



September, 25th, 2023

Traditional Unceded and Unsurrendered Territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg Peoples  
(Ottawa, ON)

**An Open Letter to Health Ministers Across Canada:  
Time to Take Action on Child and Youth Health**

TO: Hon. Mark Holland, Minister of Health

Hon. Ya'ara Saks, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, Associate Minister of Health

Hon. Jenna Sudds, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development

Hon. Marci Ien, Minister of Women and Gender Equality and Youth

Tom Osborne, Minister of Health, Newfoundland

Michelle Thompson, Minister of Health & Wellness, Nova Scotia

Brian Comer, Minister of Addictions & Mental Health and Youth, Nova Scotia

Hon. D. Mark V. McLane, Minister of Health & Wellness, PEI

Bruce Fitch, Minister of Health, New Brunswick

Christian Dubé, Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, Quebec

Hon. Sylvia Jones, Minister of Health, Ontario

Hon. Audrey Gordon, Minister of Health, Wellness, and Recovery, Manitoba

Hon. Everett Hindley, Minister of Health, Saskatchewan

Adriana LaGrange, Minister of Health, Alberta

Hon. Adrian Dix, Minister of Health, British Columbia

Julie Green, Minister of Health & Social Services, Northwest Territories

John Main, Minister of Health, Nunavut

Tracy-Anne McPhee, Minister of Health & Social Services, Yukon

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 (15-32 years of age) leaders to participate in child and youth health decision-making. The YCRH collaborates with industry, government, research, health practitioners and families. The YCRH's activities happen across Canada, bringing together as many youth perspectives as possible. Working in close partnership with The Sandbox Project staff, YCRH leadership has the authority to make decisions and coordinate youth health projects independent of Sandbox approval. The YCRH gets its administrative and logistical support from the staff at the Sandbox office, and The Sandbox Project has responsibility for the legal and administrative obligations of the YCRH.

Children and youth in Canada are suffering. We no longer wish to live as an afterthought; the future depends on the health of our generation. Without healthy children and youth, any gains we make today will be lost. The unique needs of children and youth require an urgent, equitable, and collaborative pan-Canadian response to prevent short-term and long-term harms that will have disastrous consequences. The healthcare crisis doesn't just affect our peers who are considered marginalized, such as those with complex needs, disabilities, or socio-economic inequities, racism, and structural discrimination; the current healthcare crisis now affects all eight million children and their families living in Canada today.

**Access to Care and Wait Times:** In some regions of Canada, access to healthcare services can be limited, particularly in rural or remote areas. This can make it difficult for families to access timely medical care for their children. Long wait times for specialized medical care, including pediatric specialists, surgeries, and diagnostic tests, have been a problem in the Canadian healthcare system that has only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Where you live should not dictate the care you receive and by whom. As such, we recommend the following to reduce the pediatric healthcare crisis:

- Increased funding for more spots in medical schools, with corresponding increases in opportunities for residencies in the broader array of specialties
- Increased funding for the educating and hiring of physician assistants, nurse practitioners, and other healthcare personnel to ease the burdens on physicians and nurses
- Harmonization of scope for all pharmacists across Canada, increasing their ability to be allied healthcare providers.
- Increased subsidies and debt relief for those studying in health disciplines, especially for those who come from underserved areas
- Development of a long-term strategy to reduce wait times and access to equitable care

**Access to Vaccinations:** Ensuring high vaccination rates is vital to maintaining the health of the entire population and preventing outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases. While the rates for vaccine-preventable immunizations remain relatively stable across Canada, we are short of our 95% goal for all childhood vaccines. Further, the most commonly reported obstacle parents and guardians of children aged two years registered was limited appointment availability. Amongst all groups, Black and Indigenous children and youth remain the least vaccinated for all six major childhood vaccines. Additionally, more parents and guardians believe that alternative practices (15%) and healthy nutrition and hygiene (16%) can replace the need for vaccination, up from 11% for both in 2019. When considering these vaccination numbers, however, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic still needs to be fully captured due



to the timing of the National Immunization Coverage Survey. As such, as the Raising Canada 2023 Report also points to, we must invest in:

- Delivery of vaccines in the broader array of settings consistently
- Targeted high-quality science communication messaging and education for caregivers, who remain the gatekeepers for childhood vaccines
- Data collection methods that allow for understanding the inequities leading to decreased vaccination rates for some groups (i.e. lacking a family doctor, recently moved to Canada, non-census household, disabilities)
- Implementation of child-inclusive and equitable health infrastructure

None of these recommendations can be implemented without acknowledging and addressing systemic barriers in the social determinants of health, such as income, housing, race, location, etc... Unless concurrently addressed directly with healthcare system improvements, the social determinants of health have few impacts on the health of children and youth. As we recommended in our Pre-Budget submission, hiring a Chief Youth Officer could help navigate decision-makers through the realities facing young people today when looking to realize their full health potential.

While we recognize health and social care providers are burnt out and facing tremendous challenges, the following recommendations, if implemented, could increase the health status of children and youth in Canada. With the right, targeted investments to quell years of inadequate funding for pediatric and young adult care, the full potential of children and youth can be realized.

We look forward to working with you and would appreciate the opportunity to meet to discuss our shared priorities for young people in Canada.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Stacie Smith'.

**Stacie Smith**, MAEd(c), BScKin, BEd  
Co-Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Raissa Amany'.

**Raissa Amany**, HonBHSc(c)  
Co-Executive Director



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**Saba Vatanpour**, MEng, BSc, Founder, Talk Mental Health Foundation