

Inspiring
Healthy
Futures

A Vision for Canada's
Children, Youth and Families

Summit Report

Co-designing a Future Fit for Kids

October 23-24, 2025 | Ottawa, Ontario



Co-designing a Future Fit for Kids

Canada is at a decisive moment for children and youth. Despite being one of the world's most prosperous nations, outcomes for young people continue to lag behind those of peer countries. The challenge is not a shortage of expertise, innovation, or commitment. Fragmented structures across the systems that shape children's lives—health, education, child welfare, mental health, justice, social services, and community supports—together with misaligned policies, uneven access, and short-term funding cycles, contribute to an environment in which progress is possible but rarely sustained.

A clear national direction is now emerging. Across sectors, there is growing agreement on a vision to improve child and youth well-being in measurable, equitable, and lasting ways.

This vision prioritizes strengthening prevention; improving transitions between systems; modernizing data and evidence infrastructures nationally; advancing a coordinated national agenda across the full research lifespan—from foundational and discovery science through applied, implementation, and policy-relevant research; expanding knowledge mobilization; expanding community and culturally grounded supports; and embedding youth and family leadership at all levels of decision-making.

It also includes establishing shared goals, aligning investments, and ensuring policy frameworks reflect the rights, developmental realities, and social realities of children.

The need for coordinated national leadership has never been more apparent. A stronger legislative and policy foundation—anchored in a national strategy, coherent shared indicators, and integrated data systems—would allow provinces, territories, and communities to innovate with confidence and flexibility. A modernized research ecosystem, built on partnership with youth, families, communities, grassroots organizations, and policymakers, would ensure evidence is actionable and equitably applied. And strengthened community infrastructure would ensure that the supports most essential to well-being—belonging, safety, identity, culture, connection—are available and accessible where children live, learn, and grow.

In this context of growing momentum for coordinated national action, One Child Every Child partnered on the 2025 Inspiring Healthy Futures Summit to support a cross-sector convening focused on alignment, shared learning, and collective progress. On October 23 and 24, 2025, more than 100 invited participants came together in Ottawa, Ontario, to develop an updated Acceleration Agenda to help align and guide leaders across sectors. Participants were intentionally selected for their cross-sector roles in research, policy, practice, community leadership, and lived and living experience, with representation from across the child and youth health and well-being landscape in Canada—including youth, parents, leaders, practitioners, researchers, advocates, and policymakers.

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Whose Voices Were in the Room—and Whose Were Not

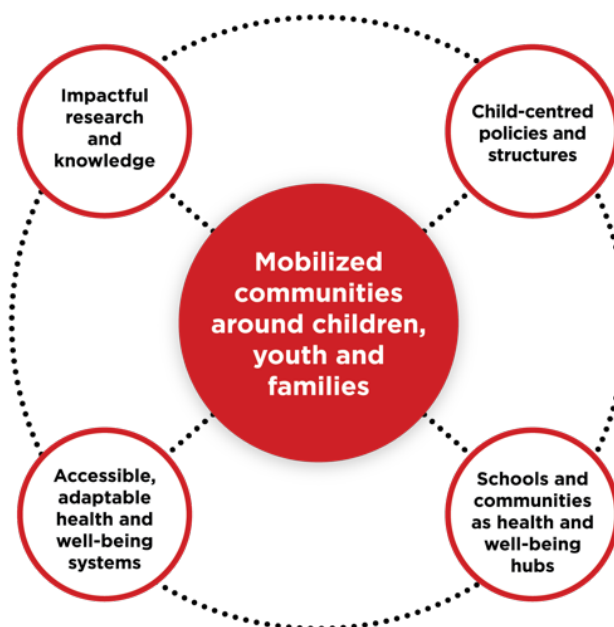
The Summit brought together a deliberately curated group rather than a representative sample. Participants were invited based on their roles and contributions across sectors. While the gathering reflected a broad range of perspectives, the convening team and participants both noted important voices that were under-represented or absent—most notably Indigenous youth and families, as well as several rural, northern, and newcomer communities. The insights below should be read with that limitation in mind, and future convenings should prioritize closing these gaps. A list of participating organizations and the full Summit agenda are included in the Appendices.

The gathering was intentionally designed as a facilitated, participatory convening rather than a traditional conference. The facilitation approach emphasized dialogue, connection, and collective sensemaking, using structured methods such as World Café discussions, collaborative sensemaking, and vision-setting exercises to move beyond siloed conversations. Across two days, participants surfaced work already underway, identified patterns and gaps, explored policy opportunities, and reflected on what collective progress over the next two to three years could look like. Connections continued following the first day with a reception hosted by program partner, Canadian Tire Jumpstart Charities. Curated reading materials—including the Inspiring Healthy Futures (IHF) framework handouts, the Deloitte report, and the UNICEF Canada Report Card—were provided as inputs to inform the dialogue.

Discussions were organized around four areas of focus identified as critical system levers:

- Data and evidence as catalysts for action
- Social supports for parents and caregivers
- Child-centred systems of care
- Healthy schools and community environments

These four areas of focus were developed in alignment with the Inspiring Healthy Futures framework, first articulated in 2021, with each tied directly to one of the framework's five pillars. Participants explored how those interlinked priorities continue to resonate amid today's policy, practice, and system realities. The insights that follow are offered to support shared understanding, collaboration, and alignment across sectors.



What This Report Captures

This report synthesizes the perspectives, insights, areas of alignment, and points of tension expressed by participants from across Canada's child- and youth-serving ecosystem during the Summit. It is a roadmap for the next two to three years, structured around six system-level Areas of Action that participants consistently named as critical to improving outcomes for children and youth:

- **Develop an Integrated Child and Youth Data & Evidence System:** turning data into information that is actionable in everyday decision-making, planning, and service improvement.
- **Integrate Knowing, Learning, and Action Across Systems:** moving from one-off pilots to embedded learning at scale.
- **Increase Prevention and Promote Health, Mental Health, and Social Literacy:** shifting investment from reactive crisis response to strength-based, preventative supports.
- **Expand Access to Community Supports and Whole-Community Approaches:** investing in the relational infrastructure where children and families actually live.
- **Build Child-Centred Systems and Improve Transitions:** designing pathways around developmental trajectories rather than institutional boundaries.
- **Strengthen Leadership, Governance, and Shared Accountability:** embedding youth, family, and Indigenous leadership in formal, compensated roles.

Each area names early leadership actions and identifies the actors best positioned to lead them: federal, provincial, territorial, and Indigenous governments; funders; research bodies; community organizations; school authorities; and the IHF network itself.

What is required now is greater coordination, sustained leadership across sectors, and long-term commitment that extends beyond individual initiatives or funding cycles. Readers of this report—whether you lead a ministry, a research program, a community organization, a school, or a youth or family network—are invited to identify which actions align with your mandate and to reach out to the IHF network to take next steps together.

Why Canada Needs a New Approach

Canada's systems for children and youth are at a pivotal moment. Despite the dedication of families, practitioners, researchers, community leaders, and governments, outcomes for young people continue to lag behind those of peer nations. This is not a reflection of insufficient expertise or commitment, nor a lack of innovation happening on the ground. It is the predictable result of systems that were built independently of one another and now struggle to respond to the full complexity of children's lives.

Children and families do not experience health, education, mental health, child welfare, or community services as separate domains. They experience their lives holistically—moving between early learning, schools, health care, disability supports, cultural and identity-based services, sport and recreation, housing supports, and community programs. Yet these systems operate with different mandates, timelines, data standards, funding structures, and accountability expectations. The result is fragmentation: services that take a considerable amount of time to find and are difficult to navigate, supports that vary widely across regions and communities, and interventions that are often reactive rather than preventative. Families also tell us that finding a service is not the same as being able to access it—and that this gap is one of the most consistent sources of inequity.

At the same time, Canada possesses significant strengths. Community organizations are creating culturally grounded, identity-affirming programs; schools are emerging as essential hubs of connection, belonging, and prevention; health and social service providers are adapting models to meet diverse needs; and researchers are generating actionable knowledge on development, equity, and system design. Youth themselves are shaping public discourse and demanding greater accountability from institutions. These strengths reflect a country with tremendous potential—but realizing that potential requires systems that can act in alignment.

The Inspiring Healthy Futures (IHF) movement was created in response to this need. Guided by the integrated five-pillar framework—with mobilized communities around children, youth, and families at the centre—participants in IHF work to connect what is too often siloed, and to build the conditions for coordinated national progress.

Building on this foundation, Summit participants articulated a focused, integrated pathway for improving outcomes over the next two to three years. It reflects insights from across the child- and youth-serving ecosystem: health care, education, community services, research, public administration, Indigenous governance, disability and family networks, lived experience leadership, and frontline practice. These perspectives converge on a shared understanding that improving outcomes requires more than program adjustments—it requires a structural realignment.

This means shifting to systems that:

- Reflect the developmental realities, social realities, and rights of children and youth
- Uphold equity as a foundational requirement rather than an aspirational goal
- Are guided by data and evidence systems capable of showing progress and informing day-to-day decisions
- Invest in prevention, early help, belonging, and cultural identity
- Embed youth, families, and Indigenous communities in decision-making
- Are designed around children's lives, not around institutional boundaries

A particular emphasis of what we heard was on the systemic conditions that enable or impede progress: coherent policy frameworks, stable and flexible funding structures, integrated data systems, community capacity, a sustainable and supported workforce, shared measurement, and coordinated leadership that can persist across governments and electoral cycles. Understanding and strengthening these conditions is essential to moving from fragmented efforts to sustained, system-wide transformation.

Participants also recognized that no single sector or order of government can achieve this alone. Children and youth thrive when the pieces of the ecosystem move together like interlocking gears—research, policy, practice, and community capacity turning in sync, with youth and families helping set direction at every level. The insights captured in this report reflect a growing national consensus: Canada needs more integrated, coherent, and child-centred systems designed around the realities of childhood and adolescence, not the convenience of institutions.

A set of six areas of action emerged from this shared purpose. They outline a practical, achievable pathway for coordinated action in the near term—one that strengthens alignment, improves access to meaningful supports, modernizes evidence systems, and centres equity and rights, while laying the groundwork for long-term generational progress.

System Drivers: The Child and Youth Ecosystem

Canada's child- and youth-serving ecosystem is shaped by four interdependent systems: policy, practice, research, and lived experience. We heard from participants that each system plays a distinct role, and none can achieve sustained impact in isolation. System transformation depends on alignment across all four: the design of policy frameworks, the quality of frontline practice, the relevance and accessibility of research and data, and the leadership of youth, families, and communities with lived and living experience. Together, these systems illustrate both the potential and the constraints of Canada's current ecosystem—and the conditions required for driving meaningful, coordinated change.

Policy: The Architecture that Shapes what is Possible

Policy establishes the boundaries, incentives, and expectations that shape how systems function. In Canada, policy frameworks for children and youth remain fragmented across ministries and jurisdictions, contributing to uneven access, variable standards, and a lack of shared accountability for well-being. Promising innovations spread slowly or remain localized when policy frameworks do not support learning, coordination, and scale.

Coherent policy requires a rights-based, developmentally informed approach—one that recognizes children as rights-holders and designs systems around their needs, not institutional structures. Legislative tools such as a National Strategy for Children and Youth, including efforts advanced through Bill S-212, provide a pathway for aligning federal leadership with provincial, territorial, and Indigenous governance in ways that respect jurisdiction while enabling shared goals. Coherent policy frameworks also depend on stable funding structures that support long-term planning and sustained investment in prevention. This legislation represents an important enabling mechanism for federal leadership—providing a framework through which shared goals, indicators, and accountability can be aligned across jurisdictions while respecting provincial, territorial, and Indigenous authority.

A stronger policy foundation accelerates improvement across the ecosystem. It enables ministries to work toward common outcomes, requires accountability for equity, supports research-to-policy translation, and creates the structural alignment necessary for practice and community innovation to take root and thrive. Policy, when aligned with children's rights and realities, becomes a key driver of system-level transformation.

Practice: Where Systems Become Real

Practice is the point at which systems are experienced directly by children, youth, and families. It is expressed through relationships, accessibility, cultural safety, continuity of care, and the ability of practitioners to respond to developmental needs. Across Canada, strong models demonstrate what is possible: community-embedded programs, culturally grounded approaches, school-based supports, multidisciplinary teams, and identity-affirming youth spaces. These models show that when practice is supported, children thrive.

Yet practitioners navigate environments that often constrain their ability to deliver what they know works. Fragmented service pathways and funding streams force families to move through multiple doors to access basic supports. Administrative and reporting requirements reduce the time available for relational work. Short-

term and unpredictable funding disrupts continuity. Risk-averse organizational cultures make adaptation and innovation difficult. These pressures limit the capacity of frontline teams to provide prevention-focused, culturally responsive, and family-centred supports.

Strengthening practice means strengthening the conditions in which it operates. This includes integrated service pathways, stable and flexible funding, structures that support cross-sector collaboration, and workforce environments that prioritize mentorship, community relationships, and relational continuity. When these enabling conditions are in place, practice becomes one of the most powerful drivers of equity and improved outcomes.

Research: A Catalyst for Insight and System Learning

Canada's research ecosystem is one of its greatest strengths. Researchers generate world-leading evidence on child development, health, education, mental health, disability, and youth well-being. Increasingly, research partnerships with communities, Indigenous organizations, families, and youth are shaping more responsive and equitable agendas.

Yet research does not consistently translate into coordinated policy or practice. Evidence remains fragmented across institutions and sectors, and knowledge mobilization structures are often disconnected from decision-making. Many systems continue to rely on pilot projects rather than embedded learning and scale-up strategies, even where strong evidence exists. Investigators have voiced consistent frustration that government decision-makers do not routinely reach out for the data and evidence already available.

A modern research ecosystem must be grounded in partnership and relevance. This includes co-created research agendas informed by lived experience; integrated mobilization strategies that make findings accessible and actionable; and evaluation approaches that focus not only on program outputs but on long-term impacts and equity. Research should inform policy design, practice development, investment decisions, and the creation of shared indicators that allow Canada to track progress consistently.

Modernizing research also requires modernizing data. Canada's child and youth data systems remain siloed, inconsistent, and difficult to access. An integrated, rights-respecting data ecosystem—grounded in ethical governance, Indigenous data sovereignty, and community stewardship—is essential for understanding needs in real time, identifying inequities, and supporting evidence-informed decisions across all levels of the system.

When research and data are fully aligned with policy and practice, Canada can move beyond a cycle of isolated pilots and toward sustained, scalable improvements.

Lived Experience: Essential Leadership for System Change

Lived and living experience—including the insights of youth, caregivers, families, and communities—offers an essential form of expertise. It reveals how systems function in practice, where they fall short, and what is required to improve outcomes. This knowledge cannot be generated through administrative data alone and is vital for designing systems that are responsive, equitable, and culturally grounded.

Despite broad recognition of its value, lived experience remains inconsistently embedded in decision-making. Engagement is often intermittent rather than sustained, advisory rather than structural, and symbolic rather than influential. Many approaches place emotional labour on young people and families without adequate support, compensation, safety, or pathways to shape decisions. Without meaningful roles in governance, planning, evaluation, and accountability, systems risk reinforcing inequities rather than dismantling them.

Embedding lived experience as core leadership requires formal, compensated structures for co-governance; supports that ensure cultural safety, accessibility, and emotional well-being; and flexible pathways for involvement that reflect diverse identities, strengths, and capacities. It also requires valuing multiple forms of knowledge—including community, cultural, Indigenous, disability-led, and experiential knowledge—on equal footing with professional and academic expertise.

When lived experience is integrated into the architecture of systems, services become more responsive, more equitable, and more effective. Youth and families are not stakeholders to be consulted—they are co-leaders whose insights are indispensable to meaningful system transformation.

Intersectoral Insights: Common Themes Across Sectors

Improving outcomes for children and youth in Canada requires attention to the structural conditions that shape how systems function across all sectors: practice, policy, research, and lived experience. While each sector plays a distinct role, its effectiveness is constrained by a consistent set of cross-cutting barriers that undermine progress across jurisdictions and sectors. We heard from Summit participants that these barriers are interconnected, reinforcing one another and producing cumulative impacts on children, youth, and families. The following insights reflect a shared, pan-Canadian understanding of the foundational issues that must be addressed to enable meaningful, sustainable system transformation.

Fragmentation Across Systems is a Foundational Barrier

Canada's child- and youth-serving systems continue to operate as parallel, disconnected structures rather than as a coordinated network. Health care, education, mental health services, child welfare, disability supports, youth justice, and community programs each hold critical responsibilities, yet they function within separate mandates, governance frameworks, and information systems. Without mechanisms for alignment, children and families often face disjointed pathways, repeated assessments, contradictory eligibility criteria, and long waits for support.

This fragmentation is not simply an administrative inconvenience—it is a driver of inequity that disproportionately affects children and youth. Children with disabilities, youth transitioning between systems, families navigating poverty or housing instability, and Indigenous communities interfacing with colonial structures are disproportionately burdened by system gaps. Addressing fragmentation requires shared goals across governments, coherent policy frameworks, interoperable data systems, and more coordinated accountability structures that transcend institutional boundaries.

Equity Must be Embedded as a Core System Principle

Persistent inequities continue to shape outcomes for Indigenous, Black, racialized, disabled, 2SLGBTQIA+, rural, and newcomer children. These inequities are rooted in historical and ongoing structural factors—colonial policies, systemic racism, discriminatory practices, inaccessible services, and fragmented investments. Equity cannot be delivered through isolated programs; it must be embedded in system design, governance, funding, and measurement.

Embedding equity requires distinctions-based Indigenous governance; disability-inclusive models of care; anti-racist, culturally grounded practice approaches; and intentional strategies for supporting youth facing intersecting forms of marginalization. Equity must also guide resource allocation, workforce composition, data collection, and decision-making structures. Systems that embed equity at every level are better equipped to deliver consistent, fair, and developmentally appropriate support to all children—without leaving children out, as too often happens when programs target a narrow definition of need.

Workforce Strain Reflects Deeper System Misalignment

Professionals working with children and youth across Canada are experiencing growing and sustained strain. Cross-sector workforce shortages, high turnover, lower wages, administrative burden, and increasingly complex needs create environments where relational, preventative, and culturally grounded work serving children and youth becomes difficult to sustain. These pressures are symptoms of deeper system misalignment: policies and funding structures that prioritize crisis response, accountability models that emphasize reporting over impact, and organizational cultures that discourage adaptation.

Workforce fatigue is not merely an operational issue—it is a barrier to quality, continuity, and safety. Strengthening the workforce requires aligning policy expectations with frontline realities, stabilizing funding structures, and building environments that support interdisciplinary collaboration, mentorship, community connection, and sustained relational practice. A strong workforce is an essential component of a strong system, and the reality is that current funding models and policies devalue professions that care for children and youth.

Youth and Family Leadership is Essential to System Transformation

When youth and family leadership is not structurally embedded in governance and decision-making, systems routinely fail to reflect lived realities. Advisory-only approaches produce policies and services that are misaligned with need, slow to adapt, and inequitable in impact—particularly for Indigenous, disabled, and marginalized communities.

Across sectors, engagement remains episodic and symbolic, placing emotional labour on young people and families without granting real influence over priorities, design, or accountability. This weakens trust, limits learning, and reinforces the very inequities systems seek to address. Systems that embed co-governance—through formal, compensated, and sustained roles for youth, families, and communities—demonstrate stronger responsiveness, improved equity outcomes, and more durable change. Without shared decision-making power, transformation efforts remain partial and fragile.

Data and Evidence Systems are Insufficient for Coordinated Action

Even where commitment and expertise exist, fragmented data and evidence systems prevent coordinated action. Incompatible platforms, inconsistent indicators, and limited access constrain the ability to track outcomes across sectors, follow children and youth over time, or identify inequities in a timely way. Data is too often collected for compliance rather than learning, reinforcing silos instead of enabling collaboration. At the same time, the absence of distinctions-based Indigenous data governance undermines trust and limits the relevance and legitimacy of national indicators.

Without interoperable, rights-respecting data systems and shared measurement frameworks, progress remains difficult to assess, and accountability remains difficult to enforce. The challenge is not only access—it is turning data into information that is actionable, embedded in everyday decision-making, planning, and service improvement. These gaps significantly constrain system transformation, even when strong policy intent and frontline innovation are present.

Prevention and Literacy Remain Under-Resourced

Despite extensive evidence on the long-term benefits of early intervention, health promotion, family support, and community-based prevention, investments remain heavily concentrated in crisis response and downstream services. Funding and support structures are tied to reactive care—but families do not live their lives waiting for bad things to happen. They live them seeking belonging, function, and meaningful participation. This imbalance increases strain on systems, raises costs, and results in missed opportunities to support children before challenges escalate.

Prevention must be understood broadly. It encompasses mental health and well-being, digital citizenship, financial literacy, climate resilience, and rights literacy—and is grounded in child rights and social-emotional development. Embedding these competencies within schools, community settings, and public systems would strengthen resilience, reduce disparities, and improve long-term outcomes. Social supports and programs create a preventive foundation that is essential to shifting systems from reactive to proactive, strength-based modes of operation.

Community Context Is a Primary Determinant of Well-Being

Community—defined by relationships, cultural identity, belonging, and local support—is the primary context in which children grow and thrive. Strong communities provide safety, mentorship, identity affirmation, and continuity. Yet many community-based organizations, including Indigenous-led and culturally specific services, operate with short-term funding, limited infrastructure, and administrative pressures that prevent long-term planning.

Recognizing community as a central determinant of well-being requires investment in community infrastructure; respect for cultural and place-based knowledge; integrated approaches between schools and community partners; and flexible funding that enables communities to respond to emerging needs with autonomy and stability. Systems that strengthen communities strengthen children.

Setting the Stage for Action

These interconnected structural barriers reinforce one another. Fragmentation weakens equity; data gaps obscure needs; workforce strain limits practice; underfunded prevention drives crises; and communities are left to fill systemic gaps without stable support. Addressing these issues requires coordinated, system-level action.

The Areas of Action developed by Summit participants respond directly to this landscape. They identify six key areas designed to address foundational barriers, align system conditions, and accelerate progress toward improved outcomes for children and youth across Canada.

Areas of Action

Participants consistently identified six system-level areas of alignment that can meaningfully improve how systems perform—that is, how well they respond to children's developmental needs, deliver equitable outcomes, and act in concert—over the next two to three years. These actions are not sector-specific recommendations or program proposals; they describe the system-level capabilities and conditions required across jurisdictions, ministries, and institutions to enable sustained progress for children and youth.

Each area highlights both what becomes possible when the capability is strengthened and the early leadership actions that governments, organizations, and partners can take to begin building momentum. Where possible, each area also names who is best positioned to lead. Taken together, they reflect what must be in place for evidence, policy, practice, community leadership, and investment to align—moving Canada from fragmented effort to coordinated action. When advanced in parallel, these actions are contributors toward more coherent, equitable, and child-centred systems; alongside appropriate resourcing and political will, they offer a practical and achievable pathway.

Reading the Six Areas: Sequencing and Interdependence

The six areas are mutually reinforcing rather than equally weighted:

- Areas 1 (Data & Evidence), 3 (Prevention & Literacy), and 6 (Leadership & Governance) act as foundations: they unlock the conditions in which the other areas can be advanced effectively.
- Areas 2 (Knowing, Learning, and Action), 4 (Community Supports), and 5 (Child-Centred Systems and Transitions) are best advanced in parallel as those foundations strengthen.
- Many of the early actions are achievable in the short term (within twelve months); others require sustained two to three-year commitment.

Each area below includes an explicit invitation: if any of these actions align with your mandate, please reach out to the Inspiring Healthy Futures (IHF) network so we can connect efforts already underway.

1. Develop an Integrated Child and Youth Data & Evidence System

An integrated data and evidence system would enable learning across sectors, support real-time responsiveness, and strengthen accountability for results. It would include distinctions-based Indigenous data governance, ethical stewardship frameworks, and investments that empower communities, researchers, and service providers to analyze and use data effectively in everyday decision-making, planning, and service improvement.

If your organization is advancing data infrastructure or shared indicators, the IHF network would like to connect.

What this makes possible:

- Stronger national insight, faster identification of inequities, and better decisions at every level of the system.
- A clearer national picture of child and youth well-being, including inequities currently obscured by inconsistent or incomplete datasets.
- Shared accountability across governments, sectors, and jurisdictions through comparable, transparent indicators of progress.
- Faster identification of emerging issues and needs, enabling earlier and more proactive responses.
- Better decision-making at all levels—from federal policy development to community planning—grounded in real-time, high-quality evidence.
- More effective research partnerships, with data infrastructures that support implementation science, longitudinal studies, and equity-focused analysis.
- Strengthened Indigenous data sovereignty through distinctions-based governance and Indigenous-led data systems.

Early actions: Opportunities for federal/provincial/territorial governments, Statistics Canada, Indigenous governance bodies, research funders, and Pan-Canadian data organizations.

- Commit to a shared national set of child and youth indicators and embed them within policy and planning frameworks.
- Modernize data platforms to support interoperability across ministries, sectors, and jurisdictions, including health, education, social services, and community systems, with the goal of making national child data accessible to all.
- Invest in organizational and community-level data capacity, ensuring staff, researchers, and partners can analyze and use data effectively.
- Resource Indigenous governments and organizations to design and govern data systems that uphold sovereignty and cultural protocols.
- Support cross-sector data collaboratives that bring researchers, policymakers, and practitioners together to interpret results and guide system action.

2. Integrate Knowing, Learning, and Action Across Systems

Across Canada, while many knowledge gaps continue to exist, strong evidence exists for many aspects of what supports child and youth well-being. Yet systems often struggle to translate this knowledge into coordinated action. A challenge is the absence of structures that support implementation, scale, adaptation, and learning. Innovations remain tied to short-term projects, and systems default to pilots rather than embedding successful models.

Integrating knowing, learning, and action requires intentional alignment between research, policy, and practice. This includes co-designed implementation plans, evaluation strategies that measure long-term impact, and cross-sector collaboratives that support adaptation and scale-up. When evidence is embedded in system structures, improvements become more durable and more equitable.

Implementation partners and learning collaborative leads are encouraged to connect with IHF to align efforts.

What this makes possible

- Proven and promising models move beyond isolated pilots and into routine practice across jurisdictions.
- Stronger consistency in quality, access, and outcomes, particularly for children who rely on multiple systems.
- Reduced duplication of effort and clearer alignment between research questions, policy goals, and practice needs.
- A system culture that values learning, adaptation, and continuous improvement rather than one-off initiatives.
- Greater efficiency and return on public investment through scalable, evidence-aligned interventions.

Early actions: Opportunities for research funders (CIHR, SSHRC, provincial counterparts), ministries of health/education/community services, university-based knowledge mobilization units, and community organizations with implementation roles.

- Establish long-term funding streams that support implementation, scaling, and evaluation—not only pilot projects.
- Create and resource shared learning collaboratives that bring together practitioners, researchers, policymakers, youth, and families to co-drive improvement.
- Embed implementation science within public and community-serving organizations to support evidence uptake.
- Align research funding priorities with system-wide needs identified by communities, governments, and practitioners.
- Incorporate evaluation and learning requirements into policy frameworks, service agreements, and program standards.

3. Increase Prevention and Promote Health, Mental Health, and Social Literacy

Preventable harms and avoidable crises continue to place strain on systems and families. Despite extensive evidence demonstrating the long-term benefits of early intervention and health promotion, preventive approaches remain underfunded and inconsistently implemented across the country. Investments are disproportionately concentrated in crisis response, generating higher long-term costs and reducing opportunities for early support.

Strengthening prevention requires embedding a broad set of literacies—health, mental health, social, digital, financial, climate, and rights literacy—across schools, communities, and public systems. Prevention must be culturally grounded, identity-affirming, developmentally appropriate, and accessible across regions.

Funders, school authorities, and public health partners advancing prevention and literacy curricula are invited to connect with the IHF network.

What this makes possible

- Sustained investment in prevention, early childhood development, mental health promotion, and family support.
- Fiscal and policy decisions that reflect the long-term economic value of child- and youth-focused investments.
- Greater public understanding of the financial and social cost of inaction.
- Alignment between budget cycles, population needs, and the evidence base on return on investment.
- Stronger cross-government coordination when strategic investments support multiple outcomes—health, education, workforce readiness, and community well-being.

Early actions: Opportunities for federal and provincial finance ministries, ministries of health and education, school authorities, public health agencies, and economic policy researchers.

- Draw on Canadian and international modelling that demonstrates the ROI of investing in children and youth across the lifespan.
- Use economic framing in public communication, budget submissions, and advocacy efforts to complement rights- and equity-based approaches.
- Support research, evaluation, and modelling that quantify both short- and long-term impacts of child-focused investments.
- Align organizational strategies and narratives around a cohesive national economic case for investing in children.
- Integrate child-impact and equity-impact assessments into major government financial decisions.

4. Expand Access to Community Supports and Whole-Community Approaches

Communities are the primary context in which children grow, develop, and form identity. They provide belonging, stability, cultural grounding, and relational connection. Yet community organizations often operate with short-term funding, limited infrastructure, and administrative burdens that impede long-term planning and equitable access—and families consistently tell us that finding services is not the same as accessing them.

Strengthening community capacity requires flexible, stable funding; integration between schools and community organizations; respect for cultural and place-based knowledge; and support for Indigenous-led and culturally specific services. Whole-community approaches recognize that well-being is shaped by relationships, environments, and culture—not solely by formal systems.

Communities, school divisions, and funders piloting or scaling whole-community approaches are encouraged to share learning through the IHF network.

What this makes possible

- Stronger, more resilient communities where children experience belonging, identity affirmation, and continuity of support.
- Earlier, lower-barrier access to culturally grounded and context-specific supports before challenges escalate.
- A reduced reliance on acute, specialized, or emergency services.
- Stronger partnerships between schools, families, and community organizations as central hubs of well-being.
- Greater alignment between community strengths, service availability, and cultural and geographic needs.

Early actions: Opportunities for federal and provincial funders, Indigenous governments, school authorities, philanthropic funders, and community-based and grassroots organizations.

- Increase long-term, stable funding for community-based organizations, including Indigenous-led, culturally specific, disability-led, and grassroots services.
- Strengthen school–community partnerships that position schools as health and well-being hubs connected to local supports.
- Expand community hubs, navigators, and integrated service models that reduce fragmentation and improve access.
- Streamline administrative requirements to allow community organizations to focus on relational, prevention-focused work.
- Recognize and fund community-led approaches as essential components of the child and youth well-being ecosystem, not supplementary programs.

5. Build Child-Centred Systems and Improve Transitions

Transitions—between early learning and school, between services, and especially between pediatric and adult systems—remain some of the most vulnerable points in a child's life. Current structures are designed around institutional boundaries rather than developmental trajectories, resulting in gaps in continuity, inconsistent eligibility rules, and avoidable harms.

Child-centred systems require policies, pathways, and service models that follow the child rather than the institution. They also require strong coordination between and across child- and youth-serving systems and governments, shared accountability structures, and mechanisms that ensure continuity for children and youth who rely on multiple services.

Networks improving pediatric-to-adult transitions, cross-ministry continuity, and similar initiatives are invited to connect with IHF and our network.

What this makes possible

- Smoother, safer transitions across early childhood, schooling, adolescence, and entry into adulthood.
- Greater continuity of care for children and youth who use multiple systems, including those with disabilities, chronic conditions, or complex needs.
- More consistent, equitable access to social supports across jurisdictions and life stages.
- Service pathways that reflect developmental trajectories and children's rights rather than institutional structures.
- Reduced risk of service gaps, crises, and adverse experiences during key developmental periods.

Early actions: Opportunities for provincial/territorial ministries (health, education, social services, justice), pediatric and adult care networks, disability and family advocacy organizations, and youth leadership councils.

- Redesign pathways and eligibility criteria around children's developmental journeys rather than institutional boundaries.
- Embed youth- and family-centred principles, including cultural safety, accessibility, and disability inclusion, into all policy and service frameworks.
- Strengthen coordination between ministries and between child- and adult-serving systems.
- Invest in joint planning, shared protocols, and transition-focused teams across systems.
- Involve youth, families, Indigenous partners, and disability communities in designing, evaluating, and governing transition processes.

6. Strengthen Leadership, Governance, and Shared Accountability

Central to effective governance is co-governance: formal, compensated, and sustained roles for youth, families, and Indigenous partners in decision-making, priority-setting, and accountability. System transformation requires sustained, coordinated leadership across all levels of government and across sectors. Canada lacks a coherent national architecture capable of aligning investments, accountability, and sustained system learning. Progress currently relies on short-term initiatives, individual champions, and ad hoc coordination.

Strengthening governance requires legislative and policy frameworks that establish shared goals and indicators, cross-government coordination structures, and mechanisms that uphold accountability for equity and well-being. It also requires embedding leadership roles for youth, families, Indigenous governments, researchers, and communities.

Organizations advancing legislative campaigns, co-governance models, or shared measurement frameworks are encouraged to align with the IHF network.

What this makes possible

- A shared national vision that aligns priorities, investments, and outcomes across governments and sectors.
- Coordinated advocacy that strengthens the collective voice for children and youth at federal, provincial/territorial, and community levels.
- Sustained momentum across electoral cycles, policy shifts, and organizational changes.
- Clearer accountability for progress through shared indicators and transparent reporting.
- Stronger alignment between research, policy, practice, communities, and lived experience leadership.

Early actions: Opportunities for federal leadership (e.g., Health Canada, ESDC), provincial and territorial governments, Indigenous governance bodies, the IHF network, and youth and family councils.

- Endorse and participate in a national collaborative approach that coordinates system transformation efforts.
- Align organizational strategies, research agendas, and advocacy priorities with the shared national vision.
- Participate in shared measurement initiatives and cross-sector agenda-setting processes.
- Support the development of governance mechanisms that embed youth, family, Indigenous, and community leadership.
- Champion and resource legislative efforts, such as a national strategy for children and youth (e.g., Bill S-212) that formalizes shared goals and accountability.

A Coherent Path Forward

The Areas of Action are mutually reinforcing. Building modern data systems strengthens accountability. Embedding evidence in system design improves practice. Prevention reduces system strain. Strong communities expand access and belonging. Child-centred systems improve continuity. Coordinated leadership sustains progress over time. Taken together, these actions offer a practical, achievable path toward more coherent, equitable, and child-centred systems—and toward measurable improvements in outcomes for children and youth across Canada.

Moving Forward: A National Moment for Coordinated Action

Canada is at a pivotal moment for children and youth. The country has the knowledge, leadership, and community capacity needed to build systems that are equitable, coherent, and centred on the developmental needs and rights of young people. What has been missing is not expertise or commitment, but the structural alignment required to act together at scale. The actions outlined in this report offer a clear roadmap for the next two to three years—a roadmap grounded in equity, prevention, community strength, data modernization, and meaningful youth and family leadership. They reflect a growing national consensus across sectors and regions: Canada's future prosperity, resilience, and social cohesion depend on creating conditions in which every child and youth can thrive.

Realizing this vision requires sustained, coordinated action. It requires policy frameworks that align investments and accountability with developmental needs; research systems that translate evidence into practice and guide implementation; community environments that foster belonging and resilience; and national structures that support shared goals, measure progress, and sustain momentum across governments and electoral cycles.

A Suggested 2–3 Year Roadmap

Participants identified an ambitious but achievable timeline. Catalysing this work will require visible federal leadership, coordinated funder commitments, and structured partnership between IHF and emerging cross-sector tables. The phases below illustrate sequencing rather than rigid deadlines.

Year 1 (2026): Foundations

- Establish a national coordinating table convening federal, provincial, territorial, Indigenous, and youth/family leadership.
- Confirm shared indicator priorities (Area 1) and co-governance principles (Area 6) as the pre-conditions that unlock the other areas.
- Launch IHF-led implementation collaboratives anchored to each Area of Action, with named leads.
- Advance Bill S-212 and other legislative efforts to establish a National Strategy for Children and Youth.

Year 2 (2027): Alignment and Early Wins

- Pilot interoperable data demonstration projects in two to three jurisdictions.
- Scale prevention and literacy investments through funder coalitions and school–community partnerships.
- Embed compensated youth and family leadership roles in at least three national governance bodies.
- Publish a public dashboard tracking progress against shared national indicators.

Year 3 (2028): Sustained System Change

- Mainstream child-centred transition pathways across pediatric–adult and inter-ministerial boundaries.
- Establish core funding for community-based and Indigenous-led organizations beyond project cycles.
- Demonstrate measurable improvements on shared indicators in at least three priority outcome areas.
- Reconvene the IHF Summit to assess progress and refresh the Acceleration Agenda.

Canada has reached a point where fragmented efforts are no longer sufficient. Participants clearly agreed that what is needed is coherent system transformation—work that is bold, collaborative, and designed to endure. With collective resolve, the country can move from aspiration to action, leveraging its strengths to build systems that reflect the promise and potential of every young person.

While long-term transformation requires sustained commitment, several concrete actions can begin immediately. These steps will build early progress, demonstrate collective will, and establish the enabling conditions required for broader system change.

- **Advance a National Strategy for Children and Youth:** A legislated national framework—such as the strategy envisioned in Bill S-212—can establish shared goals, clarify federal leadership, and align efforts across jurisdictions. Advancing this work requires coordinated advocacy across IHF members, visible public communication, and a collective commitment to embedding children's rights at the centre of national policy. This will involve federal parliamentarians, national child- and youth-serving organizations, and the IHF network.
- **Strengthen Cross-Sector Collaboration and Infrastructure:** Improved outcomes depend on alignment between health, education, community systems, research, and policy. Early actions include forming cross-sector leadership tables, enhancing communication channels, and establishing collaborative learning structures that support integrated planning and shared decision-making. This must include provincial/territorial ministries, school authorities, and regional health authorities.
- **Formalize and Expand Youth and Family Leadership:** Systems can immediately embed lived experience by creating compensated, culturally safe structures for co-governance. Establishing youth and family councils, expanding co-design roles, and integrating lived experience into evaluation, planning, and accountability processes are achievable steps that strengthen equity and authenticity. This requires actions from governments, foundations, and community organizations across Canada.
- **Enhance Community Access to Supports:** Expanding access to community-based, culturally grounded supports can begin now. Strengthened partnerships with schools, expanded navigation and outreach services, enhanced community hubs, and long-term commitments to Indigenous, cultural, and grassroots organizations will help ensure children and families receive support where they live and belong. This requires funders, school divisions, municipal partners, community-based and Indigenous-led organizations, to play a lead role.
- **Align Research and Evaluation with System Needs:** Research systems can rapidly shift toward co-created agendas, implementation science, and rapid-response evidence supports. Prioritizing research that reflects community priorities and system challenges will reduce duplication, accelerate learning, and strengthen policy and practice. Research funders, university-based research networks, and IHF research partners all have an important role to play here.
- **Promote a Culture of Action, Learning, and Adaptation:** Systems need not wait for perfect structures to begin improving. Rapid-cycle learning, iterative testing, and visible early wins can build confidence and momentum. A culture of action—supported by transparent communication, shared accountability, and collaborative problem-solving—can drive continuous system improvement. Every organization willing to share learnings publicly with peers can drive this work.

Taking the First Steps, Together

Following the October Summit and grounded in this updated Acceleration Agenda, participants in the Inspiring Healthy Futures network have a renewed focus on taking collaborative action through relationship-building, policy engagement, shared measurement, and targeted collaboration. Early emphasis is placed on aligning partners around shared indicators, strengthening youth and family leadership structures, and supporting governments and organizations ready to move from alignment to implementation.

If any of the actions in this report align with your mandate—whether you lead a ministry, a research program, a school authority, a community organization, or a youth or family network—IHF invites you to reach out. Tell us what you are already advancing, where you are looking for partners, and where this Acceleration Agenda can help connect efforts. Coordinated progress depends on coordinated outreach, and the next two to three years will be shaped by the partnerships we build now.