responsible development	16%
Focus on the impacts of climate change	16%
Perceived lack of action	10%
Generational responsibility	10%
Focus on various policy-related issues	2%
Other	2%

This table depicts the issues of environment and climate change that were top of mind for youth who completed the online *have your say* booklet.

Many comments focused on ensuring a sustainable future as a main driver for concerns about the environment and climate change (37 per cent), as well as the importance of the environment and impacts of climate change more broadly (25 per cent). An equal number of comments addressed the "balance" between the economy and responsible development (16 per cent) as did the negative impacts of climate change (16 per cent). Some participants talked about what they perceive to be as a lack of current action on the environment and climate change (10 per cent) and the responsibility of current generations to address these issues so that future generations of Canadians inherit a healthy world (10 per cent). A few comments discussed the specifics of various environmental policies (two per cent).

A sustainable future

The most common reason expressed through comments is the importance of sustainability – from environmental and economic to societal/cultural sustainability. Many point to the need to address environmental sustainability issues or today's youth will inherit a damaged and unsafe environment as adults, and be forced to raise the next generation of young Canadians in dire environmental circumstances. Several comments also express the importance of broadening Canada's sustainable industries, like clean technology and energy, to ensure a secure environmental future and create good jobs for Canadians entering the workforce. A few comments express the view that none of the aforementioned issues can be properly addressed without appropriate

education on sustainability, the environment, and climate change for youth and all Canadians, to ensure widespread buy-in for these initiatives.

> "I'm worried for the future of our country and planet. Worried about our natural resources that other countries could try and take away from us. In my province, fishing is a huge way for people to make money and if we don't have any fish left what are we going to do? This is the only planet we got and if we don't take care of it then that's it for the human race."

Environment and the economy

Fewer comments express the view that environmental and climate change issues are important to them because of their concerns about balancing the economy with responsible development. Many of these comments speak to their desire of seeing a shift in the economy toward sustainable or green industries, which would serve the dual purpose of protecting the environment and opening up new sectors of employment. Sustainable farming practices and transitioning to clean energy, for example, are cited in a few comments as examples of how Canada's economy should adapt to the realities of climate change. Some comments also support the implementation of a carbon tax to reduce emissions, however, a few others said they are skeptical about the effectiveness of a carbon tax (e.g., will have negative economic impacts on Canadians while doing little to improve the environment).

Overall, comments emphasize the importance of environmental actions being cost-effective and economically realistic.

> "For decades we have been subjected to the consequences of our economic system being anchored in the overuse of our country's natural resources without thinking of tomorrow. However, it is impossible to deny that climate change is growing in scope and that many communities around the world will be losing their economic independence and their ability to meet the basic needs of their citizens. We are proud of our ecosystems and it is our duty to ensure a prosperous future for generations to come."

The impacts of climate change

A similar proportion of comments cite the impacts of climate change as a main concern and provide specific examples to illustrate those concerns. In many instances, comments speak to how the effects of climate change will continue to have a negative impact on Canadian communities unless Canada can make a concerted effort to build climate resiliency at federal, provincial/territorial, municipal, and community levels across the country. Threatened food security, extreme weather (e.g., droughts, flooding, hurricanes, etc.), potential species extinction (e.g., polar bears), melting ice caps, and the phenomenon of climate refugees are just a few examples of the concerns raised throughout the comments. The importance of consultation with and inclusion of Indigenous Peoples on traditional environmental knowledge and protection is especially important as Indigenous nations/communities are already disproportionately affected by climate change (e.g., in the North).

"Stopping: climate change; toxins in environment (including plastic in ocean, agricultural run-off, industrial and nuclear waste etc); habitat destruction and loss of biodiversity; salmon farming on B.C.'s coast. We are freaked out about ecological collapse in our lifetime. What are you leaving us?"

Protect the environment and combat climate change	
	%
Need for education and awareness building on climate change and the environment	43%
Invest in green infrastructure and initiatives	30%
Focus on addressing various policy-related issues	28%
Incentivize "green" alternatives for consumers	22%
Enhance environmental and animal protection policies	19%
Invest in and emphasize research on climate change and alternatives	12%
Focus on engagement, transparency and accountability in decision-making processes	8%
Focus on providing additional support to new and existing organizations	5%
Other	4%

This table depicts specific actions that youth who completed the online *have your say* booklet would like to see to help youth further protect the environment and combat climate change.

Question 2: What specific actions could be taken, or should we continue to take, to help youth further protect the environment and combat climate change?

Close to half of comments submitted suggested improving education and awareness building around the environment and climate change (43 per cent) and stressed the importance of investments in green infrastructure and initiatives (30 per cent). Slightly fewer discussed various environmental policy issues (28 per cent), while others said governments should incentivize "green" alternatives for consumers (22 per cent) and enhance environmental and wildlife protection policies (19 per cent). A few comments said we should focus on engagement, transparency and accountability in decision-making processes related to the environment (eight per cent) and provide additional support to new and existing environmental organizations (five per cent).

Environmental education

Most frequently comments support increased education and awareness-building on climate change and the environment are key actions that should be taken to help youth further address these issues. A lot of comments speak to the need of implementing environmental literacy programs in schools across the country to teach the value of personal waste reduction (e.g., reducing overconsumption), recycling, sustainability (e.g., growing your own food), and more. Several comments also support mandating this kind of interdisciplinary education (e.g., including elements of science, social impacts, history, etc.). In particular, some comments highlight that post-secondary courses should incorporate an environmental lens, regardless of subject matter (e.g., sustainable business practices for MBA students). Encouraging Indigenous youth to become leaders on environmental protection using traditional knowledge, as well as teaching the broader public about Indigenous environmental knowledge, is also suggested throughout comments. Overall, comments highlight the importance of teaching youth about the concrete steps they can take to contribute to protecting the environment would motivate entire generations of Canadians prioritize these issues for years to come.

> "Things that the youth community can do include hosting community events to raise awareness and educate people about this issue and let them know about the consequences. We can also use social media to promote ideas and raise more awareness as this generation is tied closely to social media, so we can target a very big audience. Another thing we could do is host things such as community park cleanups, where the community comes together and help clean up parks. Lastly, we can go to high schools and educational centres and have little presentations about the issue and how they can help."

Green infrastructure and initiatives

Investments in green infrastructure and initiatives are highlighted throughout comments and most often describe the use of clean technology, renewable energy, sustainable building materials. Most comments speak to these investments from the perspective of resource development: some focus on additional protections and regulations to protect the environment from pipeline breaks/oil spills, while others express the view that Canada actively transition away from oil dependence, while at the same time investing in nuclear, solar and wind power. Several comments highlight that cities should set sustainability standards for all future infrastructure development and urban planning, to increase climate resiliency and reduce negative environmental impacts. Additionally, making green technologies more accessible and affordable for everyday Canadians (e.g., green roofs or home solar panels) through grants and tax breaks is another key suggestion.

> "Change the way urban planners plan communities so we can build mostly sustainable communities. Have food production close by, build the houses so they are energy-efficient (yes, they will be more expensive upfront), and allow green spaces for the people to spend outside (good for mental health!)"

Environmental policies/legislation

Comments support the implementation of a nationwide carbon tax and several suggested implementing further incentives (e.g., tax breaks) for businesses who adopt environmentally-friendly and sustainable practices/processes. Some comments call on the government to end fossil fuel subsidies and reinvest that money in renewable energy and green technology. Others express the view that government should legislate stronger protections for wildlife to prevent habitat degradation and extinction. Increased consultation with, and participation of, Indigenous communities on environmental policy is also a key component.

> "Enact harder legislation that decreases carbon emissions and promotes sustainable ways in public systems."

Incentivizing "green" consumer habits

Fewer comments expand on the idea of incentivizing green consumer alternatives for consumers to help further protect the environment and combat climate change. Suggestions include subsidizing electric vehicles, banning plastic shopping bags and Styrofoam containers, expanding public transit in urban and rural communities, encouraging household compositing, etc. Opening more community gardens is another suggestion said to promote sustainable food sources. While taxing items that are not environmentally friendly is a common theme, many express the view that green "alternatives" to those products should be made accessible and affordable.

3.3.2.2 Online discussion forum and video comment submissions

Those who commented are very concerned with the environment and feel that Canada could be doing more to help improve current conditions. There are also concerns about human health intertwined with climate change and overall health effects on the population.

One video submission suggests offering larger incentives and education programs with regards to electric cars, such as the current abilities, their average price, range and their practicality. There should also be incentives to offset the costs associated to purchasing an electric car such as installing publicly-funded charging stations.

Another emphasizes the desire to phase out the sales of bottled water. As cited, plastic bottles are terrible for the environment and phasing out the sale of plastic bottled water could help reduce Canada's carbon footprint and divert waste from our oceans.

> "Everything comes back to the environment. If we don't have a healthy planet, we won't be healthy. Also, climate change is linked to extreme weather, which has huge impacts on the economy and society in general. We have to do more to protect the environment."

> "How can we better protect the environment for the youth of tomorrow? We can protect the environment for the youth, by starting off simple. That includes throwing away your garbage into the proper bin, that leftovers should go into the

compost and paper should go into the recycling bin. Deforestation is present in our society today, as it's needed for materials that we use today. We don't have much influence and power, so a better alternative is to plant trees in our environment. It will eventually grow into a full-grown tree, and the youth in the future can have a cleaner environment."

3.3.2.3 Youth roundtables

Roundtable participants speak to the importance of climate change and environmental protection for Canadian youth. In Yellowknife, youth noted the unique environmental sensitivities of northern living and the damaging effects of climate change, including "cleaning up oil spills beneath the ice and the impacts on polar bears." Participants from both roundtables emphasize the need for government support of "increased environmental regulations" and laws in place to protect the environment, including acknowledging the unique sensitivities of the North. Youth also highlight the need for greater awareness among Canadian youth about the impacts of climate change: "Youth – and people – must stop ignoring the planet."

Participants express the view that they have a responsibility to be stewards of the environment and protect it for future generations since "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 discuss the importance of considering environmental sustainability in decision-making at a policy level, but also in daily living and throughout their communities. Participants in three roundtables drew linkages between health and the environment, particularly for Indigenous Peoples.

> "The environment and climate change directly impact our health and our future."

To that end, participants outlined a number of concrete actions that government and young people could take to better protect and preserve the environment, including:

- Practising sustainability at an individual level, since "environmental sustainability is everyone's responsibility." Individual practices could include reinforcing recycling practices, doing small, community-based initiatives that, in turn, will have "an even bigger difference" on the environment and will help reduce consumption;

- Promoting awareness of climate change and the need to protect the environment: "people need to know what they can do better to have an impact on stopping climate change." Awareness could include messaging around the detrimental effects of climate change on the environment. This could also include an education component, such as integrating "environmental science" into school curriculum and educating students on the importance of sustainable environmental practices;

- Providing incentives for environmentally sustainable practices, including facilitating the transition to sustainable sources of energy; strengthening

"environmental regulations" and laws; and, creating a non-partisan, multilateral agreement to "hold government accountable" on the environment; and

- Providing more opportunities to engage young people and Indigenous Peoples on environmental issues: "everyone needs to work together." In particular, Indigenous Peoples "should be a part of the decisions that impact their lands."

3.3.2.4 Stakeholder submissions

Frequently, groups express the view that environmental education should be expanded, further investments in renewable energy and green jobs should be made, and government funding for environmental research should be increased. One group feels governments – at all levels – must frame the fight against climate change as a process of Truth and Reconciliation with Canada's Indigenous Peoples, and therefore involve and consider their input on all environmental policies and decision-making.

In addition to improving and encouraging youth engagement on the environment, other key priorities include: building resiliency and capacity to cope with climate change-related natural disasters, especially in the North; focusing on the safe transportation of materials to prevent oil spills and other environmental crises; addressing overconsumption; implementing stricter mining policies; incentivizing municipalities and urban centres to adopt environmentally-friendly innovations and technologies; making green transportation options more accessible (e.g., bicycle systems, more electric car charging stations); and meeting our Paris Agreement targets.

3.3.3 Physical and mental health

3.3.3.1 Online *have your say* booklet

This topic explores themes related to physical health, like exercise, leisure activities and pastimes, school teams and city programs, as well as mental health-related issues such as anxiety, counselling, trust and support. Physical and mental health received a total of 1,269 comments.

Participants were invited to provide their feedback to this topic by responding to the following two questions:

1. Why are the subjects of physical and/or mental health of youth on your mind?
2. What specific actions could be taken, or should we continue to take, to improve the physical and mental health of youth in Canada?

Question 1: Why are the subjects of physical and/or mental health of youth on your mind?

Physical and mental health	
	%
Importance of overcoming stigmas around mental health	30%
Focus on the barriers to accessing healthcare and other services	29%
Personal experience with physical or mental health issues	23%
Importance of physical and mental health (with little or no elaboration)	15%
Focus on health as a socio-economic determinant	15%
Focus on the perceived stressors of modern society on today's youth	15%
Perceived negative influence of drugs and alcohol on youth	4%
Focus on the role of grassroots and community organizations	2%
Other	5%

This table depicts the issues of physical and mental health that were top of mind for youth who completed the online *have your say* booklet.

Comments mostly expressed that concerns around youth physical and/or mental health stem from the importance of overcoming stigmas (30 per cent), as well as the barriers young Canadians face in accessing health care and other services (29 per cent). Personal experiences with physical or mental health issues also play a significant role (23 per cent), as does the importance of physical and mental health more broadly (15 per cent) and the socio-economic determinants of health (15 per cent). Other comments explored modern-day "stresses" (i.e., technology) which can exacerbate physical and mental health issues (15 per cent), and a few talked about the negative influences of drugs and alcohol on youth (four per cent) and the role of grassroots/community health organizations (two per cent).

Overcoming stigmas

Comments frequently highlight concerns about these issues because they believe overcoming stigmas related to mental health is important. They explain that, too often, youth are afraid to seek help for mental health issues due to feelings of shame, isolation, and alienation. Misconceptions about the causes of and treatments for common mental health problems, like anxiety and depression (i.e., "it's just a phase") among adults with influence, like parents and educators, also prevent youth from seeking appropriate help. A few comments highlight how a lack of understanding about mental health issues in certain cultural spheres can exacerbate the effects of those illnesses on immigrant youth, for example. Others mentioned that mental health remains

a taboo subject in many workplaces, discouraging many employees from addressing these issues for fear of facing career setbacks and/or professional consequences. Overall, comments express the view that mental health should be more open and evidence-based, and that positive role models who have personally dealt with these issues be made more visible and accessible.

> "There has been a huge stigma around mental health that needs to end. Words, like depression and anxiety, are thrown around and replaced in the words sadness and feeling nervous, which isn't the case at all. Also, as teens we are told that we are just going through a phase when in reality there is something wrong. In addition to this, we are also often told to deny our feelings because it's not told to be acceptable. The only thing that's acceptable is happiness and for boys they are often taught to hide their emotions because it's girly and you are seen as weak,
> which is not right."

Barriers to health care accessibility

A similar number of comments express concern about the subjects of physical and mental health because of the significant barriers to accessing health care and other services for youth. They suggest that a lack of funding, a shortage of medical specialists and doctors, and a lack of services available in languages other than English and French make it difficult for Canada's diverse populations to access the health services they require in a timely and effective manner. Regional challenges also highlight the lack of culturally-sensitive health services available to Indigenous youth in many northern communities, which in turn leads to chronic illness, suicide, etc. Comments also focus on the lack of specialized support for youth with autism and their families.

> "Charities are providing mental health care for youth, funded by citizens rather than the government. Navigating this system is a mystery for many Canadians. Language options are minimal, French is prioritized in communities where French isn't even the 2nd or 3rd most dominant language."

Question 2: What specific actions could be taken, or should we continue to take, to improve the physical and mental health of youth in Canada?

Half of the comments on this topic suggested focusing on education and awareness-building around youth physical and mental health issues (50 per cent) and stressed that the federal government must work with provincial and territorial partners to address barriers to youth physical and mental well-being (46 per cent). Some comments said we should increase access to community programming and leisure activities for youth (25 per cent) and others mentioned various policy issues specific to youth health (17 per cent). A few comments discussed providing additional support to grassroots and community organizations with a youth health focus (five per cent) and focusing on the socio-economic determinants of health (two per cent).

Physical and mental health of youth	
	%
Focus on education and awareness building	50%
Work with provincial and territorial partners to address barriers to mental and physical well-being	46%
Increase access to community programming and leisure activities	25%
Focus on addressing other policy-related issues	17%
Focus on providing additional support to grassroots and community organizations	5%
Focus on addressing socio-economic determinants	2%
Other	7%

This table depicts specific actions that youth who completed the online *have your say* booklet would like to see to improve the physical and mental health of youth in Canada.

Prioritize education and awareness-building

Fully half of comments support the idea that governments should prioritize education and awareness-building to improve the physical and mental health of youth in Canada. The underlying premise of most of these responses was to proactively empower youth to address their physical and mental health problems by eliminating stigmas (i.e., via increasing awareness), teaching healthy life-skills, and educating youth on how to access services and leverage resources. Comments also express the view that educational programs should start early (i.e., elementary school) and continue throughout a young person's academic career. Education for parents and all Canadians on youth physical and mental health issues is also raised as an important action, as well as teaching employees about mental health resources/programs in the workplace. A few comments suggest increasing educational programs and resources specific to youth in northern and Indigenous communities.

> "Better public, workplace, and school-education programs around mental health issues and self-care. As much as possible within the government's mandate, built-in policies that recognize and allow for accommodation for those struggling with mental or physical health issues, or promote these policies in school and workplace settings. School and university policies and practices in particular need to be improved to take away some of the stigma of these issues and how we deal with them (e.g. more compassionate practices for students dealing with health issues)."

Working closer with provincial/territorial partners

Close to the same number of comments express the view that the federal government should work with provincial and territorial partners to eliminate barriers to health services and improve the mental and physical well-being of Canadian youth. While provinces and territories are responsible for managing their own health care systems, comments focus on the role of the federal government in increasing health care funding, expanding mental health resources (e.g., counselling), and encouraging the adoption of health education in school curriculums. Additionally, some comments support the idea of implementing a national pharma care system and mandating that dental care be covered by provincial health insurance. Reducing medical wait times (i.e., to see specialists) and expanding health services in northern and remote communities are also suggested.

> "Integrating mental health awareness and self-care into curriculum at all ages, providing holistic long-term and urgent care to Indigenous communities, improving availability of mental health care (such as more publicly-funded therapies)."

Expanding community recreation and leisure programs

A moderate proportion of comments suggest increasing access to community programs and recreational/leisure activities to improve the physical and mental health of Canadian youth. From expanding physical education in schools to providing tax credits for enrollment in extracurricular sports, comments highlight the need to incentivize youth physical activity to improve health outcomes. More funding for nutritional education, community food programs, and healthy eating/cooking is also key – particularly for low-income youth and their families. A few comments support the idea of governments expanding free, outdoor leisure infrastructure (e.g., bike paths) to encourage physical exercise.

> "Subsidies for fresh produce, programs to get perishable foods into low-income communities. Funding for breakfast and lunch programs in elementary and secondary schools with healthy food. Tax credits for exercise, sports, (etc.) programs."

3.3.3.2 Online discussion forum and video comment submissions

Physical and mental health is top of mind for youth who feel strongly about equal access to mental health resources with a focus on remote and northern communities.

Levels of physical exercise were also a concern as some felt that youth are not getting enough exercise, which can have a negative impact on mental health.

Suggestions to help with these concerns include: more funding for mental health initiatives and hiring of mental health professionals; increased funding to help those with disabilities participate in physical activities; and increased mental health education at a

national level (including awareness-building, practical tools and techniques and further removing the stigma around mental health).

> "The growing acceptance over the past couple of years regarding talking about mental health has been huge and that's fantastic! Now that we as a society are becoming more comfortable discussing mental health, I think it's important to educate youth on ways to manage our mental health above and beyond talking about it.

> Mindfulness methods can be so helpful but sometimes have a boring connotation. It'd be great if our youth could learn different ways to be mindful and the countless benefits that go along with it. It's essential we learn to give our minds a break and allow ourselves live in the present."

> "There has been a big increase in the awareness about mental health, and in the importance of mental health. But, there has not been a big increase in the help available for mental health. Now that people are aware of mental health issues, and ready to look for help with mental health issues, that help needs to be available, without months-long waiting lists. And it is a big problem when someone turns 18 and then cannot keep seeing the doctors and counsellors they have had as children."

In various video submissions, youth suggest integrating Indigenous health practices into the mainstream system, as they have been treating certain ailments for generations and their traditional medicine could be of help to others. This would also be helpful for Indigenous patients to have access to both types of medicine in one place. They also emphasize further mental health and cultural support for immigrants, as coming to a new country and learning a new set of cultural rules can often have quite an impact on a person's psyche.

3.3.3.3 Youth roundtables

Youth actively discuss the adverse effects that mental health can have, including leaving people feeling "ashamed, embarrassed and weak" or having a lasting and negative effect on their communities.

While youth may have been mixed on exactly what measures are needed, a Calgary participant acknowledges that "mental health is a complex issue and difficult to pinpoint just one recommendation. One thing we agree on is mental health services need to be accessible to youth." Participants unanimously agree that there is a need for enhanced supports for all Canadian youth: "make sure mental health services are available 24/7 in every community." Youth note that additional supports are needed for Indigenous and immigrant youth due to intergenerational trauma and the stresses of adapting to a new culture and home.

Additional measures include the need for more education on the importance of mental and physical health, particularly in light of the diversity of Canadian youth, "need for education cultural groups because there are different ideas surrounding mental health." For participants in Thunder Bay, this includes "learning coping mechanisms and skills,"

while a participant in Calgary notes the need for "better education on self-love and self-care in schools." This could also include a training component for teachers to provide cultural and mental health training so that youth could have easier access to resources. Similarly, a participant from Quebec City highlights the lack of research in the area, calling for "more studies on the psychological health of youth" that could help provide more information on the scale of the issue for young Canadians.

Physical and mental health is an important topic for many young Canadians who emphasize that "physical and mental health are the foundations of well-being" and are important topics for young Canadians that are often under-rated or reported. Young people who participated in youth roundtables are quick to acknowledge the profound economic, societal and individual tolls that mental and physical illness can cause and the need for good health to be "higher functioning." Other participants emphasize the difficulties facing Indigenous and newcomer youth who still bear the results of "intergenerational trauma" and encounter systemic racism in society.

Many participants discussed the need for an equitable service delivery model that would "value diversity and inclusion" for Canadian youth. Several comments from Canadian youth centre on the need to develop school-based curriculum on subjects such as "mental wellness" and education for youth on the importance of a healthy lifestyle and appropriate coping mechanisms, "education is key to recognizing the signs of poor health and knowing where to turn to improve health (physical and mental)."

Barriers identified by young people include the lack of awareness ("youth don't know or don't know how to ask"), feelings of shame or embarrassment when trying to access services, services or programming that is not offered "24/7 in every community."

To that end, youth across Canada list several recommendations to facilitate the access of mental health services to a greater number of Canadian youth, including:

- Easier access to counselling and other health services, by providing services "in schools," or lowering the bar for youth to access services without the need of a referral from a physician or coverage by private insurance;

- More training on mental health for educators and other professionals who work with youth;

- Integrating Indigenous learnings and practices in mental health care so that Indigenous youth can "reconnect with their land" and receive care in a culturally safe milieu (e.g., the Maya'xala program in Campbell River, B.C.);

- Ensuring "wellness education," including opportunities for physical activity, are provided for Canadian youth as part of a school-based curriculum;

- Strengthening mental health services for youth most at-risk, including incarcerated or homeless youth;

- Promoting services available in communities to youth and create awareness to combat the stigma associated with mental illness; and

- Establishing other supports for Canadian youth, including "peer support" (e.g., the peer support program at Fort Richmond Collegiate in Winnipeg).

Another cluster of comments from Canadian youth include the notion of engaging with other young people to discuss the impacts of mental and physical health in their communities and the potential to create synergies (e.g., a "national mental health conference" or "mental health awareness day"). Participants from a roundtable in Calgary identify the need for a youth mental health advisory board to advise the city on matters of youth mental health services.

Other mechanisms to enhance the mental and physical health of young Canadians include:

- Making healthy food more accessible for all, including youth in rural, remote and northern communities by "reducing the price differential";

- Ensuring Canadian youth have a source of income that enables them to access quality housing and healthy food choices;

- Restricting the sale of alcohol to stem the tide of "broken families" in northern communities; and

- Ensuring continuity of care for young Canadians into adulthood as "a lot of services get cut off once you turn 18."

3.3.3.4 Stakeholder submissions

Youth health is the most commonly raised issue among stakeholder submissions, particularly in relation to youth mental health. Many speak to the need governments to significantly increase funding for mental health services in all schools to ensure Canadian students of all ages, backgrounds, abilities, and regions have equal access. Increasing the affordability of counselling and therapy and reducing wait times for youth to access these mental health professionals are other key recommendations. Several stakeholders specifically discuss Indigenous mental health and suicide prevention measures, suggesting that more culturally-sensitive counselling be made available to Indigenous youth on- and off-reserve, that further efforts be made to raise awareness among Indigenous youth about suicide helplines, and that opportunities for traditional methods of healing in Indigenous communities be increased.

Other health-related ideas and recommendations include: implementing better follow-up processes for therapeutic supports in schools; funding good nutrition programs in schools and expanding nutrition education; broadening physical and mental health programs for youth who are newcomers to Canada; and opening more youth-specific detox and rehabilitation centres, including wrap-around services for youth transitioning out of these facilities.

A few stakeholder submissions mention recreation and youth centres; namely, that there should be more of them. These youth-specific centres would be non-judgmental spaces in which young people can talk openly about issues like abuse, while developing

self-esteem, self-worth and self-respect. Other groups speak to the need of making youth sports and activities more affordable for low-income families, and that women's sports programs should be better funded to encourage equal participation. One group also supports the idea of making high schools into community hubs with resources and employment opportunities for students, similar to the model used on many university campuses.

A small proportion of stakeholder groups speak to the availability and affordability of certain family services. For instance, some say that free family counselling and mediation should be made available nationwide, including for foster families. Additionally, they suggest providing access to free courses, programs, or support groups on parenting and life-skills – especially for parents struggling with poverty, addiction, and/or mental health issues. One group says Canadian families should have access to affordable childcare services, and another says there should be closer monitoring and oversight of the foster care system.

3.3.4 Service and volunteering

3.3.4.1 Online *have your say* booklet

The topic of service and volunteering relates to opportunities for youth to become involved in their communities, to build personal and professional experiences and connections and to develop skills that will be useful later in life. It is also closely linked to the values of selflessness and humility. Service and volunteering received a total of 365 comments.

Participants were invited to provide their feedback to this topic by responding to the following two questions:

1. Why are the topics of service and volunteering on your mind?
2. What specific actions could be taken, or should we continue to take, to support and enhance service and volunteering among youth in Canada?

Question 1: Why are the topics of youth service and volunteering important to you?

Many comments focused on the importance of service and volunteering for the personal development of Canadian youth (27 per cent) and of community service/volunteering more broadly (26 per cent). Some focused on the community-building aspects of service and volunteering (19 per cent), while others discussed the lack of volunteering opportunities currently available to today's youth (18 per cent). A few comments addressed a potential lack of interest in community service and volunteering among Canadian youth (11 per cent).

Service and volunteering	
	%
Focus of the importance of community service and volunteering for personal development	27%
Importance of community service and volunteering (with little or no elaboration)	26%
Focus on the importance of community-building	19%
Focus on the lack of opportunities available to youth	18%
Focus on the lack of interest in community service and volunteering	11%
Other	5%

This table depicts the issues of service and volunteering that were top of mind for youth who completed the online *have your say* booklet.

Youth personal development

Youth service and volunteering is important to the personal development of young people. Comments describe that community service and volunteer opportunities provide youth with a sense of perspective on the world and teach them invaluable social and professional skills for later in life. Several comments mention that while youth benefit from service and volunteerism (i.e., by learning compassion, selflessness), their communities are equally enriched by the work being done.

Similarly, a moderate number of comments expanded on the idea that youth community service and volunteerism have a positive ripple effect on the rest of the community and contributes to building a better future for everyone. Without volunteerism much of our social fabric would be unravelled.

Nearly the same proportion of comments express the view that these issues are important to them because they are concerned about the prevalence of disinterest in service and volunteerism among Canadian youth. To combat this, some comments say we must reframe what volunteerism means to young people (e.g., not "extra work without pay"). A small number suggest we promote the wide-ranging benefits of such activities via various media (e.g., social) and school-based programs.

Question 2: What specific actions could be taken, or should we continue to take, to support and enhance service and volunteering among youth in Canada?

The most frequent action suggested was to provide support to new or existing organizations (or other levels of government) who offer youth service and volunteering opportunities (28 per cent), with additional suggestions, like mandatory volunteer hours for high school graduation (26 per cent) and increasing youth volunteer opportunities

(24 per cent) being popular answers. Other comments said we should incentivize youth volunteerism and community service in more innovative ways (21 per cent), make volunteer opportunities easier for youth to navigate and more accessible (19 per cent), and further raise awareness on the benefits of volunteering (10 per cent).

Service and volunteering among youth	
	%
Provide support to new or existing organizations/other levels of government	28%
Mandate a requirement for community service or volunteering	26%
Increase volunteer opportunities for Canadian youth	24%
Incentivize volunteerism and community service	21%
Make volunteer opportunities easier to navigate and accessible for young Canadians	19%
Raise awareness on the benefits of volunteering	10%
Other	2%

This table depicts specific actions that youth who completed the online *have your say* booklet would like to see to support and enhance service and volunteering among youth in Canada.

Support for organizations departments who facilitate volunteerism

Most frequently, comments highlight that the federal government should support new and existing organizations that facilitate youth volunteerism (e.g., NGOs), as well as the provinces/territories and municipalities for the same purpose. This support could come in the form of increased funding or other incentives, like tax credits or grants. It is also suggested that the government work with all types of educational institutions (i.e., elementary and high schools, CEGEPs, colleges, universities) to expand youth volunteerism programs and opportunities. Others point to increasing volunteer and mentorship opportunities for disabled youth and cite the importance of expanding international volunteer opportunities.

> "Promote Katimavik and other similar projects. Offer a funding program for community volunteer coaching projects to which communities could apply."

Mandatory youth volunteer hours

A similar number of comments suggest implementing a community service and/or volunteering requirement for all Canadian students, whether upon graduation (i.e., from high school) or throughout. In regions where volunteer hours are already a school requirement, some comments speak to the need of increasing the number of hours for completion (e.g., from 40 to 100 hours in Ontario). Others say volunteering should earn youth school credits, while a few comments suggest implementing a national year of service after high school graduation.

> "High school credit program – youth can get unspecified high school credit being a member of Cadets. We should be promoting that further. It's two-fold – they get credit and the community benefits. They are more likely to continue to volunteer if they start early!! It's the life-skills and looks great on a resumé - PROMOTE IT!!!"

Increasing volunteerism opportunities

A moderate number of comments highlight that governments should work to increase volunteer opportunities for youth, whether in government itself, at school, via NGOs, or through other organizations. Slightly fewer suggest incentivizing youth volunteerism and community service through scholarships, awards and other benefits. Several comments support the idea that governments should implement targeted promotional campaigns to encourage youth to volunteer by demonstrating its many advantages (e.g., for both youth and their communities).

> "There needs to be better promotion and to volunteer. It needs to be made appealing to youth."

Other ideas include:

- Making volunteer opportunities easier to navigate and more accessible for young Canadians; and
- Raising awareness about the benefits of volunteering.

Endnote

Endnote 1
The "gig economy" is as a labour market characterized by the prevalence of short-term contracts or freelance work as opposed to permanent jobs.

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