



## OPINION

# While we build a nation, let's not forget the children who will inherit it

Policymakers at all levels of government should treat child development not as an add-on, but as foundational. Because if we truly want a stronger and more unified Canada, we must build it from the ground up.

As Canada continues to grapple with questions of national unity, reconciliation, and economic resilience, the truth that remains constant is that our future as a country rests in the hands of our children. And yet, while our political discourse often centers on pipelines, provinces, and power struggles, we are too often failing to invest where it matters most: our kids.



Health Minister Majorie Michel, left, and Anna Gainey, secretary of state for children and youth, should ensure that child well-being is a core pillar of a national strategy, writes Andrew Reddin. *The Hill Times Photographs*

As the CEO of the Child Development Institute, I've seen firsthand how early intervention, mental health support, and evidence-based programming can change the trajectory of a young life. From delivering specialized mental health and crime prevention programs to trauma-informed care to youth justice alternatives, we help create the kind of Canada we all want to live—one that is healthy, equitable, and inclusive from the ground up.

The reality is that children are not just the responsibility of families. They are the responsibility of a nation. A nation that claims to value its future cannot ignore the systems that shape the earliest years of life. We cannot build a robust and unified Canada if we are leaving behind the very people who will one day be called upon to lead it.

National unity is not only about geography or governance, but also about giving every child in this country—regardless of postal code—an honest and fair shot at success. That means serious political commitment to upstream investments: mental health and crime prevention programs in schools, family supports rooted in community, and early learning opportunities that are both accessible and culturally relevant.

Our political leaders need to understand that child development is nation-building.

Just look at the Child Development Institute's program Stop Now And Plan (SNAP), which is designed for children struggling with behaviour issues. It's been clinically proven to reduce aggressive and anti-social behaviour, build self-control

and emotional regulation skills, and lower future justice system involvement. But this program doesn't just help children. It reduces long-term social costs, it stabilizes families, and it helps communities thrive.

Supporting programs like SNAP isn't charity. It's a strategic, cost-saving, and scalable policy.

When governments invest in kids, we see generational returns. But when we allow child development to remain an afterthought, tucked behind more visible or politically urgent issues, we plant the seeds of inequality, disconnection, and division.

Now more than ever, we need a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach that sees child well-being as a core pillar of national strategy. This means embedding children's men-



Andrew Reddin is the chief executive officer of the Child Development Institute. *Handout photograph.*

tal health into health-care policy; integrating trauma-informed practices across education, justice, and housing systems; and funding innovation and research, and scaling what works.

We urge policymakers at all levels of government to treat child development not as an add-on, but as foundational. Because if we truly want a stronger and more unified Canada, we must build it from

the ground up. And that starts with courage, clarity, and a commitment to investing in our kids.

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*credited children's mental health agency and child-care provider delivering evidence-based programs to help children, youth, and families thrive.*

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