



Child Welfare League of Canada
Ligue pour le bien-être de l'enfance du Canada

**Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance
Pre-Budget Consultations**

**by the Child Welfare League of Canada
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Recommendations

To ensure that all families are able to meet their needs and the needs of their children during the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery, the Government of Canada should:

1. *Increase the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) so that it, in combination with a new benefit proposed by The Canadian Centre on Policy Alternatives called the Dignity Dividend,¹ thus helping to reach the target of a 50% reduction in child poverty by 2025.*
2. *Ensure access to the CCB for all families, particularly those living at higher rates of poverty such as First Nations, Métis and Inuit families; children whose parents have irregular immigration status; women in shelters fleeing violence; and children in situations of unstable custody, thus helping reach the target of a 50% reduction of poverty rates by 2025.*
3. *Comply with the rulings of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal by providing adequate funding for child welfare services on reserve and in the Yukon; compensation to children and parents and grandparents of children who were unnecessarily placed in care because of discrimination; and ensuring the full application of Jordan's Principle on and off reserve.*

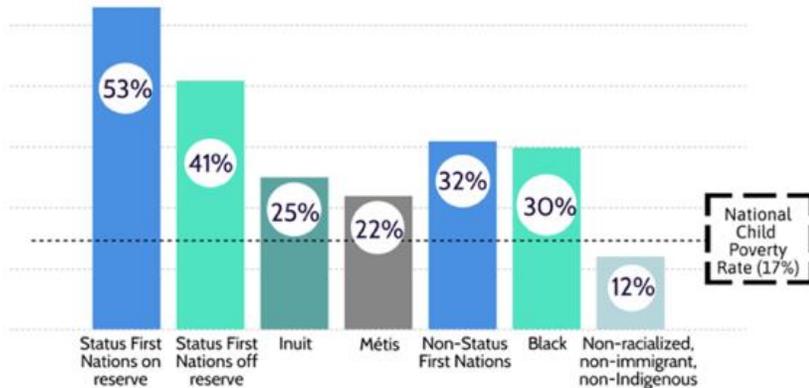
To reduce new and potentially increased inflows into homelessness and youth poverty due to the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery, the Government of Canada should:

4. *Establish a national framework for extended care and support into adulthood in collaboration with youth, territories and provinces.*
5. *Implement post-care financial and social services to First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth who were in child welfare and extend Jordan's Principle past the age of 18.*

Ensuring Families are Able to Meet their Needs

Over 1.35 million children live in poverty in Canada.² Any child growing up in a family whose income is below the poverty line experiences worse outcomes than a child from a non-poor family, in virtually every measurable metric. Years of colonial practices, racism and discriminatory funding have had an exponential impact on Indigenous, Black and racialized families, who are more likely to live in poverty.

National Rates of Child Poverty for Black, Indigenous, and Non-Racialized, Non-Immigrant, Non-Indigenous Children



Source for Indigenous child poverty rates: Statistics Canada, custom tabulation 2016 generously provided by Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.
Source for Black child poverty rate: Statistics Canada, Census of Population 2016.

In 2017, the CCB prevented 684,340 children from living in poverty.³ The impact of the CCB is seen in every province and territory, but accessing the benefit is difficult and often impossible for many children who live on First Nations reserves; those whose parents have irregular immigration status; and those living in less stable environments, such as informal care arrangements with family members.

Poverty underlies the experiences of most families involved in the child welfare system by creating an additional burden and toxic stress that reduces their capacity to meet their needs. Families who are isolated; who live in remote areas and on reserve; who face discrimination; who are affected by intergenerational trauma, mental health issues, addictions and family violence are disproportionately affected. Cost and the inability to access services is one of the many factors that determine whether a child with a severe disability can remain safely in their home. Lack of adequate housing, clean water and equitably funded and accessible child and family services have made it very difficult for First Nations, Inuit and Métis families to meet their needs and has led to a higher likelihood of state intervention, leading to family separation.

According to the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, children were most often removed due to their caregiver experiencing domestic violence (46%), having few social supports (39%) or mental health issues (27%).⁴ Families who live in poverty are more likely to experience chronic difficulties related to these challenges and intrusive interventions by the state – namely, the removal of their children by the child welfare system.

Lack of supports and/or limited access to resources can worsen the challenges vulnerable families face, decreasing parents' ability to provide safe and adequate environments for their children.⁵ This is especially true for younger children, who are placed in foster care more

frequently in regions with higher rates of absolute poverty.⁶ Improving environmental circumstances can significantly reduce the risk of children being put into out-of-home placements.⁷

The socio-economic impact of COVID-19 is expected to deepen child and family poverty. Without additional poverty reduction measures COVID-19 could deepen the overrepresentation of First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, Black and racialized children, and children with disabilities in child welfare.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. *Increase the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) so that it, in combination with a new benefit proposed by The Canadian Centre on Policy Alternatives called the Dignity Dividend,⁸ thus helping to reach the target of a 50% reduction in child poverty by 2025.*
2. *Ensure access to the CCB for all families, particularly those living at higher rates of poverty such as First Nations, Métis and Inuit families; children whose parents have irregular immigration status; women in shelters fleeing violence; and children in situations of unstable custody, thus helping reach the target of a 50% reduction of poverty rates by 2025.*
3. *Comply with the rulings of the CHRT by providing adequate funding for child welfare services on reserve and in the Yukon; compensation to children and parents and grandparents of children who were unnecessarily placed in care because of discrimination; and ensuring the full application of Jordan's Principle for First Nations children on and off reserve.*

OUT of Care and INTO Poverty and Homelessness

Young people who come into the child welfare system suffer from family separation and disconnection from culture and community. The social and cultural isolation they experience is exacerbated by economic hardship when they are forced to make life transitions without the family supports that are available to their peers who are not in child welfare. This pattern of service removal leads to negative outcomes, including a heightened risk for homelessness, unemployment, poverty, poor mental health and early parenthood.⁹

- 57.8% of homeless youth in Canada report involvement with the child welfare system in general at some point in their lives.¹⁰
- Youth who leave child welfare have a high degree of reliance on government assistance.¹¹

Most youth in Canada take on adult responsibilities gradually and with the emotional and financial support of their families. Young people are taking progressively longer to transition into adulthood,¹² with 43% of Canadian youth between the ages of 20 and 29 living with their parents.¹³ Societal shifts have led to a developmental period called “emerging adulthood”, when young people ages 18 to 25 are afforded time to explore their roles^{14,15} and become “more interdependent on their support networks rather than independent from them”,¹⁶ continuing to rely on friends, parents, and community members for advice and support.¹⁷

This is not the case for youth in child welfare, who abruptly lose support from the state when they reach the age of majority, regardless of their readiness, or their emotional and financial needs.¹⁸ Youth are forced to leave care at 18 or 19 years of age and tasked with adult

responsibilities without the support of family, friends or community. Child protection legislation and practice have not kept pace with the social and economic changes that make it much more difficult for young people to live independently.^{19,20}

All provinces and territories, except Quebec, provide financial support to youth who exit care, mostly in the form of payments to subsidize housing and living expenses.²¹ Stipends vary in terms of what is provided and until what age. The uniformity and degree to which young people can access extended supports vary within jurisdictions, suggesting provincial/territorial oversight may also be inconsistent. The federal government offers no post-care payments or services to First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth who were in child welfare and Jordan's Principle benefits expire at age 18, leaving high needs youth without essential services.

Because post-care programs are poorly documented,²² it is difficult to evaluate their overall impact. Existing programs are almost exclusively available only to youth who work or are in school, with strict eligibility criteria imposed. Many youth are excluded, especially those who are most vulnerable.

Youth, particularly those who have experienced trauma and family separation, cannot be expected to succeed with the sudden removal of housing; relationships and community supports; financial assistance; and health benefits.

COVID-19 and the socio-economic upheaval associated with the pandemic are exacerbating the already precarious situation of youth care. In Quebec, the pandemic has diminished access to housing and strongly accentuated risks linked to mental health problems in already vulnerable populations.²³ Most jurisdictions have implemented temporary moratoriums on youth transitions out of care during COVID-19.

For over thirty years, youth in care networks and advocates have called on the federal government to develop national standards on youth transitions. **Federal leadership is key to reducing the inflow of youth into homelessness and to reducing poverty for youth and young families.**

Canada is one of only a handful of countries in the global North with no nationally legislated entitlements for youth from care. National legislation exists in the U.K. and the U.S. and in many other parts of the world entitlements for youth in care, including the option to stay in placement, are framed as rights without any exclusions or admissions processes. Youth who grow up in care in Canada are subject to considerable inequities, placing them at a disproportionate level of risk. Government should respond to the opportunity presented by temporary moratoriums for youth leaving care and develop national standards that promote coherence and equity across jurisdictions.²⁴

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. *Establish a national framework for extended care and support into adulthood in collaboration with youth, territories and provinces.*
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For more information, please contact:

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The Child Welfare League of Canada is a national, membership-based charitable organization dedicated to promoting the safety and well-being of young people and their families, especially those who are vulnerable and marginalized.

¹ CCPA. (2020). [Alternative Federal Budget Recovery Plan](#).

² Campaign 2000. 2019. [Report Card on Child & Family Poverty in Canada](#).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ PHAC. 2008. [Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect](#).

⁵ Esposito et al. 2017. [Out-of-home placement and regional variations in poverty and health and social services spending: A multilevel analysis](#). Children and Youth Services Review, 72, 34-43.

⁶ Wisconsin Institute for Research on Poverty. 2017. [Financial causes and consequences of child maltreatment](#).

⁷ Esposito et al. 2017.

⁸ CCPA. 2020.

⁹ Kovarikova. 2017. [Exploring Youth Outcomes After Aging Out of Care](#).

¹⁰ Gaetz et al. 2016. [Without a Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey](#).

¹¹ Schaffer & Anderson. 2016. [Opportunities in transition: An economic analysis of investing in youth aging out of foster care](#).

¹² Doucet. 2018. [Relationships Matter for Youth 'Aging Out' of Care](#).

¹³ Stats Can. 2011. [Living arrangements of young adults aged 20 to 29](#).

¹⁴ Laut. 2017. [On My Own: The Experience of Youth Who Have Successfully Transitioned Out of Foster Care](#).

¹⁵ Arnett. 2004. [Emerging adulthood: The winding road from the late teens through the twenties](#).

¹⁶ Doucet. 2018.

¹⁷ Molgat. 2007. [Do transitions and social structures matter? How "emerging adults" define themselves as adults](#). Journal of Youth Studies, 10(5), 495-516.

¹⁸ Rutmen et al. 2007. [When Youth Age out of care where to from there](#).

¹⁹ Gaetz et al. 2016.

²⁰ Nichols et al. 2017. [Child Welfare and Youth Homelessness in Canada: A Proposal for Action](#).

²¹ PHAC. 2018.

²² Jones et al. 2015. [Children and youth in out-of-home care in the Canadian provinces](#).

²³ Goyette. 2020. [The COVID-19 Pandemic and Needs of Youth Who Leave Care](#).

²⁴ Mann-Feder & Goyette. 2019. [Leaving Care and the Transition to Adulthood: International Contributions to Theory, Research, and Practice](#).