

The Current, On-The-Ground Landscape of Youth Engagement in Health Spaces in Canada: Challenges, Strategies and Opportunities



2020-2021

Young Canadians Roundtable on Health
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Supported by Stacie Smith and Sharaya
McCollum-Brown

Vision

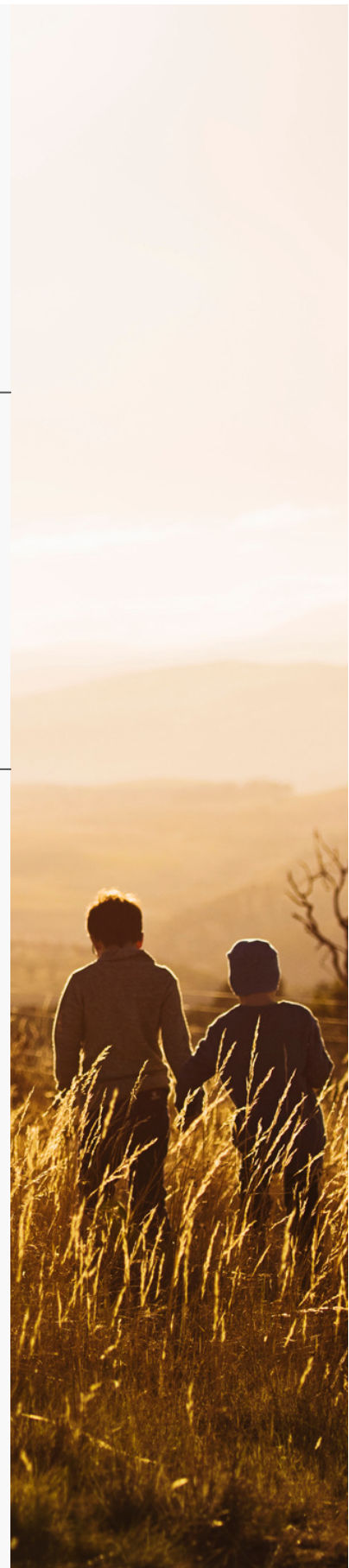
A world where youth can share and discuss concerns about their health and wellbeing and contribute to the development of initiatives that influence their community.

Mission

To close the gap that exists between youth and policy makers regarding youth health and to be the collaborating organization that represents diverse Canadian youth.

Objectives

- Be Canada's leader in youth engagement and education pertaining to child and youth health.
- Lead youth in creating independent initiatives and policy
- briefs in the areas of mental, physical and emotional wellbeing as well as broader societal and environmental factors.
- Create opportunities to support and educate Canadian youth with the goal of improved quality of health in youth across the country.
- Foster new partnerships with individuals and organizations involved in youth health issues.
- Generate national awareness of youth health initiatives.
- Collaborate with partners to advance equity and inclusion in child and youth-related research and programs.





About the YCRH

A Brief Description About The Roundtable

The Young Canadians Roundtable on Health (YCRH) was created in 2013 based on one of the recommendations in The Sandbox Project's founding report, *Reaching for the Top*. The recommendation focused on creating a national advisory of youth leaders to participate in decision-making around child and youth health. The YCRH's activities happen across Canada, bringing together as many youth perspectives as possible. The YCRH operates in a unique model within The Sandbox Project, while being youth-run and youth-led. YCRH leadership has the authority to make decisions and coordinate youth health projects independent of Sandbox's approval.

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Youth Engagement and Children's Rights



United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC):

Article 12

"Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child."

Article 13

"The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice."

What is meaningful youth engagement?

- ✓ Active and intentional partnership between youth and organization; youth are involved in all parts
- ✓ Youth can voice their perspectives and ideas without judgement; they are experts at the table



- ✓ Initiatives and programs incorporate the ideas and experiences of youth
- ✓ Youth get to build on their knowledge and skills through engagement
- ✓ Meaningful youth engagement is often long-term and resource-intensive
- ✓ Beneficial to youth, organizations, communities, and the broader public

Importance of youth engagement in health

Childhood and adolescence are critical development period that impact health outcomes. Strong evidence that empowering youth voices and facilitating engagement/partnership in health spaces can lead to better health outcomes. Health challenges Canadian children/youth face include obesity, chronic illness, substance use and mental health difficulties

According to UNICEF Report Card 16 which measures overall child and youth health and wellbeing, Canada ranks

30TH OUT OF 38TH

wealthy countries when it comes to child and youth well-being

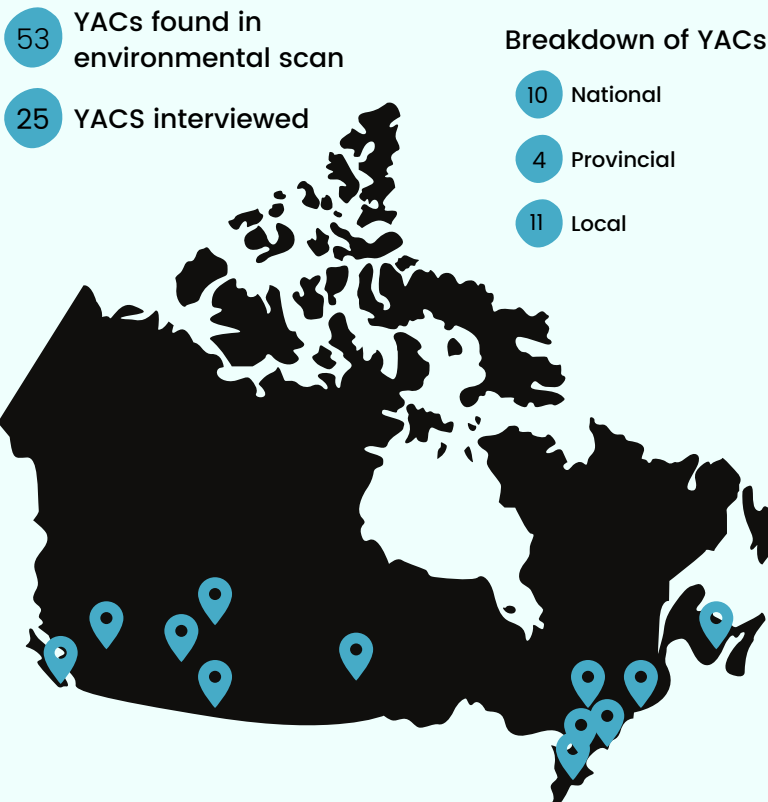
Child and youth engagement in their health and wellbeing are important now more than ever!



The Importance of Youth Voices

- Conducted an environmental scan of youth advisory committees (YACs)
- Conducted one-on-one interviews with YAC representatives to ask the following:
 - Promising practices in youth engagement
 - Challenges and how they've addressed challenges
 - Strategies for obtaining representative membership
 - How they incorporate equity into their YACs and initiatives
- Conducted inductive thematic analysis
- Collected common promising practices and challenges across the YACs

Overview of Youth Advisory Councils



Topics of interest:



youth health,
urban health



complex needs,



mental
health



vaping and
tobacco



health service
use

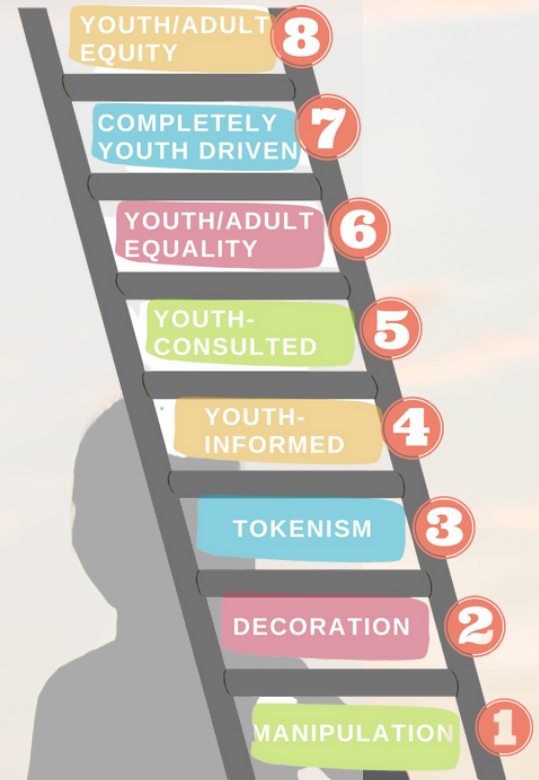
Promising practices for meaningful youth engagement

- Walk the talk: ensure youth engagement is not tokenistic
- Provide supports and maintain flexibility to enable engagement from all participants
- Work with youth to create the opportunities, spaces, and processes that would enable optimal engagement
- Demonstrate value placed on youth input and unique experiences
- Ensure you have representative membership at the table

Walk the talk: Ensure youth engagement is not tokenistic

- Have youth in leadership roles and embed them into organization's work
- Facilitate youth empowerment and independence
- Focus on issues that are important to youth
- Co-evaluate what works and what doesn't work

Source: Avoiding Tokenism When Engaging Young People (C4 Innovations)



Work with youth to create the opportunities, spaces, and processes that would enable optimal engagement

- Enable safer spaces
- Youth-friendly communication
- Be clear about opportunities and expectations
- Provide options for involvement
- Use informal interactions to build relationships with youth

Demonstrate value placed on youth input and unique experiences

- Compensate youth for their time and input
- Establish and maintain feedback loops
- Strive for organizational buy-in/support for meaningful youth engagement

Provide supports and maintain flexibility to enable engagement from all participants

- Provide supports according to the needs of the youth
- Have flexible processes and communication methods in place

Ensure you have representative membership at the table

- Have conversations about who is missing
- Go to where the youth are
- Implement processes/strategies to retain membership



Addressing COVID-19 Challenges

ALWAYS CHECK-IN WITH YOUTH AND HOLD SPACE FOR DOWNTIME

USE CREATIVE SOLUTIONS TO INCORPORATE FOOD INTO MEETINGS

ASK CLOSED-ENDED QUESTIONS AND USE VISUAL TOOLS

SHORTEN MEETING TIMES

HAVE THEMED MEETINGS TO KEEP YOUTH ENGAGED



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Socials



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