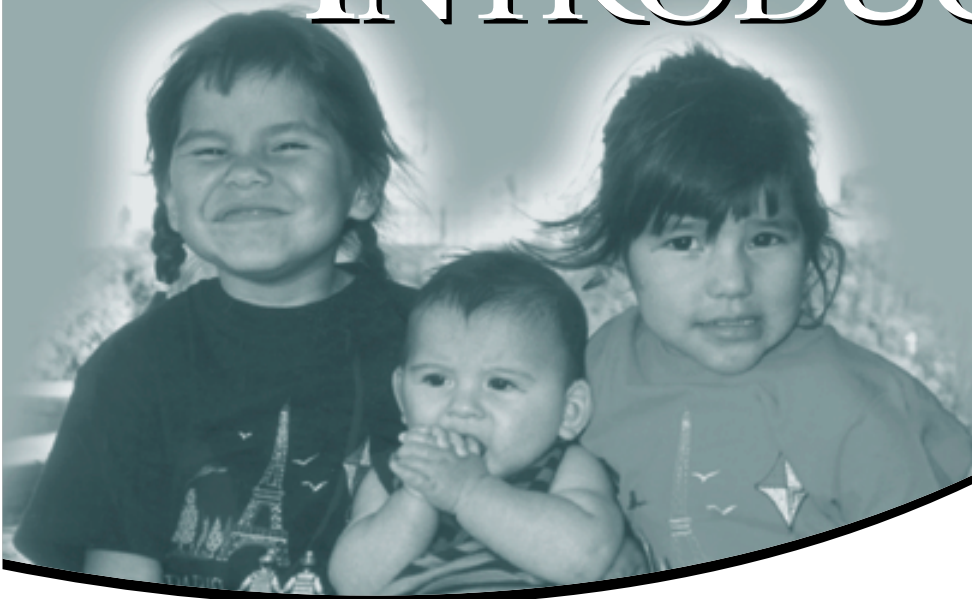




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# INTRODUCTION



**THIS IS THE 5<sup>TH</sup> EDITION OF *THE PROGRESS OF CANADA'S CHILDREN*. AS IN PREVIOUS EDITIONS, WE CONTINUE TO REPORT ON IMPORTANT INDICATORS OF WELL-BEING — THOSE THAT SHAPE THE LIVES AND DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES, AND THOSE THAT MEASURE OUTCOMES. THESE INDICATORS WERE DEVELOPED WITH THE HELP OF AN ADVISORY GROUP AND A NATIONAL PANEL OF EXPERTS.**

In the first part of *Progress*, we assess the important influences or inputs that affect the development of children and youth. These *environmental indicators* include family life, economic security, physical safety, community resources, and civic vitality. In the second part of the report, we assess how well Canada's children and youth are doing by examining outcome or *progress indicators* such as health status, social engagement, learning, and the labour force profile of youth. Taken together, these indicators provide a snapshot of the well-being of children and youth in Canada and show how they are faring year by year.

## ***FOCUS ON SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN***

This 2001 edition of *Progress* places a special focus on school-aged children. School-aged children are a complex and fascinating group. Through this time of their lives, children gain a great deal of independence. They become increasingly involved in relationships and activities outside their own homes and away from their families. Outside influences assume new importance in shaping what they do, the choices they make, and the kinds of individuals they will become. School-aged children take on more and more responsibility for their own actions. They begin to make decisions that are complex and have consequences, both immediate and

long-term. They have tremendous potential for growth, learning and the development of skills that will remain with them throughout their lives. While in some respects they need less immediate support and supervision than they did when they were younger, they continue to need the kind of safe and nurturing environments within which they can take risks, make choices and learn in a safe way. Only in this context can they reach their full potential.

The population of school-aged children in Canada is growing. Between 1990 and 1999, the number of school-aged children increased more than the number of children and youth of all other ages. This means there are increasing numbers of children in our schools, increasing numbers seeking access to such things as recreational and health care services, and increasing numbers of children who need our attention and support.

### **GOOD NEWS AND BAD**

What have we learned about school-aged children in this year's *Progress*? There is good news and some worrisome news. In many respects, this is the healthiest time of a child's life. From the standpoint of physical health, school-aged children are faring quite well, comparatively speaking. They have the lowest rates of death and hospitalization of any other age group. That being said, however, there are still too many injuries among this age group – many of which are preventable. And respiratory illnesses continue to rise, many people believe as a result to exposure to environmental contaminants.

The emotional health of school-aged children is causing growing concern among child health experts. The Canadian Institute of Child Health has labelled mental illness as the “new morbidity” for children, and school-aged children are particularly implicated in this diagnosis. A significant proportion of school-aged children have emotional or behavioural problems. A significant proportion of young teens feel lonely and depressed.

Most Canadian children live in families which have the resources to love, support and nurture them extremely well. Most school-aged children live with praise and encouragement. Once again, however, there are worrisome signs. Canadian parents are worried about whether they are raising their

children properly. And there is a growing time crunch for families with children – the struggle to balance work and family responsibilities seems to be getting harder. Families are more stressed and less satisfied with the balance between their work and home lives.

### **AN INCOME INEQUALITY GAP**

One of the most worrisome trends in the lives of school-aged children is the increasing gap between affluent and poor families in Canada. This income inequality gap is clearly widening, which means that groups of children are becoming increasingly marginalized. And we have good evidence that children living in low-income families have less access to such things as recreational and physical activities, health benefits, child care, and environmental safety.

Not all school-aged children have the privilege of fully accessing Canada's resources. Certain groups are too-often excluded, either from participation or from the healthy outcomes that the majority enjoy. These groups include Aboriginal children, children with special needs, and some children from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

### **COMMUNITY RESOURCES BEING SQUEEZED**

There are also genuine concerns about the environments needed to support school-aged children. Again, most school-aged children in Canada have access to protection and opportunities. They have access to education and health systems that are envied by others in the world. For many children, all the supports they need are easily available.





But there are growing concerns. Community resources are being squeezed by financial and staffing cutbacks. There are specific examples of this in *Progress*. Key informants have told us that special education services are inadequate for children with special needs. And access to recreation is threatened as user fees become the norm. The physical environment for school-aged children is becoming more worrisome too, for while exposures to some environmental hazards have decreased – such as the elimination of lead in gasoline – children continue to be exposed to toxic chemicals in our air, water and food. Most standards were developed many years ago to protect adults, not children, and they fail to reflect new information on children’s environmental health.

Access to safe and affordable housing is becoming increasingly difficult for many Canadian families, and evidence indicates that inadequate housing places risks on children’s health and well-being.

### ***A PATCHWORK OF POLICIES***

And finally, there is no cohesive policy approach to support school-aged children in Canada. A study by the Canadian Policy Research Networks concludes that while federal and provincial governments have not ignored school-aged children, substantial challenges remain if governments are to live up to their promises in the National Children’s Agenda of ensuring that all Canadian children “can fulfill their potential to be healthy, safe and secure, able to learn, be socially engaged and responsible.” Current policies and programs go some way towards meeting the challenges of this age group, but they do so in quite varied ways and to different degrees. The patchwork of policies and programs in place reflect the divergent courses charted by federal and provincial governments.

So what does this mean? There has been a great deal of focus recently in Canada on the early years – on young children before they reach school-age. This is indeed critical, because we know that the pathway to healthy development is strongly influenced by a child’s early experiences. But let us not forget about our children once they get to school. As adults and as caring Canadians, we must continue to ensure that our school-aged children have access to the supports they need in order to continue to grow and develop to their full potential.

# HIGHLIGHTS

## PORTRAIT OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

*The number of lone-parent families with school-aged children increased by 35% from 1990 to 1999.* They also increased as a proportion of all families with school-aged children, from 22% to 27%, while the proportion of two-parent families declined from 78% to 73%.

*One in eight school-aged children lives in a family with very low average income — below \$20,000 per year.*

*Most school-aged children have mothers who work outside the home.* Nearly 80% of women with school-aged children were in the labour force in 1999. Over the last two decades, this figure jumped by 42%, with most of the increase occurring in the 1980s.

*Enrollment in private schools is rising.* While the number of students in public schools rose by 0.5% between 1993/94 and 1997/98, the number in private schools rose by 8.6%.



## GROWING UP IN CANADA

### FAMILY LIFE

*62% of parents worry whether they are raising their children properly.* 63% of Canadians surveyed (parents and non-parents) also worry whether parents in general know what they are doing in raising children.

*Parents are spending more time on paid and unpaid work.* Between 1992 and 1998, married parents aged 25 to 44 who were employed full-time increased their paid work activities by two hours per week. Over the same period, their unpaid work hours also increased, from 33.6 hours to 34.3 hours per week for women (up 2%), and from 22.4 hours to 23.1 hours per week for men (up 3%).

*Having children increases the paid and unpaid workloads of adults.* When they become parents, married women and men increase the total number of hours spent on paid and unpaid work. Men increase their workload from 9.4 to 10.3 hours per day. Women increase their workload from 9.6 to 10.5 hours per day.

*Most families are more stressed and less satisfied.* About two-thirds of full-time employed parents with children are dissatisfied with the balance between their job and home life. 26% of married fathers, 38% of married mothers and 38% of single mothers report severe time stress.



### ECONOMIC SECURITY

*Between 1993 and 1998, children under age 18 living in the poorest families got poorer, while the most affluent were increasingly better off.* In the same period, persistent poverty affected 12% of children.

*In 1999, 32% of single parents felt that their income was not adequate to meet their family's basic needs — compared to 13% of couples with children.*

*In 1998, 19% of Canadian children (under 18) lived in poverty.* According to UNICEF, Canada has one of the worst child poverty rates among the 16 industrialized nations.

*Can average-income earners still afford children?*

Statistics Canada's demographic data show that young women are delaying childbearing into middle age — or opting out altogether.



## PHYSICAL SAFETY



*Unintentional injuries are the leading cause of death among school-aged children aged 5 to 14, with most deaths resulting from motor vehicle collisions.* However, the death rate on our roads among school-aged children fell substantially between 1987 and 1997.

*91% of parents with children under age 15 say their children always wear seatbelts.* Children living in rural areas are less likely to buckle up.

*77% of parents say they always require their children to wear a helmet when cycling.* Parents living in provinces with bike helmet legislation are more likely to say so. The proportion of parents who insist on helmet use also increases with education and income level.

*Smog is killing Canadians.* Air pollution can be linked to 5,000 deaths each year in 11 major Canadian cities.

*Each year, more than 28,500 Canadian children are treated at hospitals for playground injuries.* Most involve climbers, slides or swings.

## COMMUNITY RESOURCES

*Recreation user fees are rising, threatening access for low-income children and youth.* The majority of recreation departments charge user fees for all of their aquatics, athletics and arts programs.

*Per capita funding for special needs education has increased in the last five years, but is still not sufficient.* 100% of special education experts surveyed say there are not enough non-teaching professionals (such as speech pathologists, occupational therapists, and the like) in their province.

*In 1999, there was one computer in the school system for every seven students at the secondary level, one for every eight at the intermediate level, and one computer for every nine elementary students.* About one in three Canadian students have designed or maintained a website.

*According to the 1996 Census, 516,000 families with children live in housing that is in need of major repair, is overcrowded or that consumes more than 30% of their pre-tax income, in communities where no affordable alternative is available.*

Living in less-than-adequate housing has an impact on children's well-being.

*Over one million children aged 6 to 11 – 43% of the total – are in some form of child care.* Higher-income families are more likely than lower-income families to use child care.



## CIVIC VITALITY

*Opportunities for the civic involvement of youth are increasing.* Of the 24 cities responding to this year's CCSD survey, 20 reported that they provide opportunities for young people to participate in public life – four more than in 1998.

*Ten Canadian cities have now established youth advisory councils to the mayor, or other means of including youth.* However, Inuvik was the only city that reported having a youth representative on its town council.

*Children's recreation is affected by their family income level.* 60% of children from very poor homes "almost never" participate in supervised sports, compared to 27% of their counterparts from well-off homes.

*Good communities can lessen the harmful effects of being poor.* Poor children living in a good, civic community are more apt to engage in supervised sports than are poor children living in a less civic community.



# HOW CHILDREN AND YOUTH ARE FARING

## HEALTH STATUS

**School-aged children are faring well, although injuries remain high and respiratory illness is on the rise.**

Injuries and cancer are the leading causes of death among school-aged children. Respiratory illness is a leading cause of hospitalization.

**The majority of Canadian school-aged children are not active enough for optimal development** – and they become less active as they get older. The proportion of children aged 7 to 13 who are overweight rose sharply between 1981 and 1996, from 15% to 29% for boys, and from 15% to 24% for girls.

**Physical activity varies by income – and the participation gap is growing.**

While young people in middle- and upper-income groups increased their participation in exercise programs and summer and winter sports between 1996 and 1998, participation rates went down among lower-income youth.

**Females feel more “time-crunched” than males. The proportion of employed females aged 18 to 24 who said they were highly stressed rose by 64% between 1992 and 1998.** Female students aged 15 to 17 were almost twice as likely as their male counterparts to consider themselves to be workaholics.

**Child hunger persists in Canada. Children under age 18, who account for just over one-quarter of the population, make up 39% of food bank recipients.** 62,000 children went hungry at least once in 1996. Of those, 22% went hungry at least once a month.



## SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

**Most school-aged children have close friends.** In addition, 92% of pre-teens and young teens feel they have someone other than their friends that they can talk to if they have a problem. 86% said they could talk to their mother.

**As young people move through high school, they feel less positive about their relationships with their teachers.**

**Although parental reports of fighting and bullying among children declined somewhat from 1994 to 1996, problems remain.** One-third of parents reported in 1996 that their sons aged 6 to 11 sometimes or often got into “many fights.” 8% of 12- and 13-year-olds reported being bullied some of the time.

**There were 60,360 missing children under 18 in Canada in 1999 – 4,611 more than in 1995.**

**Youth crime continues to decline.** Between 1998 and 1999, the rate of young people charged with Criminal Code offences fell by 7%, with declines in all categories. The rate has been dropping since 1992.

# LEARNING

**Feelings of pressure for good grades have increased for older students.** 26% of female Grade 10 students reported “feeling a lot of pressure from school work” in 1998, an increase of 24% over 1994. 21% of their male counterparts reported similar feelings.

**Household income affects families’ hopes for children’s education.** Only half of children aged 12 and 13 in families with incomes of less than \$20,000 per year hoped to go to university. The figure was 71% for children from families with incomes over \$80,000.

**Science learning has improved.** Canadian students’ scores on tests of science knowledge and skills improved significantly between 1996 and 1999.

**Most parents who own a home computer say they bought it for educational purposes.** 90% say that the computer has had a positive impact on their child’s learning ability, while 79% say it has improved their child’s homework quality. Teens in households with Internet access spend eight hours a week doing homework – an increase of one hour over 1998.

**Access to computers and the Internet is linked to income.** In 1998, 74% of Canadian households in the highest-income group had computers, compared to only 18% of households in the lowest-income group.



## LABOUR FORCE PROFILE OF YOUTH

**Teen employment is rising – but is still lower than in 1989.** The number of employed teens (as a percentage of all teens) increased from its 1997 low point of 37% to 41% in 1999. However, it is still far below the 52% rate of 1989.

**The gender gap is closing.** In 1999, the employment rate for girls was slightly higher than for boys. Girls are more likely than boys to hold a job during the school year (36% compared to 32%), and they are just as likely to find a summer job (49% compared to 50%).

**Fewer teens are leaving school.** In 1999, 15% of teens were not in school, down from 21% in 1989. Of those not in school in 1999, 67% were employed.

**A modest level of paid work is associated with better school performance, a lower drop-out rate and broader social participation.** Working more than 15 to 20 hours per week, however, can have negative effects on school performance.

## POLICY INITIATIVES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

**The “targeted” approach of governments has resulted in a patchwork of public policies for school-aged children.** The general trend away from universality, with emphasis on targeting the early years, adolescence, and youth at risk, has left “holes” in the public policy quilt.

**Only two provinces – Québec and British Columbia – have created publicly funded child care systems open to all families – rich, poor, and the large majority in between.**

**The Early Childhood Development Initiative (ECDI), a federal/provincial/territorial agreement signed on September 11, 2000, will allocate \$2.2 billion over the next five years.** But how the ECDI funds will be used and the methods of reporting and accountability remain vague, prompting calls for sustained pressure on governments.

