

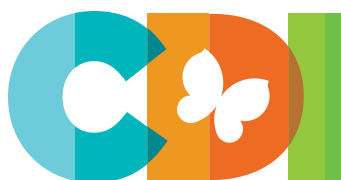
Nation Building Starts With Our Children:

**Upstream Mental Health Support and Crime Prevention
as a Strategic Investment in Canada's Future**

*2025 Pre-Budget Submission
to the Government of Canada*

Submitted by
Child Development
Institute (CDI)

August 2025



Contents

Introduction: Investing in Canada's Long-Term
Security and Economic Resilience

1

CDI's Recommendations

2

SNAP: Canada's Most Effective Early Crime
Prevention Program

3

A High-Return, Low-Cost Investment

3

Targeting High-Risk Communities to Maximize
Impact

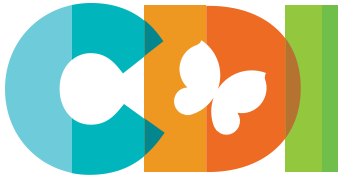
4

Policy Alignment with Federal Priorities

4

Conclusion: A Nation That Invests in Its
Children Builds a Stronger Future

5



Introduction: Investing in Canada's Long-Term Security and Economic Resilience

As Canada charts its future to face generational challenges — accelerating infrastructure development, enhancing national security, and preparing Canadians for a changing economy — it must also act boldly to reduce future burdens on public spending by investing in early intervention.

That work includes making upstream, evidence-based investments in child and youth mental health as a foundational pillar of public safety, economic resilience, and community well-being.

With youth crime rates increasing, it's more critical than ever that the federal government invest in prevention to keep Canadians safe. Recent data from *Justice Canada's JustFacts: Youth Crime Statistics (2025)* reveals that youth crime in Canada rose by 13% in 2023, following a 19% increase in 2022.¹ In Ontario, reported classroom violence has also risen 77% since 2018, according to Ministry of Education data.² When a child is exposed to violence in any setting, it increases their risk of aggressive or violent behaviour later on, making prevention even more important.

The Child Development Institute (CDI) urges the Government of Canada to maintain and reinforce funding under the National

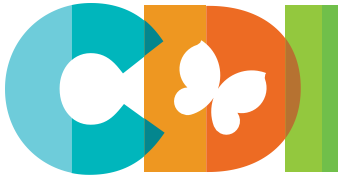
Crime Prevention Strategy (NCPS) to support Canadian organizations working to reduce crime. CDI has already seen great success with funding provided by Public Safety Canada. Bolstered funding under the NCPS would allow CDI to innovate and scale one of its flagship programs: Stop Now And Plan (SNAP).

SNAP is a made-in-Canada, internationally recognized, evidence-based program that builds emotional regulation, reduces violence, and diverts children from future justice system involvement.

**Every \$1 invested
in SNAP yields \$17
to \$32 in long-term
savings through
avoided justice,
health, and social
system costs.**

¹ These findings are based on Statistics Canada's Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, which tracks youth offences across provinces and metropolitan areas.

² Years' worth of data, obtained by Global News, shows the level of violence reported by school boards to the Ontario Ministry of Education has risen by 77 per cent since the Progressive Conservatives took office, with more than 4,400 incidents reported in the 2023-24 year alone.

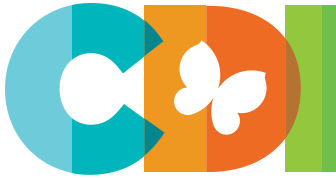


CDI's Recommendations

Upstream prevention is fiscally responsible nation-building. The upcoming federal budget presents a strategic opportunity to maintain the funding programs that are working and saving the government money long term.

As such, CDI has two key recommendations:

1. Maintain the government's investments in the NCPS and invest another **\$50 million over the next four years** to support additional program intakes and deliver measurable improvements in mental health, crime prevention, and community safety in high-risk communities **by 2029**.
2. Establish **dedicated funding** under the NCPS to support the scaling of evidence-based, community-driven crime prevention programs that have previously demonstrated success with federal funding.



SNAP: Canada's Most Effective Early Crime Prevention Program

SNAP is a globally recognized, evidence-based program designed for children ages 6 to 11 who are at risk of disruptive, antisocial, and aggressive behaviours. Delivered by trained professionals in school, clinical, and community settings, SNAP's structured, cognitive-behavioural approach teaches children to manage their emotions, reduce aggression, control impulses, and build pro-social decision-making skills. The program also supports caregivers and teachers, creating a comprehensive ecosystem of care.

The evidence of impact is clear and compelling:

- **68%** of SNAP participants will not have any criminal justice contact by age 20.
- Conviction rates are **cut in half** for SNAP participants versus non-participants.
- SNAP consistently **outperforms** comparable programs on key mental health indicators, including emotional regulation and conduct.

SNAP is a proven, cost-effective strategy that addresses the root causes of crime and mental health challenges. It is also the only Canadian program of its kind that has been evaluated through randomized control trials, longitudinal research, and neuroimaging studies.

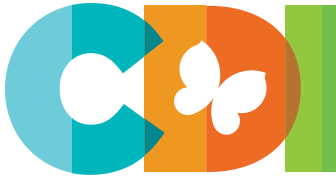
A High-Return, Low-Cost Investment

As the government seeks to spend smarter and increase the productivity of public investments, SNAP offers a compelling return.

SNAP as a cost-saving economic investment:

- **Every \$1 invested in SNAP yields \$17 to \$32 in long-term savings** through avoided justice, health, and social system costs.
- SNAP program participation **reduces public costs** by an average of **\$80,000 to \$147,000 per child**, primarily through reduced justice system involvement.
- A previous \$6.1M federal investment under the NCPS (2016—2021) enabled national scale-up and **cut per-child delivery costs by over 50%**, from \$1,223 to \$597.

These are the kinds of fiscally responsible, results-driven investments the government has committed to prioritizing. With the federal government's support through the NCPS, along with CDI's provincial and municipal partners, CDI can build a **next-generation SNAP delivery model** to reach more children faster, more affordably, and with deeper community integration.



Targeting High-Risk Communities to Maximize Impact

CDI's SNAP program supports the federal government's priorities in crime prevention, public safety, and mental health. In partnership with Boston Consulting Group, CDI has geo-mapped 35 at-risk communities across Canada with elevated risk factors, such as:

- **Youth violence and gang activity**
- **Overburdened mental health systems**
- **Intergenerational trauma**
- **Systemic barriers to care**

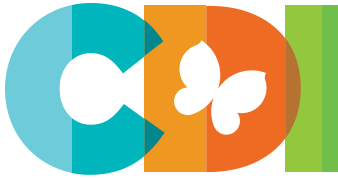
With increased federal support, non-profit organizations can expand the impact of critical, proven programs across the country while targeting communities with the highest needs to stabilize families, reduce crime and violence, and relieve the pressure and economic burden on schools, justice systems, and emergency services.

Policy Alignment with Federal Priorities

Maintaining and bolstering the NCPS and its funding programs, which support outcome-driven programs like CDI's SNAP, will help advance several federal priorities, including:

- **Public safety and crime prevention:** Reduces early behavioural risk and youth contact with police and courts
- **Spending less on government operations:** Generates long-term savings and reduces reliance on costly interventions, including diverting children away from the criminal justice system
- **Building stronger communities:** Supports locally delivered services in high-need neighbourhoods and strengthens community-based safety and wellness infrastructure
- **Reconciliation and equity:** Addresses systemic barriers, fosters safer environments, and empowers communities

Programs like SNAP ensure that Canada's children — tomorrow's workers, leaders, and innovators — have the emotional health and tools to thrive.



Conclusion: A Nation That Invests in Its Children Builds a Stronger Future

We cannot build a united, resilient Canada if we ignore the mental health needs of children growing up in instability, violence, and economic precarity. At a time of fiscal constraint and generational opportunity, the Government of Canada must prioritize investments that generate enduring value.

SNAP is a proven, scalable, and nationally recognized model, one that addresses crime and mental health before they become crises while unlocking the potential of Canada's most vulnerable children. We need to ensure that evidence-based programs have the resources, including federal funding, to expand nationally. We cannot afford to lose effective crime prevention programs that create safer neighbourhoods, stronger families, and a healthier Canada.

This federal budget offers a critical moment to align upstream mental health investments with long-term public safety and national well-being. It serves as a pivotal opportunity to invest not only in physical infrastructure, but in human infrastructure — the children and youth who will carry Canada forward.

CDI stands ready to work in partnership with the Government of Canada to scale SNAP, improve outcomes for families, and help ensure Canada's future is inclusive, safe, and prosperous.

**Let us build a nation
that never leaves
its children behind.**

