

# YOUTH IMPACT SURVEY DATA BRIEFS



## WHAT IS THE YOUTH IMPACT SURVEY?

The Children and Youth Planning Table (CYPT) partnered with UNICEF Canada, the Canadian Index of Wellbeing, and the Ontario Trillium Foundation to develop and pilot the Youth Impact Survey (YIS). It was developed to align with the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being, a framework developed by UNICEF Canada to better understand the lives of children and youth, help track progress for child and youth well-being and guide changes that can be made to help children and youth facing challenges in Canada. The framework includes 125 indicators over multiple dimensions of well-being.

Too often, decisions about children and youth are made without their involvement. The YIS was a chance to learn directly from children and youth in Waterloo Region about their own well-being and their experiences. Results of the survey can be used to inform conversations, decisions, services and programs impacting children and youth in our community.

We worked alongside local children and youth to identify what is important to them—things like how they are feeling, what they do in their free time, and how they feel about school and their community. Launched in July of 2020, children and youth between the ages of 9 and 18 were invited to participate in the YIS pilot to share insights into their own well-being and provide feedback on the survey tool, with just over 300 youth participating.

## WHY IS THIS DATA IMPORTANT RIGHT NOW?

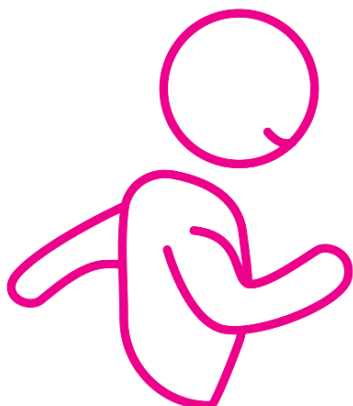
The purpose of the Youth Impact Survey Data Brief Series is to highlight key well-being data that was shared from young people in Waterloo Region over the summer of 2020 - during the COVID-19 pandemic. This series will present data across 10 focus areas of child and youth well-being. We hope that this information is helpful to those working and supporting children and youth in our community. The data can help inform the current state of well-being, and can be used in conjunction with additional data and/or as a conversation starter with young people to better understand their specific state of well-being.







# WHAT IS MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH?



Child and youth mental and emotional health includes their feelings, behaviour and thoughts. In particular, mental health "refers to cognitive, behavioral, and emotional well-being. It is all about how people think, feel, and behave. Mental health can affect daily living, relationships, and physical health".



Where appropriate, national data has been provided for comparison to the YIS data. Please Note: all national data is pre-pandemic and thus there are limitations in comparability.

## WHY IT MATTERS TO WELL-BEING

Children and youth who have good mental and emotional health are able to understand and manage their own emotions and those of others. This includes being able to cope with challenges they experience in life and build healthy relationships with others including peers and adults. In addition, children and youth who have good social and emotional skills have greater success in school and in life more generally. Children and youth who do not have good emotional well-being can face many challenges in life. This includes challenges to relationships with family and friends, experiencing higher rates of stress, and social anxiety. Helping children develop good mental and emotional health can provide them with the skills to better overcome such challenges, and have better overall well-being which is important to healthy development.

**"I LIKED HOW EVERYTHING FROM SCHOOL LIFE TO FAMILY LIFE, TO PERSONAL LIFE AND MENTAL HEALTH [IN THE SURVEY] WAS CONSIDERED. THIS WAY, ALL FACTORS IMPACTING YOUTH AND THEIR EXPERIENCES CAN BE UNDERSTOOD..."**

**YIS Respondent**

5. Felmen, A. (2020, April 13). What is mental health? Medical News Today. Available online: <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/154543>

6. National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2004). Children's emotional development is built into the architecture of their brains: Working paper No. 2 (3rd printing). Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 1-8. Available online: <http://www.developingchild.net>

7. Thomson, S. (2019, August 05). Assessing and understanding social and emotional skills: The OECD Study on Social and Emotional Skills [Paper presentation]. Research Conference 2019 - Preparing students for life in the 21st century: Identifying, developing and assessing what matters. Available online: [https://research.acer.edu.au/research\\_conference/RC2019/5august/4](https://research.acer.edu.au/research_conference/RC2019/5august/4)

8. UNICEF Canada (2019). Where Does Canada Stand? The Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being 2019 Baseline Report. UNICEF Canada, Toronto. Available online: [https://oneyouth.unicef.ca/sites/default/files/2019-08/2019\\_Baseline\\_Report\\_Canadian\\_Index\\_of\\_Child\\_and\\_Youth\\_Well-being.pdf](https://oneyouth.unicef.ca/sites/default/files/2019-08/2019_Baseline_Report_Canadian_Index_of_Child_and_Youth_Well-being.pdf)

# WHAT DOES THE DATA SAY?

## CHILDREN AND YOUTH SELF-ASSESSED MENTAL HEALTH

Almost four in ten (37.6%) of respondents reported their mental health as very good or excellent. This is considerably lower than their self-reported physical health where 58.1% reported their physical health as very good or excellent.



## LIFE SATISFACTION<sup>9</sup>

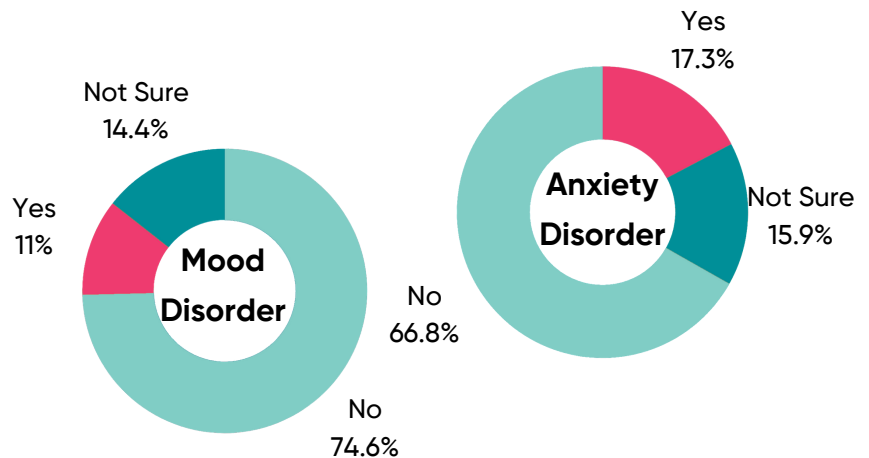
In *UNICEF Report Card 16: Canadian Companion, Turning Canada's Wealth into Child Well-being*, UNICEF Canada starts with a focus on life satisfaction—how children and youth feel about their own lives—which is an important measure of their overall happiness and well-being. About 77% of children and youth in Canada report at least a moderate level of life satisfaction, ranking 28th out of 38 peer countries. Looking at the responses from the YIS regarding life satisfaction, Waterloo Region is comparable, but observing lower life satisfaction to Canada overall.<sup>10</sup>

**74.5% OF YIS RESPONDENTS REPORT AT LEAST A MODERATE LEVEL OF LIFE SATISFACTION.**

## CHILDREN AND YOUTH HAVING A DIAGNOSED MOOD OR ANXIETY DISORDER

Just over one in ten (11.0%) of respondents reported they have been diagnosed with a mood disorder.<sup>11</sup>

Almost one in five (17.3%) of respondents reported they have been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder.<sup>12</sup>



9. This indicator is part of the We are Happy and Respected Domain of the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being.

10. UNICEF Canada (2020). UNICEF Report Card 16: Canadian Companion, Turning Canada's Wealth into Child Well-being. UNICEF Canada, Toronto.

11. Data note/definition: Mood disorder - eg. depression, bipolar disorder, mania.

12. Data note/definition: Anxiety disorder - a phobia, obsessive- eg. compulsive disorder, panic disorder.

## RISKY LIFESTYLE AND BEHAVIOURS

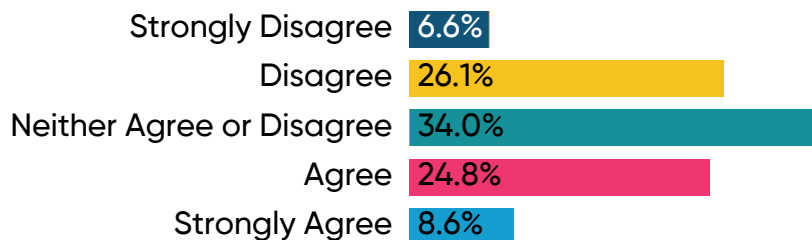
The majority of youth who responded had never engaged in the risky behaviours listed (alcohol, cannabis, e-cigarettes, prescription medications to get high, cigarettes). Alcohol was the most common risky behaviour, with 11.0% of respondents having consumed alcohol at least one day in the last 30 days. Just over 1% of respondents (1.3%) reported having drunk alcohol at least ten times in the last 30 days. 1.0% of youth reported using cannabis, and 2.0% reported using e-cigarettes (vaping) at least ten times in the last 30 days, while no respondents reported smoking cigarettes this often.

Risky Behaviour	Never	1 to 9 days	10 to 29 days	Every day
Drank alcohol	89.0%	9.6%	1.3%	0.0%
Took cannabis	95.3%	3.7%	0.3%	0.7%
Used e-cigarettes (vaping)	96.0%	2.0%	1.0%	1.0%
Taken prescription medications to get high	96.3%	2.7%	0.7%	0.3%
Smoked cigarettes	98.0%	2.0%	0.0%	0.0%

## STRESS AND SCHOOL<sup>13</sup>

The YIS was a unique opportunity to hear from youth just after an abrupt transition to online learning due to COVID-19 safety measures. When answering this question, youth were encouraged to think about their overall school year experience. One in three (33.4%) of YIS respondents felt as though they had more school work than they could handle. This is higher than their peers across Canada (22.8%) as reported by UNICEF Canada.<sup>14</sup>

**How much do you agree or disagree that you have more school work than you can handle?**



13. This indicator is part of the We are Learning Domain of the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being.

14. UNICEF Canada (2019).

# WHAT IS BELONGING?



UNICEF Canada defines belonging as “feeling loved and supported and having mutually caring and respectful relationships”.<sup>15</sup> This love and support can come from many sources including friends, family, teachers, pets, and people in the community. Locally, when we think about belonging for children and youth, we recognize the importance of equity, relationships and attachment, and feeling valued, heard and included.



Where appropriate, national data has been provided for comparison to the YIS data. Please Note: all national data is pre-pandemic and thus there are limitations in comparability.

## WHY IT MATTERS TO WELL-BEING

A sense of belonging among children and youth has positive impacts on health and well-being. We know that children and youth who have a sense of belonging (i.e. a feeling of social and environmental connection) have a greater sense of stability which can help them deal with challenges and uncertainty.<sup>16</sup> Those with a strong sense of belonging tend to be engaged in their community, have social networks, and build relationships with others, reducing feelings of loneliness.<sup>17</sup> The impacts of feeling like you belong have also been linked to life expectancy, with a lack of social connections having negative impacts on your health similar to smoking, obesity, and diabetes.<sup>18</sup> When children build healthy relationships at home, school, with friends and in the community, it contributes to their overall well-being.

**“I LIKED THE QUESTIONS BECAUSE THEY WERE BASED ON OUR EVERYDAY LIVES. THOSE QUESTIONS THAT WOULDN'T BE ASKED OF US COMMONLY AND ARE VERY UNIQUE AND NEW. THESE KIND OF QUESTIONS MAKE US THINK THAT WE ARE HERE TO SHARE OUR IDEAS AND OUR VOICES ARE BEING HEARD.”**

**YIS Respondent**

15. UNICEF Canada (2019).

16. Hatala, A.R., Pearl, T. Bird-Nartowhow, K., Judge, A., Sjoblom, E., & Liebenberg, L. (2017). “I have a strong hope for the future”: Time orientations and resiliency among Canadian Indigenous youth. *Qualitative Health Research* 2017, Vol. 27(9) 1330–1344.

17. UNICEF Canada (2019).

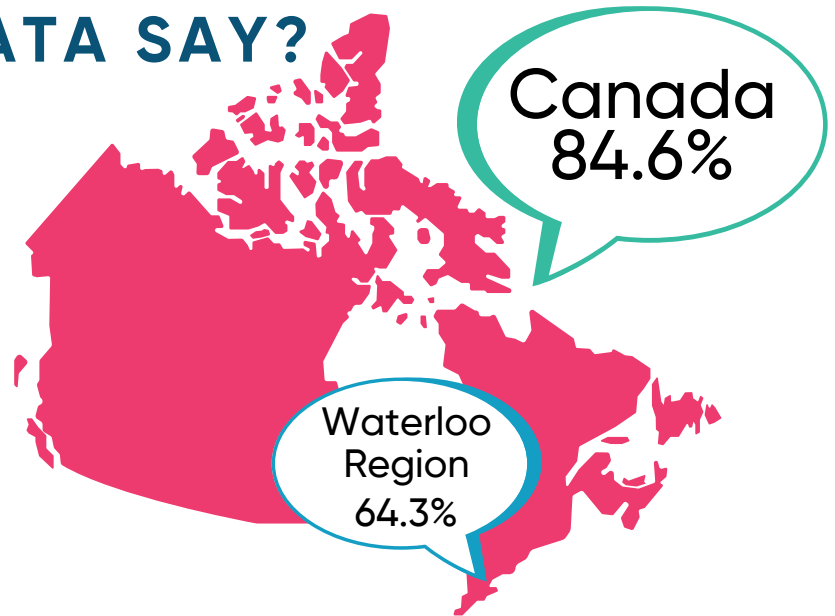
18. Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health (2017). *Connected communities: healthier together*. 2017 Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer of Health of Ontario to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Available online: [http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/ministry/publications/reports/cmoh\\_19/cmoh\\_19.pdf](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/ministry/publications/reports/cmoh_19/cmoh_19.pdf)



# WHAT DOES THE DATA SAY?

## SENSE OF BELONGING

64.3% of YIS respondents reported feeling a very strong or somewhat strong sense of belonging to their community. This is below the national average (84.6%) reported by UNICEF Canada.<sup>19</sup>



## LONELINESS

Almost three in ten (28.7%) of respondents reported feeling lonely on at least a regular basis.

I feel lonely...



## SOCIAL SUPPORT FROM FAMILY AND FRIENDS

The YIS asked children and youth if and how they feel supported by family and friends. For family and friends, support looks like help making decisions, emotional help and support, someone to count on, and someone to talk through problems and share joys with. More respondents of the YIS feel supported by family than friends. Among YIS respondents, 62.4% of youth felt supported by their families, compared to 57.3% of children and youth across Canada observed by UNICEF Canada.<sup>20</sup> Just over 58% (58.2%) of youth who responded to the YIS felt supported by their friends, slightly lower than the 65.9% of children and youth across Canada who felt supported by friends.<sup>21</sup>

**62.4% OF YOUTH FELT SUPPORTED BY THEIR FAMILIES.**

**58.2% OF YOUTH FELT SUPPORTED BY THEIR FRIENDS.**

19. UNICEF Canada (2019).

20. UNICEF Canada (2019).

21. UNICEF Canada (2019).

## CHILDREN AND YOUTH FEELINGS OF SUPPORT FROM TEACHERS

A school environment, and relationships with teachers, are important to shaping a young person's sense of belonging and well-being.<sup>22</sup>

**79.3% OF RESPONDENTS FELT THAT THEIR TEACHERS ACCEPT THEM AS THEY ARE.**

**73.2% OF RESPONDENTS FELT THAT THEIR TEACHERS CARE ABOUT THEM.**

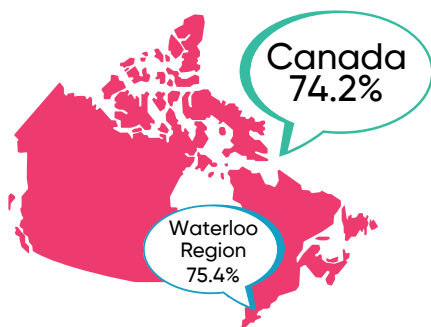
## EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION<sup>23</sup>

The YIS asked children and youth about their experiences of discrimination in the last year. Almost half, (44.5%) of respondents have experienced discrimination in the past year due to characteristics such as physical appearance, sex, and age.

Experiences of discrimination due to...	Per cent
Your physical appearance	22.6%
Your sex	18.9%
Your age	16.9%
Your ethnicity or culture	16.0%
Your race or colour	16.0%
Your religion	11.6%
Your sexual orientation	9.2%
A disability	8.1%
Your gender identity	6.4%
Your language	4.2%

## FEELING VALUED, HEARD, AND INCLUDED<sup>24</sup>

One key piece of feeling valued, heard and included, is feeling like you have a voice and someone is listening. When young people feel heard, like their opinions and perspectives matter, there is a stronger sense of connection and inclusion. More than three-quarters, 75.4% of respondents felt that when they speak, someone in their family listens, much like their peers across Canada (74.2%).<sup>25</sup>



**73.4% FELT THEY CAN EXPRESS THEMSELVES WITH THEIR FRIENDS.**

**68.1% FELT THEY CAN EXPRESS THEMSELVES WITH FAMILY.**

22. UNICEF Canada (2019).

23. This indicator is part of the We are Protected Domain of the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being.

24. This indicator is part of the We are Participating Domain of the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being.

25. UNICEF Canada (2019).