



The Students  
Commission  
Centre of Excellence for  
Youth Engagement



# A YOUTH POLICY FOR CANADA: WORKING TOWARDS THE CANADA WE WANT

APRIL 2018

This report reflects the voices of 150 young people from coast to coast to coast who gathered to share their input into A Youth Policy for Canada. We understand Canada's commitment to develop this youth policy as a commitment to support our voices in shaping the country we want to live in. Working towards the #CanadaWeWant is therefore inherently connected to this Youth Policy: it is the way we will know the Government continually hears and values our stories in decision-making.



Policy discussions at Canada We Want Conference March 2, 2018

## SUMMARY

The #CanadaWeWant is a country that fosters its young people to use and understand the impact of their voice. Our vision for Canada's first Youth Policy is that it is reflective of the inclusive process that helped generate it. Canada's youth policy should make an ongoing commitment to listen to young people, as this process is essential in shaping the #CanadaWeWant. We want this youth policy, and ultimately Canada, to be grounded in

principles of responsibility, compassion, inclusion and honesty. This policy will be successful if it addresses social issues by acknowledging truths such as pervasive structural racism, social exclusion of rural, remote and northern communities, and environmental injustices. By investing in young people in this way, Canada will benefit for generations to come.



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**The Students  
Commission**  
*Centre of Excellence for  
Youth Engagement*

The Students Commission / Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement  
23 Isabella Street, Toronto, ON, M4Y 1M7  
Tel: (416) 597-8297, Fax: (416) 597-0661  
Email: [info@studentscommission.ca](mailto:info@studentscommission.ca), URL: [www.studentscommission.ca](http://www.studentscommission.ca)

## Acknowledgments

Thank you first to the courageous young people who traveled from **coast to coast to coast** to build the #CanadaWeWant so we can have the #CanadaWeNeed.

With representatives from First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities from across the country, we humbly gathered on the traditional territories of the Haudenosaunee, the Ojibway/Chippewas, the Anishinabek, and currently the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation. We were also surrounded by Indigenous communities: to the North were the Chippewas of Georgina Island; to the East were the Mississaugas of Scugog Island; and to the West were the Chippewas of Kettle and Stoney Point. Through Indigenous-led ceremony, acknowledgement and respect, we recognized the enduring presence of Indigenous Peoples on this land, and were very grateful to have the opportunity to use it as a meeting place, and a space for knowledge sharing.

Thank you to the Privy Council Office's Youth Secretariat for supporting the participation of youth from across the country and for asking us to provide our voice into A Youth Policy for Canada. Thank you to YMCA Cedar Glen, The Students Commission of Canada, Sharing the Stories Research and Evaluation Platform, Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement, RBC Foundation, UNICEF Canada, the many other funders of the #CanadaWeWant Conference 2018, and all of the organizers, elders, adult allies, and facilitators. Thank you to The Students Commission Conference Planning Committee for their hard work. Thank you to the federal government representatives and policymakers that attended the Conference and will continue to support the development of A Youth Policy for Canada.



## Executive Summary

In deciding to develop A Youth Policy for Canada, our government has made a commitment. In our view, this commitment ensures that the voices of young people are heard and valued in the decisions that affect them. It is our view that A Youth Policy for Canada should be a mechanism through which all young people in Canada know that they have an important role in shaping the actions and values of their community and country.

The content of this report was generated through discussions that took place in Nobleton, Ontario from February 27 to March 5, 2018 at the #CanadaWeWant Conference. This Conference brought together 150 young people and adults from every province and territory to discuss things that matter to them. Conversations took place around ten specific themes: Children’s Rights, the Path to Truth and Reconciliation, Structural Racism, the Canadian Workplace, Youth Identity Formation, Mental Health and Wellness, Gender-based Violence, the Justice System, Youth Service and Volunteering, and Marketing Food to Youth. In virtue of the diversity of individuals participating in these discussions, this contribution into the youth policy reflects both the similarities and contrasts of reality that youth in Canada experience based on their various identities, histories and geographic locations.

The #CanadaWeWant is one that is responsible, compassionate, inclusive and honest. As such, the Youth Policy must be grounded in children’s rights- a commitment Canada made in 1991 upon ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (UNCRC). It is undisputable that not every young person in Canada has access to these rights, nor are they aware of them. The first step in supporting young people’s voices is affirming the rights they have as a young people, especially Article 12.<sup>1</sup> Connected to this, a responsible and honest Canada will ground this youth policy in anti-racism, for racism continues to create structural and systemic inequalities that prevent many of Canada’s racialized young people from achieving their full potential. Addressing the structural nature of racism in Canada requires this youth policy to walk the path of Truth and Reconciliation so that no Indigenous young person is left behind. To make this possible, it is important that this Youth Policy ensures all young people in Canada, regardless of their citizenship status, understand their role in achieving truth and reconciliation. Finally, a truly national youth policy will be one that reaches *all* young people. This youth policy cannot continue the pattern of neglect that exists for those living in rural, remote and especially Northern communities.

These core frameworks- Children’s Rights, Addressing Structural Racism, Truth and Reconciliation and reaching Rural, Remote and Northern Communities- ground this report and



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<sup>1</sup> In child-friendly language, Article 12 states that every young person has the right to an opinion and for it to be listened to and taken seriously.

in our view will be the guiding frameworks that will result in the implementation of a successful Youth Policy for Canada.

We also firmly believe that The Students Commission of Canada's Four Pillars: Respect, Listen, Understand and Communicate™ should ground the policy. Respect for young people and their capacity to change the world. Respect for all people and the unique gifts they carry within. From Respect comes Listening. Listening with not only our ears but all of our senses. Listening not to reply. Listening for silences, deeds, spoken and written word. Through listening comes Understanding: empathy, being able to disagree without being disagreeable, putting ourselves in the shoes of others. With these pillars in place, all the obstacles fall away, that is when we are able to Communicate the change we want to see in the world. The Students Commission works in inter-generational partnerships to communicate the change that we (young people) want to see in the world. We believe that youth and adults working with the Four Pillars can create a world where all young people positively transition into a successful adulthood.

## Grounding the Policy in Core Frameworks

### The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

A Youth Policy for Canada must be grounded in the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Canada ratified this convention in 1991, but recent Children's Rights workshops across the country make it clear that not every young person has access to, nor are they aware of their rights.<sup>2</sup>

The #CanadaWeWant is a country where the youth policy reinforces to young people that their voices matter and that they can have an impact in effecting change. Grounding this Youth Policy in rights will give young people an important sense of accountability— their voice is not only something the Government values, it is something the Government has an obligation and responsibility to respect.

Article 42 of the UNCRC states that every young person has the right to know about their rights, and this should be at the forefront of the Youth Policy. Article 12 states that every young person has a right to an opinion and for this opinion to be heard and taken seriously by adults. It is our view that implementing measures that support the full adoption of these articles will improve the lives of children and youth in this country. As a result, it is our recommendation that A Youth Policy for Canada should include a strategy to ensure all young people understand and/or are made of their rights. We also recommend that the Government of Canada continue to meet its obligations under the UNCRC to make sure all children (regardless of background, location, beliefs) in Canada's rights are protected (Article 4).



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<sup>2</sup> See Children's Right Report submitted to the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC)

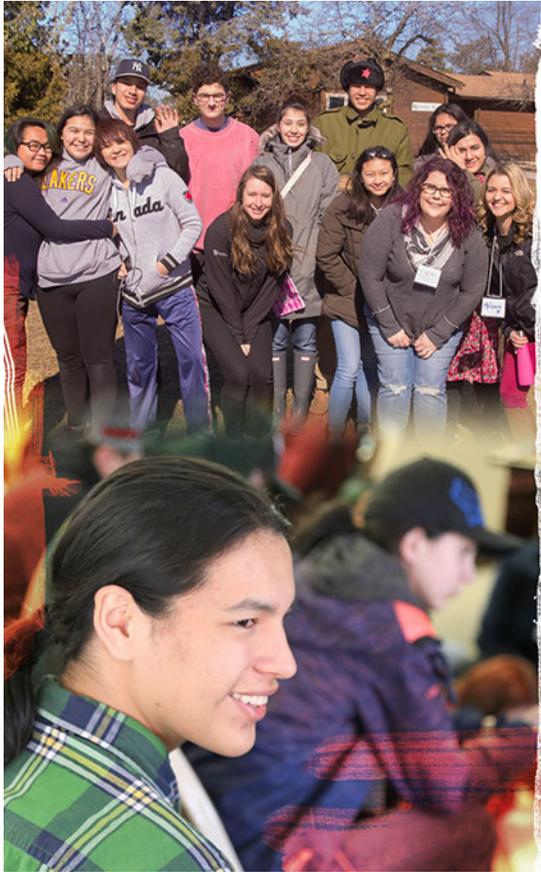
## Addressing Structural Racism

Racism in Canada is persistent. It is not only a historical reality, but a contemporary one as well. Some people in this country believe that embracing multiculturalism has resulted in a discrimination-free Canada. Racism in Canada always has and continues to shape the realities racialized young people and their families live. Racism in Canada still exists at the individual level, but the racism that is the most pervasive exists at the structural level. The honest and responsible #CanadaWeWant addresses structural racism by revisiting the stories it tells to reveal whole truths. Only with complete narratives can we adequately address the systems, such as child welfare or youth justice, that racialized young people disproportionately interact with by consequence of structural racism. Moving through these systems often degrades the trust these young people feel towards the Government, towards each other and towards society. A Youth Policy for Canada must therefore be grounded in anti-racism frameworks so that all young people feel that it is relevant to them.

There are several ways in which A Youth Policy for Canada can be grounded in anti-racism. First, ensuring that the policy is written by youth and adults who represent diverse cultural and racial backgrounds. For example: this report includes the views of Canada's diverse regions and its diverse people. Second, a Youth Policy for Canada should include an analysis of how the outlined solutions/policy statements will affect racialized young people. Third, an effective approach to anti-racism will not homogenize all racialized people. This means that young people's different cultural and racial backgrounds are taken into consideration, and further, are recognized to experience different stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See #CanadaWeWant Structural Racism Report



## Truth and Reconciliation (TRC)

Indigenous young people in Canada continue to be discriminated against by the Government and other peoples in Canada. It is not uncommon for Indigenous children in Canada to grow up never having had access to clean drinking water, adequate housing, affordable food or emergency response services. This is unacceptable. Indigenous people are also overrepresented in the Child Welfare and Justice systems. Until these patterns of discrimination change, Indigenous young people in Canada will face significant barriers to reaching their potential. The #CanadaWeWant is one in which *all* young people are supported to thrive, something that has not been the case for the past 151 years of this country's history.

Canada's commitment to Truth and Reconciliation is the promise that future generations of Indigenous people will not experience the same violence and injustices that their ancestors have. The #CanadaWeWant is one that begins with truth to understand where we were and how we got to where we are today. We noted that the conversation guide for A Youth Policy for Canada only references reconciliation. We believe that you cannot have reconciliation without first experiencing truth. Only before the whole truth is heard and understood by all people in Canada can we begin to work

towards reconciliation. A Youth Policy for Canada should explicitly recognize that Indigenous young people need specific attention by the Government of Canada. Policy solutions should be designed and analyzed to consider the impact on Indigenous youth.

It is important that this Youth Policy reflects that Indigenous young people need culturally-relevant supports to have their voices heard. It is not appropriate, nor in the spirit of reconciliation, for government decision-makers to simply walk into a community, host a consultation, and leave. The process of listening must reflect Indigenous worldviews and include ceremony. Consultations on policies must take the form of dialogue. This fundamental expression of respect is how the government will work towards building trust among Indigenous young people and their families.

This Youth Policy is an important opportunity for all young people in Canada, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to learn the truth of Canada's relationship with Indigenous people – both historical and contemporary, and build on education, awareness and empathy building necessary for reconciliation. Walking the path of Truth and Reconciliation in the development of this youth policy will also mean that there are Indigenous people in government involved in the actual writing of the policy. Both the development of this youth policy and the Youth Policy itself should embody the principles of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See #CanadaWeWant Truth and Reconciliation Report

## The Four Pillars

Respect, Listen, Understand, Communicate™

The Students Commission of Canada begins with respect. First, respect for young people, their idealism, their hope and their capacity to improve the world. Second, respect for the gift that each person carries within. We believe that by creating conditions of respect, we enhance the capacity of people to work together and improve their lives and the lives of others. Respect means respect for diversity and an effort to strive for diversity of people and experiences and expertise in all of what we do. Respect means actively seeking and valuing the gifts and experiences of all those with whom we work and live. Respect means reciprocity - that each person is an equal partner in our work. Respect means youth and adults working collaboratively as equals. Respect means that we have "commissioned" youth to carry out their hopes and dreams for a better world, and that as an organization we will facilitate, support, and assist them to our best capacity.



With respect as our foundation, we learn to listen. We listen not just with our ears, but with our heads, hearts and all our senses. We listen actively, intensely, not just to words, but to silences, to deeds, to experiences. We listen to the spoken word, the written word, and the image. We listen to learn, to gather information, to enhance our capacity to give and to receive. We listen to youth as experts, and we gather other information, other voices to ensure diversity. We listen because we are curious, because as people and as an organization we are constantly growing and changing through the input of others. We listen to truly understand who others are.

From listening comes understanding. To understand is to go beyond listening, to process what we have heard, and to reflect upon the new knowledge and gifts given to us. Understanding creates new knowledge, new skills. If we truly understand who others are, and who we are, we can work together as equals, valuing differences and building upon similarities and common goals. We understand the problems each of us faces, and the aspirations each of us has. Understanding creates the conditions for working effectively together.

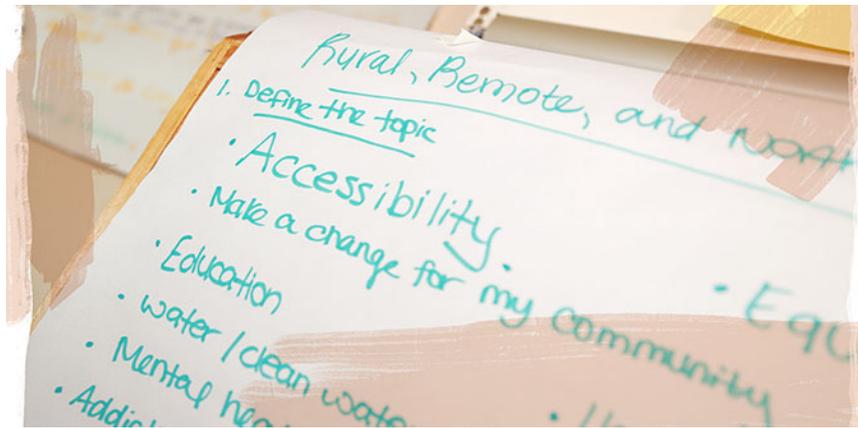
If people really understand each other, then they can communicate – our fourth pillar. When people truly communicate, the obstacles fall away. Communication is the first action and creates the process for developing and taking all the actions we need to take, as individuals and as an organization to achieve our goals and dreams. With communication, we create action plans and implement them with practical projects that make a positive difference. With communication, we continue to reaffirm the respect and trust we have for each other and create the relationships with others who can help us achieve our goals.

Our belief is that this process and these four pillars – Respect, Listen, Understand, Communicate™ – create the foundation for taking action to improve lives and society. We give opportunity for young people to choose a positive path, to take action on the disadvantages, inequalities, the barriers so many face. We believe that this process and these values provide

the structure for youth and adults to work collaboratively towards the elimination of poverty and all of the factors that create advantage for some and disadvantage for others. This process and these values create the space for youth to celebrate and develop their hope, skills and knowledge – and the space to impart that knowledge to adults.

## Reaching Rural, Remote and Northern Communities

Young people in Rural, Remote and Northern Communities are consistently left behind in isolation. Many Indigenous youth live in Rural, Remote and Northern Communities, further compounding the limited access to opportunities, resources and supports that allow them to thrive. The development of this youth policy should ensure that young people living in these communities have accessible opportunities to provide input. The Youth Policy itself should include strategies to ensure the voices of these traditionally hard-to-reach young people are heard.



# #CANADA WE WANT



## *The change we want to see:*

The #CanadaWeWant is one in which all young people's voices are valued and heard in decision-making.

The #CanadaWeWant is one in which all young people have the supports they need to thrive.

The #CanadaWeWant is one in which all young people know about and have access to their rights as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

## *The way we want to get there (Activities):*

Every Ministry in the federal government creates an ongoing youth engagement mechanism to gather input in policy-development processes by 2020. These mechanisms are inclusive and engage youth the furthest away from opportunity.

## *The way we want to get there (Activities):*

Youth, regardless of where they live, have the opportunity to address social issues in their communities. The Government gives funding to communities to create opportunities to do so, especially activities relating to anti-racism and Truth and Reconciliation and opportunities in RRNC.

## *The way we want to get there (Activities):*

All school curricula are updated to emphasize children's rights and the UNCRC. Teachers Colleges educate teachers on listening to youth voice and Children's Rights. All government staff receive training on children's rights.

## *The way we want to get there (Resources):*

Appropriate funding from the government to support the creation of ongoing youth engagement mechanisms. Appropriate funding will ensure that these opportunities are meaningful and effective.

Government staff should receive adult-ally and youth engagement trainings, as well as education on the UNCRC. All of government is informed about the Youth Policy.

## *The way we want to get there (Resources):*

All levels of government collaborate to support diverse youth to have the opportunity to make change through community-based projects. The federal government creates funding for these projects, and young people are involved in the allocation of this funding. Young people are able to creatively measure the impact (tell the story) of their projects in their community.

## *The way we want to get there (Resources):*

Social media presence: campaigns that educate youth and adults on the UNCRC.

Diverse young people from across Canada are accessed to deliver trainings to adults on children's rights and youth engagement.

Young people within the justice system and child welfare receive context-specific education about their rights in the UNCRC.

***What are the values and the principles to ground our recommendations? The Four Core Frameworks: Children's Rights; Addressing Structural Racism; Truth and Reconciliation; and reaching Rural, Remote and Northern Communities.***

***What are the values and the principles to ground our recommendations? This youth policy will ignite ongoing collaboration between young people and adults. Any interactions should be grounded in the Students Commission of Canada's Four Pillars: Respect, Listen, Understand, and Communicate™ These Four Pillars foster the meaningful dialogue necessary to make change.***

## Topic Report-Backs

### Civic Engagement and Participation

#### *The issue:*

We believe civic engagement is important because it connects young people to their communities and the resources and opportunities (or lack thereof) available within them. Civic engagement and participation create active members of society who contribute positively and feel like they belong. We disagree with the notion that young people in Canada suffer from disengagement. This generation is one of the most engaged and informed populations this country has ever had. Young people are more likely to be civically engaged when they feel like there is a chance their engagement will matter in contributing to something. Rather than waiting for young people to prove that they have the skills to become leaders, adults need to respect young people for their capacities as young people and value the engagement and participation that comes with this. The #CanadaWeWant is full of civically engaged young people who participate in their communities and eventually, participate in political systems.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Underlying principles or objectives for action:*

The #CanadaWeWant is one in which all young people are civically engaged and have the opportunity to participate in their community and have their voices heard.

#### *Concrete solutions or actions that could be implemented by the Government of Canada:*

1. The Government of Canada should support the creation of opportunities for dialogue in communities about issues that matter to young people.
2. Each municipality should adopt and implement a youth strategy. The creation of these youth strategies must be a process of youth civic engagement itself.
3. Rural, Remote, and Northern Communities need additional support to create opportunities for young people living within them to be civically engaged. E.g. Grants to support transportation
4. The Government of Canada can lead by example. The government needs to listen to youth through ongoing processes that are meaningful. Youth should connect with policymakers in decision-making processes whenever possible. These processes should avoid tokenizing young people by engaging an array of different people.
5. Young adults are more likely to be civically engaged if they attain their High School Diploma. The Government of Canada should support building a nation in which all young people have this base-level of education.
6. The Government of Canada should create grants that young people themselves can apply for. These grants should focus on providing opportunities for youth to be engaged in their community. These grants must be “youth-friendly” so that a high school student could fill them out.

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<sup>5</sup> See #CanadaWeWant Youth Service and Volunteerism Report

7. Local governments should create their own youth engagement mechanisms, such as Youth Advisory Councils. Local governments should also be encouraged to access youth leadership that already exists, such as Student Councils.

## Canadian Identity, Immigration and International Experiences

### *The Issue:*

Our conversation included young people who are Canadian citizens, newcomers, immigrants, and youth who identify more with their Indian Status than Canadian citizenship. Overall, the #CanadaWeWant is one that is responsible, compassionate, inclusive and honest. For this reason, we looked deeper into what Canada's multicultural identity has been in our experience. We do not want multiculturalism and embracing diversity to change as pillars of Canadian identity. It is one thing to be diverse, it is another to practice this diversity by being socially inclusive. Immigrants who come to Canada most often have high levels of education and skills from other countries. Unfortunately, these are not always recognized when they arrive. We want people of different cultures and backgrounds to be well-supported and experience economic inclusion. An honest Canadian identity will also lead us to revisit many stories we tell. Many of us learned that the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) was a "nation building project;" however, we did not learn that this also accelerated the attempted destruction of Indigenous ways of life in Western Canada, nor that the CPR was built by poorly treated Chinese and Japanese workers. We want young people and adults in Canada to be informed about our present identity, but also that this identity of multiculturalism did not always exist. In doing so, we will better understand the lasting impacts of our former national identities and be able to address Canada's structural racism. (For example, until WWII, many Prime Ministers advocated for "A White Country.")



### *Underlying principles or objectives for action:*

The #CanadaWeWant is one in which all young people and their families feel like they belong here and experience social and economic inclusion. We want Canada's identity to be one of multiculturalism, but also one that is honest and recognizes that the celebration of diversity was not always an ingrained part of our identity.

### *Concrete solutions or actions that could be implemented by the Government of Canada:*

1. The Government of Canada should support opportunities for newcomer youth to connect with Canadian citizens to share experiences and learn from one another. These opportunities will build compassion and understanding.
2. The Government of Canada should not hesitate to admit where it was wrong in the past. Words like "colonial violence" or "cultural genocide" or simply

- “racism” are facts that represent our government’s and society’s past history and should be acknowledged as such.
3. The Government of Canada should create an anti-racism directorate and collect and monitor policy on the disparities experienced by different racialized groups. This directorate should deliver educational campaigns about Canada’s racist past to emphasize why multiculturalism and the celebration of diversity is important. It should also be geared to developing forward-looking solutions that help to reduce the barriers experienced by racialized people.
  4. Canada should always accept immigrants and refugees. The Government of Canada should not ever use language that suggests refugees or immigrants are a “risk” or potential burden on Canadian society.
  5. The Government of Canada should never revoke citizenship once it is granted.
  6. The Government of Canada should recognize the education that most immigrants have attained in other countries. The Points System ensures that immigrants coming to Canada will be an asset to this country. It should not be the case that these assets are dismissed upon their arrival.
  7. Canada’s immigration policies should prioritize family reunification.
  8. Universal health-care should be provided to all refugees and immigrants. There should be a “don’t-ask-don’t-tell” policy with respect to citizenship status. Mental health supports should be created and delivered to refugees arriving in Canada.
  9. Canada should create an initiative that creates affordable housing (in general) but especially for immigrants and refugees.
  10. There should be special grants available to children of refugees to help them access and attain a post-secondary education.
  11. The Government of Canada should create an employment program for immigrants to help them get their work experience in this country.
  12. The Government of Canada should create grants for young people of lower socio-economic status to travel outside of Canada.
  13. The Government of Canada should create more exchange opportunities so young people can experience Canada’s diversity.

## **Economic Opportunity, Innovation and Money & Youth Education and Employment**

### ***The Issue:***

The #CanadaWeWant is one where education systems prepare young people for employment in areas that interest them. Young people should be encouraged and motivated to pursue their interests and feel confident that they could make a living wage no matter what industry they work in. Today, the primary factor for many youth in deciding what degree to take in the likelihood that they will be able to get a job afterwards. If a stronger culture of innovation was fostered in Canada, our economy would be more diverse, and the people driving it would be happier.

The #CanadaWeWant is one where all young people experience economic opportunity, regardless of their identity or where they live. Discrimination still exists in the education system.<sup>6</sup> Discrimination also exists in seeking employment.<sup>7</sup> These barriers must be addressed before Canada can access its full economic potential. Economic opportunities should also be created where they are needed the most, such as in remote and northern communities.



***Underlying principles or objectives for action:***

The #CanadaWeWant has a thriving economy that is supported by education systems that are equitable AND a discrimination-free workforce. The #CanadaWeWant has an innovative economy that creates opportunities for young people to explore their diverse passions and interests.

***Concrete solutions or actions that could be implemented by the Government of Canada:***

1. The Government of Canada should ensure that education systems are delivering curricula that equip young people with knowledge and skills they need for the 21st century.
  - a. Young people should be taught financial literacy and how to code.
  - b. Curricula need to be honest and be grounded in Truth and Reconciliation. Teachers should receive training on Indigenous history and the TRC commission report.
  - c. Education needs to be culturally relevant. Young people in northern communities must be able to speak their Indigenous languages in school. Curricula should be relevant to the populations they are being taught to. For example, Toronto's Africentric Alternative School.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/almost-half-of-tdsb-students-expelled-over-last-5-years-are-black-report-says-1.4065088>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/careers/the-future-of-work/survey-reveals-canada-still-has-a-ways-to-go-on-workplace-discrimination/article27006279/>

- d. Teachers need to be educated on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).
2. There are certain groups of young people who rarely have a teacher that looks like them. It should not be mandatory for a teacher to look like their students, but there needs to be a greater diversity of teachers with different identities.
3. High Schools should be community hubs. They should have community resources and employment opportunities within the physical space, similar to post-secondary campuses.
4. The Government of Canada should support senior populations to retire and open jobs for young people.
5. The Government of Canada should expand the Canada Summer Jobs program to be an all-year program that supports youth employment while young people are in school.
6. The Government of Canada should create programs that address structural racism within the education system.
7. The Government of Canada should create programs that address other forms of discrimination in the workplace.
8. Better mental health supports should be available so that individuals coping with mental illness can better access employment opportunities.
9. All workplaces must accommodate different cultures and religious practices. For example, an Indigenous person should be provided with a space to smudge.
  - a. The Government of Canada should create resources for employers to train them on Indigenous culture.
10. All internships should be paid.
11. Indigenous communities across Canada are impacted by climate change and the economic industries that extract resources that perpetuate climate change. Canada's economy must be transformed into one that is sustainable and Indigenous communities and their values must be at the forefront of this economic transition.

## Gender Equality, Inclusion and Accessibility

### *The Issue:*



Gender inequality is still a significant issue that affects girls, boys and those with diverse gender identities. People in Canada who are Indigenous, LGBTQ+, a visible minority, disabled, of a lower socioeconomic status and many other social identities often experience compounded inequities. The #CanadaWeWant ensures equality and equity for all. In addressing the gender inequality, the dynamics that come with living different identities must be recognized. For example, a queer

black woman will experience different kinds of discrimination than a white cis-gendered woman. Strategies that address gender inequality must not homogenize populations as traditional

strategies have. Our discussion on this topic focused primarily on factors that contribute to gender-based violence and how these factors can be addressed.<sup>8</sup>

***Underlying principles or objectives for action:***

The #CanadaWeWant ensures all people, regardless of their gender identity(ies), are included in society and have equitable access to social and economic opportunities.

***Concrete solutions or actions that could be implemented by the Government of Canada:***

1. The education system should be informed by feminist values.
  - a. Young people should be educated about various gender and sexual identities to dismantle negative stereotypes and assumptions.
  - b. Education systems must include consent in their health curriculum, beginning at a young age.
  - c. Young people should receive education on healthy teen relationships; topics such as sexual consent, boundaries and safety should be covered.
  - d. All schools should have accessible gender-neutral bathrooms.
2. The Government of Canada should create a program to promote girls going into the trades and STEM. Other programs should encourage boys to go into nursing and other traditionally female professions.
3. Women should not have to pay for, or at least pay tax on, feminine hygiene products.
4. Women should never be forced or expected to wear makeup or revealing clothing in their workplace.
5. The Government of Canada should create a program that matches young people with a “grandmother” or elderly woman to share stories. Learning to respect our mothers and grandmothers is an opportunity for truth and reconciliation.
6. The Government of Canada should create a social media campaign on what positive masculinity is and how this plays an important role in breaking down gender inequality.

## **Youth Service and Volunteerism**

***The Issue:***

Being engaged in one's community, especially through volunteering opportunities, is a valuable experience all young people should have. Not all young people have the opportunity to volunteer, however, and not all volunteer opportunities are meaningful. The #CanadaWeWant gives young people the opportunity to explore and identify their interests through volunteering opportunities. Youth are full of energy and are aware of social issues. Young people desire meaningful opportunities to volunteer where they have an impact and contribute to addressing the social issues that matter to them. This process of contributing to something that matters greatly to young people is often transformative and empowering. In order for volunteer opportunities to be meaningful, young people need to be able to identify the positive things

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<sup>8</sup> See #CanadaWeWant Gender-based Violence Report

they are contributing to. The #CanadaWeWant is one in which young people volunteer from a young age. This experience will reinforce young people's understanding that their voice matters and that they have an ability to impact change in their community.

### ***Underlying principles or objectives for action:***

All young people, regardless of where they live, should have the opportunity to contribute to their communities through meaningful volunteer activities. The #CanadaWeWant fosters civic engagement and participation in young people through a culture of service.

### ***Concrete solutions or actions that could be implemented by the Government of Canada:***

1. The Government of Canada should create a campaign “redefining” volunteering. Young people should understand that the value of volunteering extends beyond giving back to one’s community. It is also an activity that builds transferable skills, job experience and lasting relationships.
2. Create a nation-wide digital platform for young people to learn about volunteering opportunities. The platform should host webinars on how to apply for grants and create volunteer opportunities, as well as trainings on youth-engagement and positive youth-adult mentorship/relationships.
3. The Government of Canada should deliver workshops to organizations to allow them to better support the creation of meaningful volunteer programs. Young people should be involved in the creation and delivery of these workshops.
4. The Government of Canada should host annual National Youth Forums dedicated to celebrating and sharing knowledge about service and volunteering.
5. The Government of Canada should support the creation of mentorship programs that match young people with another young community leader to volunteer together.
6. The Government of Canada should create grants for organizations in rural, remote and northern communities to access to increase the accessibility of their volunteer opportunities. For example, grants should help organizations provide, transportation, food and childcare for young parents or young people who care for their siblings.
7. Community Service should be integrated into elementary level education, similar to how high school students must volunteer in order to graduate.



## **Environment and Climate Change**

### ***The Issue:***

Climate change is an issue that does and will continue to severely impact all people in Canada. Indigenous ways of life are inherently connected to the relationship between people and the earth, and a failure to address climate change adequately is a form of discrimination against Indigenous people. Addressing climate change must therefore be an activity of truth and reconciliation. Canada’s economy must be transformed into one that does not rely on finite resource extraction, and rather, creates economic opportunities from sustainable practices.

Climate change has serious impacts on the quality of one's health, and this is especially the case for Indigenous people. Indigenous people's rights must be affirmed by the Government, and these rights must always come before economic and corporate interests. In many cases, this is a matter of life and death. In the face of climate change, Canada must fundamentally rethink our relationship with the land, working not toward extraction from the land but reciprocity.

***Underlying principles or objectives for action:***

Climate change is real. The #CanadaWeWant is one that protects its natural environment and addresses climate change in a process that emphasizes truth and reconciliation with Indigenous people.

***Concrete solutions or actions that could be implemented by the Government of Canada:***

1. All Canadians must be educated on the reality climate change. Climate change denial is not going to solve the problem. Governments should analyze each decision that is made by how it helps to address climate change.
2. The Government of Canada must consistently invest money in climate change resource and innovation.
3. The Government of Canada must reject the "environment-economy" dichotomy. Investment in the economy does not necessitate a disregard for environmental preservation. The Government must be brave and innovate solutions that move Canada towards a green and sustainable economy.
4. The Government of Canada must support municipalities and urban centres to innovate and address climate change. All municipalities should be required to ensure all infrastructure and policies promote ecological responsibility. All cities should be mandated to build infrastructure that supports environmental sustainability, such as greenspaces with public gardens and bike lanes.
5. Businesses and corporations need to be held accountable to their contribution to climate change. There needs to be legal and financial consequences against corporations that make mistakes that result in tragedies such as oil spills. There needs to be an incentive for the private sector to invest in green alternatives.
6. Building resilience against natural disasters needs to be a government priority. Municipalities must be ready for the adverse effects of climate change such as flooding and storms.
7. The Government of Canada should create tax incentives for individuals to support local economies. Local food should be subsidized by the government.
8. The Government should create tax incentives for companies that phase out the use of plastic bags.
9. All environmental initiatives must be informed by Indigenous people and their values. Combatting climate change must be framed as a process of truth and reconciliation.

## Physical and Mental Health

### *The Issue:*

Our conversation focused primarily on mental health and how marketing food to kids negatively impacts the ability of young people to make healthy dietary choices.

There is a mental health crisis in Canada right now. Young people experience depression, anxiety and other mental disorders and, in too many cases, are unable to access the supports they need to be happy and healthy. Certain populations of young people disproportionately struggle with mental health, especially LGBTQ+ and Indigenous youth.

Youth in Canada feel that mental health and wellness is just as important as physical health. Although we recognize that leaders in some of our communities are changing in the way we treat mental health, Canada as a whole still has far to come. It is the responsibility of the Government of Canada to provide Indigenous-specific mental health supports including holistic healing, counselling, and safe spaces to share. The Government of Canada needs to prioritize communities that have been identified as having disproportional rates of mental illness and suicide. It is also the responsibility of the Canadian government to provide support services for Indigenous families that address and acknowledge intergenerational trauma, a consequence of Canada's colonialism. A failure to do so constitutes a form of racism.



Young people must also be supported to make healthy food choices. Marketing food to youth seriously impedes their ability to do so.

### *Underlying principles or objectives for action:*

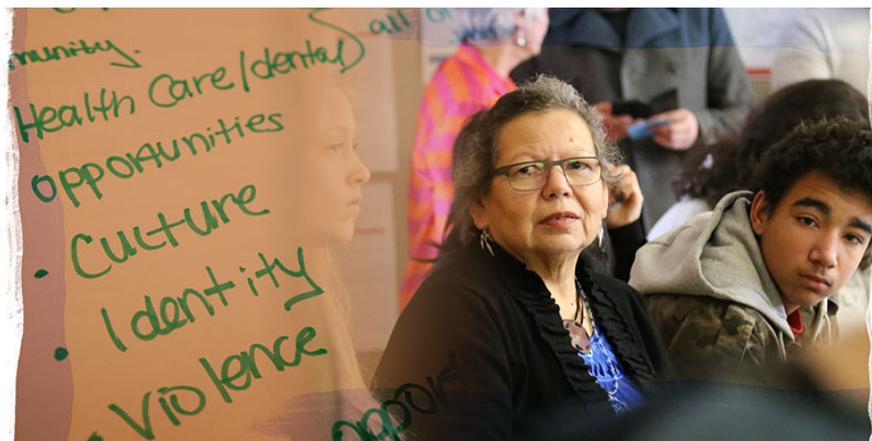
In the #CanadaWeWant, young people have support and resources they need to take care of their mental health. In the #CanadaWeWant, no young person takes their own life. Young people are supported to make healthy food decisions through regulations on companies' ability to market unhealthy food to youth.

### *Concrete solutions or actions that could be implemented by the Government of Canada:*

1. The Canadian Government must provide on-reserve and off-reserve Indigenous specific mental health supports. These mental health services must be culturally relevant and informed of intergenerational trauma and the role of residential schools in the Indigenous mental health crisis. These mental health supports must provide counselling, opportunities for sharing, traditional healing and ceremony, and addictions treatment.
2. All students should go through mandatory suicide prevention training at school.
3. Publically funded peer-to-peer mental health support trainings should be delivered in all schools beginning in Grade 7 (or at the age of 12).
4. The Government of Canada should create a national database of all mental health services available to youth and young adults. This database should follow

the model of the Mental Health Helpline of Ontario, which includes paid staff that help young people navigate (through call, chat, email and directory) the services included in the database, and connect youth to services located in their local communities. This database should include a specific section for mental health supports for indigenous people and LGBTQ+ youth.

5. All health curricula in school must equally weight mental and physical health education. Health curricula need to educate on how to recognize mental illness, treatment options and trauma awareness.
6. Most employers require basic first aid training. All workplaces should also mandate and deliver mental health trainings.
7. The Government of Canada should fund and support the creation of community health networks, especially in rural, remote and northern communities, enabling them to offer mobile crisis units such as COAST (Crisis Outreach and Support Teams) for youth. This mobile unit will be parallel to calling an ambulance in a physical health crisis, and will support youth feeling suicidal or experiencing a mental health crisis. When the mobile unit arrives, they will work with the youth to develop a care plan, practice intervention as needed and help connect youth to appropriate community services.
8. Within Canadian hospitals, inpatient support services should be provided. These services should include educational workshops co-developed by patients and community partners.
9. The Government of Canada should impose restrictions or limitations on marketing food to youth, especially contest-based schemes and advertisements on cartoon channels.



## Rural, Remote and Northern Communities

### *The Issue:*

Many youth living in rural, remote and northern communities (RRNC), and have limited access to basic services and opportunities that youth living in urban areas take for granted. Many Indigenous youth living in these communities are forced to leave their homes in order to receive

an education. This is a form of discrimination because it contributes to the loss of Indigenous culture and language.

In RRNC, other opportunities such as employment, volunteering and basic services such as healthcare are limited or unavailable. In northern and remote communities, food prices are astronomically high, making healthy food, and often food in general, unaffordable. Rural, remote and northern communities also often have limited access to fundamental needs like clean water for drinking and hygiene. All this leads to often poor mental health, which is seldom appropriately treated because of a lack of services. RRNC also experience higher rates of sexual violence. These realities must change.

***Underlying principles or objectives for action:***

The #CanadaWeWant is one where all young people, particularly those who are especially hard to reach, have access to supports and opportunities that allow them to thrive and reach their potential.

Many Indigenous people populate rural, remote and northern communities. No intervention strategy or solution should be imposed on these communities that has not been developed through genuine partnership with Indigenous people. Any solution that is not developed through partnership and in the spirit of reconciliation will be inherently inadequate and likely less effective.



***Concrete solutions or actions that could be implemented by the Government of Canada:***

1. All young people, regardless of where they live, should have equal access to an education in their home community. A lack of schools and teachers in rural, remote and northern communities fails to break the cycle of Indigenous children being forced to leave their homes and resulting in a loss of culture.
  - a. Schools in Indigenous communities must have teachers that speak and curriculum delivered in Indigenous languages.
  - b. Schools need to have elders young people can access for support.

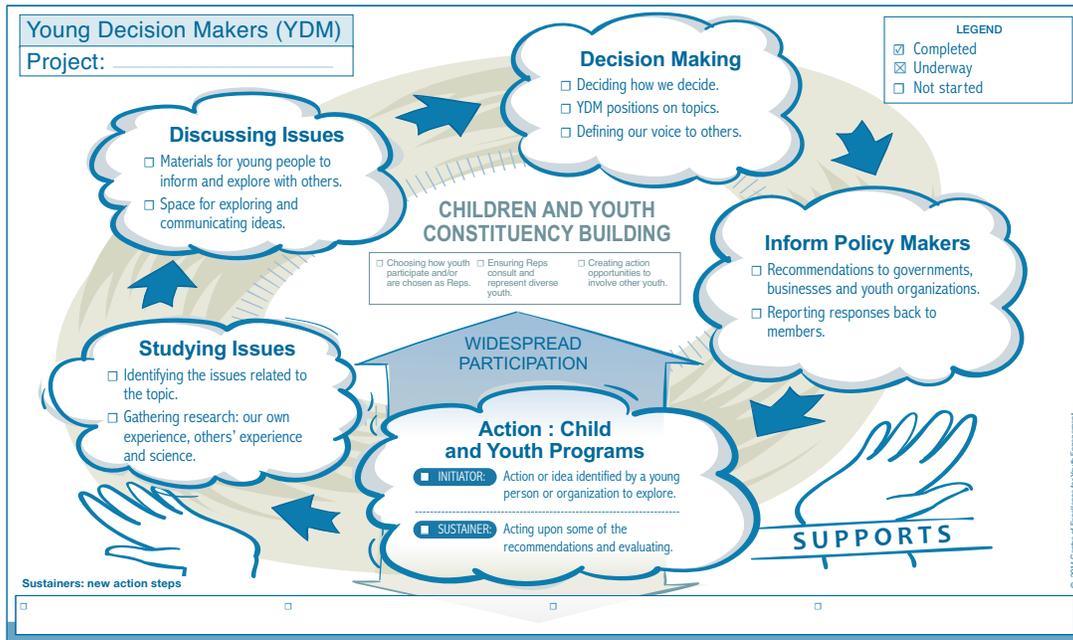
2. A national strategy and intervention plan needs to be created to address rampant sexual violence in many rural, remote and northern Indigenous communities.
3. Health care services should be available in all RRNC. Culturally-relevant healthcare should be available wherever possible.
  - a. Both physical and mental health care supports need to be delivered. RRNC need detox and treatment centres to promote healing.
  - b. Young people often face barriers to talking about abuse in these communities because of a lack of confidentiality in virtue of how small the communities are. Youth need people external to their community to discuss the supports and services they need.
4. All water boil advisories must be ended. No matter what, all people in Canada should have access to clean water for drinking and hygiene.
5. Young people in RRNC need accessible safe spaces for youth. The Government of Canada should fund the creation of youth centres and services in Northern Communities especially. These youth centres should have supports for LGBTQ+ young people, who report facing increased stigma in these communities. These youth centres should have volunteer opportunities and adults that support young people to make change. Transportation should be provided for free so youth can access the youth centres.
6. Climate change represents a unique threat to Indigenous people and their way of life. Northern communities and Inuit populations must have agency in government decision-making, particularly decisions that will contribute to environmental destruction and the melting of arctic ice.

## Roadmap for Continued Engagement on A Youth Policy for Canada

The development of A Youth Policy for Canada is the beginning of a shift towards a Canada in which young people are **always** valued and listened to by government decision-makers.

The discussions that took place at the #CanadaWeWant Conference to inform this report were premised in the Students Commission of Canada's Four Pillars: Respect, Listen, Understand and Communicate™, as well as the Young Decision Makers Model (YDM). The YDM could be utilized in future youth engagement opportunities to gather input into the Youth Policy both before and after its creation.

# The Young Decision Makers Project Model



It is important that A Youth Policy for Canada not be a one-time process. The Youth Policy must be a living document that is re-affirmed by a representative group of Canada’s young people at least every 4 years. This re-affirmation process should take place through dialogue at national forums that bring together diverse people to learn from each other. In addition, the validation process can take place through:

- Online forums that connect the Youth Secretariat with young people in Canada
- Federal Ministry youth engagement mechanisms (see Dream Tree pg. 7)
- Provincial Youth Councils
- Tribal Council Youth Councils
- Youth-led and adult supported Policy Roundtables

Young people should be made aware that the policy will be re-affirmed every 4 years. The Youth Policy should explicitly state that the government wants young people to hold them accountable and should outline what these accountability mechanisms look like. Some accountability measures include:

- Assigning key indicators and metrics to policy statements and/or guidelines so that progress can be tracked
- Working with youth serving organizations to provide an annual report that updates Parliament and the public on how Canada is meeting its obligations under the youth policy
- Funding activities that support the implementation of key policy statements and/or guidelines. For example: funding programs that support the achievement of policy goals

- Supporting local, provincial and national youth gatherings to provide input into the implementation of the Youth Policy
- Analyzing the Federal Budget based on its impact on youth in the same way that Budget 2018 analyzed the Federal Budget using gender-based analysis
- Supporting through funding: local, provincial and national organizations in the implementation of programs that support the achievement of policy goals

## Conclusion

The #CanadaWeWant is one that is responsible, compassionate, inclusive and honest. It is our view that these principles should form the bedrock of A Youth Policy for Canada. We will be working over the next year to continue to support policy roundtables in local communities. We will be implementing community action projects based on the many themes that were explored at the conference. We will be meeting again in at the next #CanadaWeWant conference in March 2019. It is our hope that we will be able to celebrate the completion of A Youth Policy for Canada at the conference.

The Students Commission of Canada was founded at a national youth conference in 1991. It was the recommendation of students attending the conference to ‘commission’ an organization that would ensure youth voice is heard in decision-making. We will continue to champion youth voice through national gatherings, local community action projects and policy reports to achieve our desired outcome: A world where all young people transition positively into a successful adulthood. We invite the Minister of Youth, the Parliamentary Secretary for Youth and the Youth Secretariat to walk with us on this journey as we build a better Canada.