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GLOBAL

Children and youth need decisive action to improve their environmental health and well-being

By DAVID MORLEY AND EMILY GRUENWOLDT (/AUTHOR/DAVID-MORLEY-AND-EMILY-GRUENWOLDT) JUNE 27, 2022

Environmental damage is not just a distant crisis they will have to deal with in the future; it is damaging the minds and bodies of children right now, and some will live a lifetime with the mounting impacts.



Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault's mandate letter requires securing the 'right to a healthy environment in federal law and to introduce legislation to require the development of an environmental justice strategy.' *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

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Canada's grades are not top of the class in UNICEF's 17th report card on child and youth well-being, measuring the impacts of environmental damage on children and youth in the world's 39 richest countries. While Canada had decent grades related to overcrowded housing and environmental education, our country ranked 28th overall, and some of the findings are stinging:

“Canada is a rich country but a poor global citizen,” the report concluded (https://www.unicef.ca/sites/default/files/2022-05/UNICEF%20RC17%20Canadian%20Summary%20EN%20-%20DIGITAL.pdf). “Of the countries in the Report Card, Canada has the worst ranking for waste production, the second-worst ranking for resource consumption and the third-worst ranking for greenhouse gas emissions. The environmental impacts not only affect children in Canada today, but also spread to children beyond our borders and to future generations.”

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Canada's high level of wealth fuels activities that contribute to climate change and other environmental damage, without adequate regulation to reduce waste and pollution. Despite Canada's abundant land, water, and other natural resources, these grades show that our country is

failing to provide healthy environments for all children.

After many years of regulation, Canada's efforts to reduce children's exposure to toxicants are not complete. The majority breathe air that exceeds the World Health Organization (WHO) safe level, and more than one child in 100 has a poisonous level of lead in their blood, for which there is no safe level. We rank 29th for the percentage of children living in areas with high pesticide pollution risk and 23rd for the impacts of child road traffic casualties. Our children are more likely than many of their rich-country peers to lose years of healthy life from air pollution (ranking eighth) and unsafe water (ranking 24th).

Children's health and their stage of development makes them particularly vulnerable to toxins, extreme weather, lack of clean water, and traffic injury. Environmental damage is not just a distant crisis they will have to deal with in the future; it is damaging the minds and bodies of children right now, and some will live a lifetime with the mounting impacts.

Not surprisingly, children from marginalized, racialized, Indigenous, and lower-income communities are the most negatively impacted, with higher exposure to air pollution and traffic and greater deprivation of safe housing and green spaces.

The good news is that many of these impacts are preventable, and others can be alleviated. It will take stronger environmental protection policies and adaptation plans, at all levels of government, that specifically consider the needs and rights of children and youth and make them a priority.

Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault's mandate letter requires securing the "right to a healthy environment" in federal law and to introduce legislation to require the development of an environmental justice strategy." The federal government has recently rolled out new emissions, sustainability, and adaptation plans, and tabled Bill S-5 to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act (<https://www.parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/44-1/bill/S-5/first-reading>). This cornerstone environmental law recognizes that children are a particularly vulnerable group, but Bill S-5 should specifically require child impact assessments to protect them from toxin exposure and other environmental damage. The recently announced National Adaptation Strategy should give children priority in the protection, continuity, and restoration of health, education, and other services and supports when climate change crises disrupt and displace them.

But there is also a critical role for all policies and systems to ensure children and youth are resilient to climate change, including health, education, and social protection policies. We have a plan for that. It's called Inspiring Healthy Futures. Now all we need is for various levels of government to help implement it.



David Morley is the president and CEO of UNICEF Canada. *Photograph courtesy of UNICEF Canada*



Emily Gruenwoldt is president and CEO of Children's Healthcare Canada and executive director of Pediatric Chairs of Canada. *Photograph courtesy of Children's Healthcare Canada*

Inspiring Healthy Futures sets out the steps to create the healthy and sustainable future our children and youth deserve today. It was developed by a diverse, pan-Canadian group of youth, parents, researchers, educators, advocates, policy-makers, service providers, and community and business leaders, and it delivers a roadmap for positive change.

The vision emphasizes the need to recognize schools and communities as health and well-being hubs, and to develop child-centred policies and structures, and accessible, adaptable health and well-being systems that can survive environmental crises.

All of this must be driven by impactful research and knowledge.

The outcome would be to increase resilience in children and youth, and essential progress toward providing them with the basic necessities of life such as adequate incomes, food security, good housing, a safe environment, clean water, learning and literacy, development support and childcare, as well as reliable internet.

Finally, kids need to know that their voices are heard – and the release of this year’s UNICEF report card (https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/RC17-EN_Places-and-Spaces_Environments-and-childrens-well-being_Report-Card-17.pdf) provides the perfect opportunity to show that we’re listening.

The future is now. Raging storms, floods, and wildfires make the effects of climate change on our communities impossible to ignore. Long wait times for access to mental health services endanger our children and youth. And, long-term boil water advisories in 34 First Nations (<https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1506514143353/1533317130660>) are a stain on both our history and our present. We can and must do better.

The vision is there. Now we just need government support and action to make it a reality.

David Morley is the president and CEO of UNICEF Canada. Emily Gruenwoldt is president and CEO of Children’s Healthcare Canada and executive director of Pediatric Chairs of Canada.

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say-indigenous-advocates/368870)Assembly of First Nations National Chief RoseAnne Archibald says she is being targeted by the AFN's executive for her efforts to bring accountability and transparency to the organization, and is now rallying support.

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(<https://www.hilltimes.com/2022/06/27/coalition-warns-of-death-knell-to-cryptocurrency-industry-under-proposed-tax-law-changes/367740>)Proposed changes to the Excise Tax Act could shut cryptocurrency companies out of an GST/HST input tax credit that benefits the traditional mining sector.

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(<https://www.hilltimes.com/2022/06/27/win-or-lose-poilievre-may-already-represent-heart-and-soul-of-conservative-caucus/368863>)Even if Pierre Poilievre doesn't win, Conservative pundits and political analysts believe that whoever does will have to accommodate Poilievre. But if he does win, he'll need to reach out to his Quebec and Atlantic caucu

'Never been afraid to punch above our weight': set to retire this fall, Peter Van Dusen reflects on 21 years at CPAC
<https://www.hilltimes.com/2022/06/27/never-been-afraid-to-punch-above-our-weight-set-to-retire-this-fall-peter-van-dusen-reflects-on-21-years-at-cpac/368689>

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(<https://www.hilltimes.com/2022/06/27/never-been-afraid-to-punch-above-our-weight-set-to-retire-this-fall-peter-van-dusen-reflects-on-21-years-at-cpac/368689>)When Peter Van Dusen was first hired by CPAC more than 20 years ago,



it pretty much covered the House proceedings, but he turned it around. Today, it covers news, leadership conventions, and election campaigns.

Parliament Hill braces for Canada Day protest as MPs face threats
<https://www.hilltimes.com/2022/hill-braces-for-canada-day-protest-as-mps-face-threats/368996>

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(<https://www.hilltimes.com/2022/06/24/parliament-hill-braces-for-canada-day-protest-as-mps-face-threats/368996>) House Sgt.-at-Arms Pat McDonnell told the House Affairs Committee last week that staff and MPs were harassed on a daily basis during the Freedom Convoy's occupation of downtown Ottawa in February.

Government should be 'pretty pleased' with first session of Parliament, but summer will be 'the calm before the storm,' say observers
<https://www.hilltimes.com/2022/06/should-be-pretty-pleased-with-first-session-of-parliament-but-summer-will-be-the-calm-before-the-storm-say-observers/368921>

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Rule change lets MPs charge House up to \$36,000 annually for constituency rentals amid office budget pressures
<https://www.hilltimes.com/2022/06/change-lets-mps-charge-house-up-to-36000-annually-for-constituency-rentals-amid-office-budget-pressure/369030>

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(<https://www.hilltimes.com/2022/06/23/rule-change-lets-mps-charge-house-up-to-36000-annually-for-constituency-rentals-amid-office-budget-pressure/369030>) Plus, the Board approved a 10 per cent increase to the

Travel Status Expenses Account to help offset the rise in MP secondary residence rental costs in the National Capital Region.

New staffers on board for ministers Fraser, Petitpas Taylor
(<https://www.hilltimes.com/2022/06/23/new-staffers-on-board-for-ministers-fraser-petitpas-taylor/368813>)

FEATURE | By LAURA RYCKEWAERT ([HTTPS://WWW.HILLTIMES.COM/AUTHOR/LAURA-RYCKEWAERT](https://www.hilltimes.com/author/laura-ryckewaert))



(<https://www.hilltimes.com/2022/06/23/new-staffers-on-board-for-ministers-fraser-petitpas-taylor/368813>) Among others, Cib Cabillan is now issues manager to Immigration Minister Sean Fraser, and Audrey Léveseque Aubut has joined Official Languages Minister Ginette Petitpas Taylor's parliamentary affairs team.

Charest's route to Conservative leader 'very similar to the party's path to victory,' says Kheiriddin
(<https://www.hilltimes.com/2022/06/22/charests-route-to-conservative-leader-very-similar-to-the-partys-path-to-victory-says-kheiriddin/368649>)

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(<https://www.hilltimes.com/2022/06/22/charests-route-to-conservative-leader-very-similar-to-the-partys-path-to-victory-says-kheiriddin/368649>) Strategists and pollsters say the Conservative Party membership is divided into 'two different audiences,' meaning persuasion will be difficult and campaigns should focus on bringing out their own vote.

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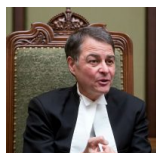
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