



November 1, 2011

Key Points about the CCRC Alternative Report

Every child counts, especially in an aging society: central theme of report

Developing the full potential of every child needs to be a Canadian priority, in order to meet the challenges of its aging population.

Supporting every child to develop her or his full potential is the purpose of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Canada ratified in 1991.

“Right in Principle, Right in Practice,” assesses how well Canada achieves the goal of creating a society where every child can realize his or her full potential. It also provides evidence to show that everyone in Canada, children and adults, will benefit if we make the well being of children a higher priority and fully implement the Convention.

How well does Canada fulfill children’s rights?

“Right in Principle, Right in Practice” provides a comprehensive analysis of children’s rights in Canada in 2011. It finds that too many children face major obstacles to realize their full potential, even though the basic needs of a majority of children are met. Canada cannot afford to let this situation continue; we need to focus on the development of every child across the country.

In particular, governments are not consistently giving priority to the best interests of children when decisions are made that affect them. The report cites examples such as:

- delayed health treatments for aboriginal children because of funding disputes between federal and provincial governments;
- frequent moves of children in foster care and long stays in child welfare systems;
- estimates that 25% of young children are not ready for school;
- limited access to mental health services for adolescents; and
- failure to intervene when young girls from the polygamous community of Bountiful were trafficked across the border to be child brides for religious leaders.

Children often fall through the cracks in Canada's federal system of government. There is no coherent and consistent policy framework for children. Piece-meal, reactive, and inconsistent policies for children need to be replaced by comprehensive strategies that put children's well being at the centre of policy formation and program delivery.

How does Canada compare with other countries?

International research studies of children's well being in the last five years find Canada below average or near the bottom, in comparison with similar nations, with the exception of academic performance. The report cites the following as examples:

- Infant Mortality: 24th of 30 industrialized countries
- Health and Safety: 22nd of 30 countries in OECD study.
- Child Poverty: 20th of 30 industrialized countries.
- Children's Well-being: Middle rank among 21 countries. Canada's rating varies for 6 dimensions reviewed in a UNICEF comparative study.
- Early Childhood: Canada ranks very low among OECD countries in access, quality, and funding for early childhood development and care. On average OECD countries invest 0.7% of GDP in early care and learning, more than twice Canada's investment of 0.25% of GDP.
- Inequality in Child Wellbeing: Over-all Canada ranked average among OECD countries, higher in educational equality, lower in material equality, average in health equality.
- Adoption: Canada has a lower rate of adopting children who need permanent families than the United Kingdom and the United States.

Why is this report important?

The report is an independent assessment. Preparation of the report included more than thirty organizations who support young people across the country, professionals who work with children, and academic researchers who focus on the healthy development of young people. At every stage, the sponsoring organizations consulted with young people. Draft reports were posted on the web for public feedback in an inclusive, transparent process.

This report stands in sharp contrast with the government's official report, which excluded young people themselves and the people who work with them in its analysis of progress in Canada.

The report is being submitted to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, which will review Canada's record during 2012. This is a combined Third and Fourth review of Canada's record. This report provides an alternative, community-based assessment to the official Third and Fourth Reports filed by the federal and provincial governments.

The CCRC is releasing the report publicly now so that Canadians can discuss how well we are doing to respect and protect the rights and well being of children.

The upcoming National Child Day on November 20 provides a good opportunity for everyone to take stock and take action

The CCRC hopes that steps will be taken to improve key areas before Canada appears in front of the UN Committee in six months. The CCRC calls for a continuous improvement model and regular public reporting after the review to implement its outcomes.

What changes does the report recommend?

The report recommends changes in two categories:

➤ **Systemic changes** to ensure that children's well being and children's rights receive serious consideration when governments make decisions that affect children's lives.

- Make the Convention part of Canadian law so all children across Canada have their basic rights protected.
- Use child rights impact assessments for proposed laws, budgets, and programs.
- Adopt a continuous improvement approach with regular public reporting and monitoring of the situation of children across the country.
- Establish a national children's commissioner with a strong mandate to give children a voice at the federal level, address issues that fall under federal jurisdiction, and work with provincial children's advocates to close gaps for children in our federal system.

➤ **Specific action on specific issues for vulnerable children**

The report recommends a wide range of actions that can be implemented simultaneously by different branches of government at different levels. Together they would make a substantial difference for children.

Top priority should be given to issues affecting vulnerable groups of children, including Aboriginal children, children in state care, and children with disabilities.

What specific issues and specific steps are addressed in the report?

Specific issues and actions include the following:

- **Protect the rights of children who can't live with their families by closing gaps in child welfare systems across the country.**
- **Provide equal access to education and child protection for Aboriginal children.**
- **Do a child rights assessment of proposed changes to the youth justice system.**
- **Reduce violence against children through a national strategy that expands effective preventive actions into all parts of Canadian society.**
- **Adopt a child-first approach in a national early childhood development strategy.**
- **Protect the rights of non-citizen children through consistent application of the best interests of the child principle in immigration processes.**

- **Make healthy living conditions for children a priority in health policy and in the upcoming 2014 health accord between federal and provincial governments.**
- **End child labour in Canada through national guidelines for the regulation of hours and conditions of work to protect the health and education of adolescents.**
- **Educate children to know their rights and responsibilities to respect the rights of others through a national initiative by the Council of Ministers of Education.**

What are the next steps in Canada?

The CCRC would like to see the following:

1. Public discussion about how well we are fulfilling children's rights in Canada, using the themes in the report as a springboard. The CCRC will maintain a monitoring page on its website with background research reports for those who want more information and updates as new information or analysis becomes available. .
2. Parliamentary review of the government report, the CCRC report, and any other related reports before Canada is reviewed before the UN Committee, a process that starts in February 2012. Members of parliament are ultimately responsible and need to assure themselves that the rights of children in Canada are being fully respected.
3. An updated government report to the UN Committee that provides:
 - more complete and up-to-date data on the situation of children in Canada;
 - response to the recommendations from the previous UN review; and
 - proposed actions to address areas for improvement.

What can be achieved through the UN review process?

The UN review process draws attention to areas where progress has been made and areas that need improvement. Recommendations from the review process provide guidance on how Canada can live up to its obligations to children under the Convention.

We would like federal and provincial governments to commit to continuous improvement and increased public accountability to parliament and to young people in Canada that includes:

- early response to recommendations from the UN review;
- tabling specific plans for improving child wellbeing; and
- frequent and regular public reporting on progress in the situation of children in Canada.

More Information

Reports and background research documents are available on the Monitoring page of the CCRC website, www.rightsofchildren.ca/monitoring.

Contact: Kathy Vandergrift, Chair, at 613-820-0272 or kathyvandergrift@rogers.com.