

## National Issue Summary

# Successful Youth Transitions to Adulthood

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United Way Centraide Canada (UWCC) has developed National Issue Summaries on key issue areas of national concern that are central to our network's mission. They summarize available data and research to provide an overview of the issue and how the United Way Centraides (UWCs) are investing in community supports and solutions.



## What a successful transition to adulthood means

A successful transition to adulthood happens when young people have the relationships, supports, and skills needed to navigate key milestones, overcome challenges and build healthy, fulfilling, and independent lives, regardless of their background or the barriers they face.<sup>1</sup>

## Who experiences challenges in the transition to adulthood

- While challenges in the transition to adulthood can affect any young person, youth from rural, remote or northern communities, youth with mental health challenges, and those from low-income families are more likely to experience barriers.<sup>2</sup>
- Indigenous youth, Black and racialized youth, LGBTQIA+ youth, youth with disabilities, newcomer and refugee youth, youth leaving child welfare, and youth experiencing homelessness face systemic barriers that can make the transition to adulthood more difficult.
- Becoming disconnected from both school and work is one of the clearest signs that a transition has stalled. The longer youth are out of employment, education, or training, the harder it is for them to reconnect.<sup>3</sup>

## The facts about youth transitioning into adulthood in Canada

- Chronic absence from school is a warning sign that a student may not finish high school. Rates of students missing at least 1 in every 10 school days have risen sharply since the pandemic, more than doubling in some school districts.<sup>4</sup>
- More than 1 in 5 Canadian 15-year-olds (22%) scored below the global baseline of math proficiency in 2022, and math and reading scores in Canada fell to their lowest levels on record.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Adams, Hahn & Coffey. February 2021. [Stabilizing young people transitioning to adulthood](#); Statistics Canada. May 4, 2026. [Youth not in employment, education, or training \(NEET\)](#).

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada. 2025. [Postsecondary enrolment rates by parental income](#); Statistics Canada. 2026. [The NEETEST youth](#); Mental Health Research Canada & GreenShield. November 2025. [A Generation Under Pressure](#).

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada. 2026. [The NEETEST youth](#).

- A total of 65% of post-secondary students describe themselves as financially unstable, and 45% cannot adequately cover basic needs such as food and housing.<sup>6</sup>

## Addressing challenges for youth moving into adulthood is urgent

- Youth are losing hope. Once the happiest age group in the country, young people under 30 in Canada now rank 58th in the world for happiness, but 8th for those over 60.<sup>7</sup>
- Growing up online is intensifying the strain. Young people who spend seven or more hours a day on screens are significantly more likely to experience anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation.<sup>8</sup>
- The economic downturn is hitting young people hardest. Unemployment among teens aged 15 to 19 reached 21% in the third quarter of 2025, up from 13% in 2022, meaning about one in five who want work cannot find it.<sup>9</sup>

## What everyone needs to know about youth transitioning into adulthood

- Struggling to launch is not a personal failing; this generation faces a genuinely steeper climb. Financial independence is the milestone most associated with adulthood, cited by 68% of 18- to 24-year-olds, yet rising costs have pushed it further out of reach.<sup>10</sup>
- Youth success benefits everyone, not only young people. The benefits ripple outward to parents, communities and an economy that depend on a rising generation of workers, taxpayers, and contributors.<sup>11</sup>
- With the right support, every young person can thrive. Resilience exists in everyone, but it grows when children and youth have strong relationships, access opportunities, and learn the personal skills they need to succeed.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Carman, T., & Wesley, A. (2024, March 27). [Kids missing more school since the pandemic, CBC analysis finds](#). CBC News.

<sup>5</sup> Council of Ministers of Education. 2023. [Measuring up](#).

<sup>6</sup> TD Bank Group. August 27, 2024. Nearly half of Canadian students are unable to adequately cover basic needs such as food and housing.

<sup>7</sup> C.D. Howe Institute. February 17, 2025. [Canada's happiness decline hits young people the hardest](#).

<sup>8</sup> Mental Health Research Canada. 2025. [Associations between social media use, personal screen time, and mental health indicators among Canadian youth](#).

<sup>9</sup> Statistics Canada. 2025. [Youth faced a challenging labour market in the summer and into September](#).

<sup>10</sup> Angus Reid Institute. 2016. [Canadian millennials think they have it tougher than past generations, and half of boomers agree](#).

<sup>11</sup> Deloitte and King's Trust Canada. 2024. [Failure to launch](#).

<sup>12</sup> Search Institute. (n.d.). [The Developmental Assets framework](#).

## UWCs are building communities where youth mental health matters

Across Canada, UWCs are addressing youth mental health, focusing on four areas:

- **Investing in solutions** that span from childhood to adulthood, engaging kids in learning, supporting strong personal and community connections, and foster emotional and physical wellbeing – particularly for those young people facing the greatest barriers..
- **Building capacity** by ensuring youth and their families can access information and navigation resources, supporting ongoing education and training for youth-serving organizations and front-line workers and ensuring organizations have resources to meet the needs of the children and youth they serve.
- **Leading collaborative efforts** that focus on youth wellbeing and key life transitions, partnerships with schools, employers, and service providers that connect young people to opportunity, and place-based initiatives that coordinate support around young people and their families.
- **Driving system change** by advocating for policy change, consulting on local, provincial, and national tables, and raising public awareness about issues related to coordinated youth services, flexible supports that follow youth into early adulthood, and wrap around supports that enable youth to achieve key milestones.