

## Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the **2025 Federal Budget**

Written submission by Inspiring Healthy Futures

As a pan-Canadian, cross-sectoral network committed to improving the health and well-being of children and youth, Inspiring Healthy Futures recommends four priority investments for the 2025 federal budget:

1. **Expand Economic Protections for Families** by increasing income, food, and service access supports for children, particularly those living in low-income households.
2. **Expand the Youth Mental Health Action Fund by \$5 billion over ten years**, with an explicit focus on infants and children.
3. **Invest \$24 million to strengthen Canada's child health research infrastructure**, including support for IHDCYH, longitudinal surveys, and Capstone integration.
4. **Sustain and scale Jordan's Principle and the Inuit Child First Initiative** to ensure equitable access to care for Indigenous children.

## **Introduction: A Crossroads for Children's Health and Well-Being**

Canada is one of the world's top 10 economies, yet children growing up here face deep systemic inequities and worsening outcomes. According to UNICEF's Report Card 19 (2025), Canada ranked 24th out of 36 high-income countries in physical health, and 33rd in adolescent suicide. These outcomes are neither inevitable nor acceptable. Countries that consistently rank highly on child well-being make deliberate, sustained investments, prioritize children in policy, and establish leadership structures that are accountable for outcomes.

The health and well-being of children and youth must be treated not only as a moral imperative, but as a foundational element of Canada's long-term economic and social success. Budget 2025 offers a critical opportunity to course-correct. Our recommendations aim to reverse alarming declines in Canada's child health outcomes and advance meaningful systems change.

### **Recommendation 1: Expand Economic Protections for Families**

Economic instability is a growing threat to the well-being of children and youth. Rising housing costs, food insecurity, and inflation disproportionately impact low-income families, deepening inequities and worsening child health outcomes.

UNICEF Canada and others have repeatedly demonstrated the importance of income and social supports in buffering families from economic hardship. Strengthening these protections is one of the most direct and cost-effective ways to improve child health.

We recommend Budget 2025:

- Increase the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) for low-income families, particularly in the early years when the return on investment is highest;
- Strengthen food security programs, including full implementation of the National School Food Program and support for community-led nutrition initiatives;
- Establish stabilization mechanisms for children's health and social service providers to shield them from inflationary pressures, labour shortages, and supply chain disruptions.

These targeted investments would help ensure that no child in Canada has their health, development, or opportunity compromised by financial hardship.

## **Recommendation 2: Expand the Youth Mental Health Action Fund by \$5 Billion Over Ten Years**

Canada faces a worsening mental health crisis among children and youth. One in four young people reports poor mental health, and suicide remains the second leading cause of death among youth aged 10–19. Yet access to care remains fragmented, and infants and young children are often left out of mental health strategies altogether.

While the Youth Mental Health Fund introduced in Budget 2024 was a promising start, the scale of investment must match the scope of the crisis.

We recommend a \$5 billion top-up over five years, with the following priorities:

- Ensure infants and young children are explicitly included in eligibility and service planning;
- Expand access to early intervention, school-based, and community mental health services;
- Support culturally relevant, Indigenous-led, and family-based care models;
- Address health human resource shortages in pediatric and youth mental health.

Investing in early mental health interventions not only improves individual and family well-being but yields high economic returns by reducing downstream healthcare, education, and social costs.

## **Recommendation 3: Invest \$24 Million to Advance Child Health Research**

Improving child health and well-being requires robust, equity-driven research infrastructure that reflects the distinct developmental and social contexts of children and youth. Yet Canada continues to underfund this research relative to population needs and potential impact.

We recommend:

- Tripling the base budget of the CIHR Institute of Human Development, Child and Youth Health (IHDCYH) by \$16 million annually;
- Allocating \$8 million to support additional waves of the Canadian Health Survey on Children and Youth (CHSCY) in 2025 and 2027;
- Establishing a dedicated stream for maternal, child, and youth health research within the new Capstone research organization.

Priority areas should include mental health and the digital environment; developmental disabilities and chronic illness in childhood; reconciliation and health equity; and policy impacts on child and youth well-being.

These investments would support interdisciplinary research teams, data-informed decision-making, and inclusive models of knowledge translation that reflect the voices of young people and families.

#### **Recommendation 4: Sustain and Scale Jordan's Principle and the Inuit Child First Initiative**

Jordan's Principle and the Inuit Child First Initiative have been transformative in advancing health equity and access to care for First Nations and Inuit children. These programs ensure children can receive the health, social, and educational services they need without delays, jurisdictional disputes, or administrative barriers.

We recommend Budget 2025:

- Commit to the long-term renewal and expansion of funding for Jordan's Principle and the Inuit Child First Initiative at 2024 levels, with increases indexed to inflation;
- Scale up proven, community-based models of care, such as the Rehabilitation Centre for Children (RCC) in Manitoba, which partners with First Nations to deliver rehabilitation therapies, specialized clinics, and education directly in communities.

Without continued investment, progress toward health equity for Indigenous children is at risk. These programs are not only vital health investments but essential commitments to reconciliation and justice. By expanding their reach and sustainability, Canada can ensure that Indigenous children across the country receive timely, culturally safe, and needs-based care.

#### **Conclusion: A National Opportunity to Invest in Children**

Inspiring Healthy Futures urges the Government of Canada to take bold and measurable action in Budget 2025 to prioritize children and youth across policy and funding decisions. These four recommendations reflect the collective voice of a pan-Canadian network of civil society leaders, youth, researchers, family partners, and frontline service providers.

By expanding economic protections, improving mental health systems, advancing research, and sustaining reconciliation commitments, we can ensure that every child—regardless of income, geography, or identity—has the opportunity to grow up healthy, supported, and hopeful.

## About Inspiring Healthy Futures

Inspiring Healthy Futures is a pan-Canadian, cross-sectoral network of champions committed to the well-being of children and youth in Canada. Hosted by Children's Healthcare Canada, we focus on strategic advocacy, research, and coordination to ensure that the voices of young Canadians and those working with them are heard at the highest levels of decision-making. To ensure a holistic approach to child and youth well-being, our efforts span across all determinants of health.

The foundational Inspiring Healthy Futures action framework was co-designed to mobilize and connect communities, spanning youth initiatives, research collaborations, grassroots parent groups, advocacy initiatives, and community and industry partnerships. Our interlinked priorities were picked because, if actioned, they would measurably improve the health and well-being of children and youth in Canada.