



News Release

For Immediate Release
June 18, 2015

GROWING UP IN B.C. – 2015

LIFE REMAINS CHALLENGING FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND YOUTH

VICTORIA – Life remains challenging for British Columbia’s most vulnerable children and youth – including those in government care and Aboriginal children and youth – says a joint report released today by B.C.’s Representative for Children and Youth Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond and Provincial Health Officer Dr. Perry Kendall.

Growing Up in B.C. – 2015 examines the question, “How are our children doing right now?” As a follow-up to the first *Growing Up in B.C. (GUIBC)* issued in 2010, the report documents the state of B.C.’s children and youth over six areas of well-being, with the voices of experts and youth prominent throughout.

It finds that, while there have been some improvements for children overall, children and youth in care continue to struggle when it comes to education, physical and mental health, family economic well-being, safety, behaviour, and making and maintaining important family, peer and community connections.

“With the passage of five years since the last *GUIBC*, are we able to report improvement? The short answer is ‘no,’” Turpel-Lafond said. “While there are some positive findings overall, serious gaps in well-being remain. These children start out behind their peers and stay behind. This is most true for young people and their families with multiple, intersecting vulnerabilities.”

“While the report shows some promising trends in declining teen pregnancy rates, rates of smoking during pregnancy and serious criminal activity, there are some findings that are of great concern,” Kendall said. “This report shines a light on what needs to be focused on to better support B.C.’s youth – especially Aboriginal youth and children in care.”

GUIBC – 2015 finds a number of positive aspects of child well-being, including:

- The number of Aboriginal students graduating from high school within six years increased to nearly 60 per cent – a 13 per cent improvement
- Teenage pregnancy rates declined
- 80 per cent of youth say they usually feel good about themselves
- Youth involvement in serious crime declined.

However, some findings in the report are worrisome:

- About one-third of children entering Kindergarten are not as ready as they should be for school

- Aboriginal children and youth are 12 times more likely than non-Aboriginal children and youth to be in government care
- Children in government care are five times more likely than the general population to be designated as having a special education need
- Almost 60 per cent of youth in care do not graduate from high school within six years
- Half of youth who age out of care when they turn 19 are on income assistance within six months of leaving care.

“Since the onset of the recession in 2008, the number of children living in families with incomes below the poverty line increased to one in five, with very little progress in recent years to improve that,” Turpel-Lafond said. “This report demonstrates, once again, the need for a cross-ministry children’s plan in B.C. to close the gaps, planning for targeted investments where they are needed most.”

To that end, both the Representative and Provincial Health Officer have serious concerns about the lack of reliable data available in some areas of child well-being and the trend by both provincial and federal governments toward less commitment to generating reliable data and making it available. The federal government’s cancellation of the mandatory long-form census in 2011 has left critical gaps in information, and some key data from the Ministry of Children and Family Development contains significant holes because of changes in the ministry’s information management system and how data is now collected.

“The importance of having accessible data to measure outcomes and guide policy cannot be understated,” Kendall said. “In 2011, the federal government went against the advice of experts and chose to discontinue the mandatory long-form census. As a result, we have lost a critically important source of information, specifically about the more marginalized populations who are under-represented in voluntary surveys.”

More than 200 youth across B.C. were consulted for *GUIBC – 2015*, and their voices are highlighted throughout. In addition, the report includes commentaries from independent academic and community experts who provide insight into what the data means, why these outcomes matter for everyone in B.C. and what should be done to improve well-being for children and youth in this province.

The full report can be viewed here:

www.rcybc.ca/guipc2015

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