



# Mental Health is a Child Rights Issue

Young people name mental health as a priority for improvement in Canada. We know that:

- About 1 in 5 children experience a mental illness.
- The majority of mental illnesses originate before adulthood.
- Rates of mood disorders are higher among youth than other ages.
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth.
- Only 1/3 of youth access mental health services they need.
- Stigma is a major barrier for youth access to mental health services.

For research sources, check out [Children's Rights and Mental Health: A Working Paper](#).

## Canada's Record

In 2012, the 3<sup>th</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> review of children's rights in Canada highlighted the high rates of suicide and diagnosed behavioural issues, over-medication without addressing causes or offering other therapies, and violations of the right of consent. Recommendations included:

- Strengthen and expand suicide prevention, including early detection;
- Ensure access to confidential counselling services in every school;
- Monitor over-use of psychotropic drugs, address causes, and improve access to other interventions; and
- Audit the practice of informed consent in every province.

Canada's response in the 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> report falls far short, such as:

- No child-focused section in a new federal framework for suicide prevention.
- No data on access to counselling in schools, and failure to report evidence of children being denied access to education due to mental health issues;
- No analysis of over-use of psychotropic drugs and access to other interventions; and
- No analysis of informed consent and respect for voice of youth.

Published by the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children



## **Identified Areas of Action**

### **Easy Access to Child-friendly Mental Health Services**

- Release data on access to services, set specific targets for improvement, and establish mechanisms for young people and parents to use when searching for help.
- Publicly report on mental health support services in schools to help ensure access in every school and establish a complaint mechanism for children who are denied access to education due to mental health issues.



### **Child Focus and Early Detection in Suicide Prevention Strategies**

- Add a specific child-focused section to the federal framework for suicide prevention that focuses on early detection.
- Draw on the youth-developed Mental Health Strategy for Canada, prepared by the Mental Health Commission of Canada in 2013 and advice in General Comment 20 on Implementing the Rights of Adolescents. They recommend a comprehensive, multisectoral, integrated approach, “based on public health and psychosocial support rather than overmedicalization and institutionalization,” involving parents, peers, community support, schools, and access to assistance by trained staff.



### **Listen to Children and Implement Best Practices in Right to Consent**

- Children have the capacity and right to have their views considered in individual mental health care decisions and in the design of mental health services for young people.
- Implement the right of regular review (Article 25) and the right to “psychological recovery and social integration” for children who have experienced any form of neglect or abuse (Article 39).

Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children

Share this with others and add your voice to support children's rights across Canada.

The CCRC appreciates the contributions of Dr. Tanya Halsall and Lisa Lachance in the preparation of this Fact Sheet. Further information in [Children's Rights and Mental Health: a Working Paper](#). Available at [www.rightsofchildren.ca](http://www.rightsofchildren.ca).