

## Backgrounder

### Petition to Ensure the Rights Vulnerable Highly Mobile Children

#### **Inequities in the delivery of federally funded benefits and services**

##### **Vulnerable children in informal care arrangements barred from accessing federally funded benefits**

Children whose parents cannot care for them because the parents are homeless, incarcerated or have addictions either enter foster care or the care of family or friends. When family or friends step in, formal custody agreements can be difficult to arrange, such as when a parent will not or cannot give consent. Without legal custody, it can be both difficult and expensive for caregivers to access documentation, like birth certificates and proof of residency, that are needed to apply for benefits such as the Canada Child Benefit. Without legal advice or skilled advocacy, which is not available to all, many caregivers, such as grandparents with few financial resources, cannot overcome the hurdles to access benefits that vulnerable children should receive.

##### **Children in foster care receive less money than those with parents at the same income level**

Due to variations in the way provincially delivered, federally funded benefits are administered, children in foster care may not receive the full benefit they otherwise would. For example, in BC, a six-year-old living with their mother on welfare would receive \$1,107.24 per month from the federal child benefits and the apportioned provincial welfare benefit for the child, versus \$803.81 paid by the province to a foster parent for that child's care.

##### **Children of chronically homeless parents are not recognized or provided for**

The Homeless Partnering Strategy (Housing First) provides monies for basic necessities and housing for chronically homeless adults. Children living with their homeless parent are unrecognized and are not eligible for any support to meet their basic needs. By forcing families to live on monies meant to support only the adult, some of the poorest children in our country are further deprived, which can lead to lifelong negative impacts such as poor health.

##### **Not all groups of marginalized children are recognized or provided for**

Canada committed to ensuring common quality for social programs and health care across the country. The Government of Canada sets priorities and requirements for the care of children. Through the Canada Social Transfer, it provides funding for education, social assistance and social services to provinces, territories and First Nation governments. Canada prioritizes supports for children who are affected by domestic violence, while failing to recognize other vulnerable children such as those whose parents are homeless, have addictions or are incarcerated. Indeed, Canada is the only Commonwealth country that does not provide specifically for children of incarcerated parents, despite their high risk of adverse life events and criminal justice involvement. The Cambridge Longitudinal Study suggests children whose parents have been incarcerated are 3.3 times as likely as other children to later become incarcerated themselves. Appropriate programs and services can enable more of these children to reach the bright futures they deserve.

#### **Impacts of Canada's failure to equally support the rights of marginalized children**

- Children who grow up in poverty have poorer life outcomes, with greater incidence of health impacts, lower education and employment levels, greater likelihood of addiction, gang involvement and incarceration.

- Compared with peers living in poverty, homeless children have significantly more behavioural and school problems; higher rates of health and developmental issues; lower academic achievement; more learning disabilities, and increased exposure to violence.
- Vulnerable children are unable to achieve their potential, with children in the same circumstances having access to different financial benefits, programs and services depending on where or how they live.

### Canada's responsibility

- As a signatory of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Canada has committed to providing equally for all children and must rectify this variation.
- Through the 1999 Social Union Framework, Canada pledged to provide common quality for social programs across the country.

### What the petition will achieve if recommendations acted upon

- It will address the disparities between the benefits that impoverished children in different provinces and territories are able to access.
- It will reduce the level of material deprivation for children who move a lot due to homelessness, parental incarceration or addiction, or government care experience.
- It will reduce interprovincial and territorial disparities that exclude children not considered under current eligibility rules and will increase supports for Canada's poorest children.

### About federally funded benefits, agreements and programs

- **Canada Child Benefit:** Introduced by the federal government in 2016 to replace the Universal Child Care Benefit and the Canada Tax Benefit. It combines two key elements:
  1. *Monthly payments to low-income families with children.*
    - In 2018, the maximum benefit to low income families was \$6,496 for a child under six and \$5,461 for children from six to 17.
    - The Child Disability Benefit may be added for low income families with children under 18 who have severe or prolonged impaired functioning. Up to \$2,865 per year, per child.
  2. *Benefits and services designed and delivered by the provinces and territories to meet the needs of families with children in each jurisdiction.* Examples:
    - Canada Child Benefit and the Child Disability Benefit is paid as the Children's Special Allowances by the federal government to provinces (unless they direct otherwise to child welfare agencies or caregivers) for every child in their care.
    - Child and daycare initiatives
    - Early childhood and children-at-risk services
    - Supplementary health benefits
    - Other initiatives as determined by individual provinces and territories.
- **Social Union Framework Agreement:** Recognizes principles and rights of Canadians, including common quality for social programs across Canada.
- **Early Childhood Development Initiative:** Provides flexibility to provinces and territories in how they invest in early learning and child care. It spans (1) healthy pregnancy, birth and infancy, (2) parenting and family supports, (3) early childhood development and (4) learning and care/community supports.
- **Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework:** A foundation for governments to work toward a shared long-term vision where all children can experience the enriching environment of quality early learning and child care that supports children's development to reach their full potential.
- **Canada Social Transfer:** The federal government's transfer payment system in support of education, social assistance, and social services, including early childhood development, early learning and childcare.