



June 9, 2025

Open letter to

The Right Honourable Mark Carney, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada

Re.: Prioritizing youth mental health as a pillar of One Canadian Economy

Dear Prime Minister Carney,

I am writing to encourage you to prioritize youth mental health as a key investment under the *One Canadian Economy* initiative. As Canada charts a path toward a more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable future, the mental well-being of young people must be recognized as a foundational economic and social priority.

Mental health challenges among youth are escalating at an alarming rate. One in five young Canadians experiences a mental health disorder, and suicide remains the second leading cause of death among youth aged 15 to 24. These challenges are not only a public health crisis; they are an economic one. Many youth facing mental health challenges have two choices: 1) seek treatment, or 2) become part of the mental health, homelessness, toxic drug, and public safety crises. The impact on the government includes reduced tax revenues throughout their entire lifetime, and significantly greater expenses in the social safety net the longer that these crises continue.

Delays in access to care for anxiety and depression among youth cost Canada at least **\$4 billion annually**, reflecting burdens on the health, education, and justice systems, as well as lost income for families. If left unaddressed, the lifetime cost of mental health issues for today's 10-year-olds could reach **\$1 trillion**.

Investing in youth mental health meets all five of the *One Canadian Economy* initiative assessment criteria:

1. **Strengthen Canada's Autonomy, Resilience, and Security:** A mentally healthy youth population is essential to a strong, adaptable workforce and a secure future. Early intervention builds resilience and reduces long-term dependence on public systems.
2. **Provide Economic or Other Benefits to Canada:** Youth mental health investments yield high returns through improved educational outcomes, increased productivity, and reduced public expenditures. Every dollar spent on early intervention can save multiple dollars in future costs.
3. **Have a High Likelihood of Successful Execution:** Canada is home to a range of proven, community-based mental health programs that are ready to scale. These models are evidence-based, culturally responsive, and integrated into existing public systems.
4. **Advance the Interests of Indigenous Peoples:** Indigenous youth face disproportionately high rates of mental health challenges due to intergenerational trauma and systemic inequities. Supporting culturally grounded, Indigenous-led mental health initiatives is essential to reconciliation and equity.
5. **Contribute to Clean Growth and Climate Objectives:** Many youth mental health programs incorporate land-based and nature-based therapies, fostering environmental stewardship and a deeper connection to the land. These values align with Canada's climate and sustainability goals.



TAKE A HIKE
FOUNDATION

One such program is the **Take a Hike Youth Mental Health Foundation**, which partners with public school districts to deliver full-time mental health support integrated with outdoor experiential learning. Take a Hike's model has demonstrated a social return on investment of **\$5.60 to \$13.40** for every dollar spent, through improved graduation rates, reduced service dependency, and better long-term outcomes for youth. With 16 locations across British Columbia and Ontario, Take a Hike exemplifies the kind of scalable, high-impact initiative that aligns with the goals of *One Canadian Economy*.

Young people today are yet again facing unprecedented challenges that demand urgent attention and action. They are contending with the compounded effects of the affordability crisis, the long-term impacts of the pandemic, global economic pressures, and growing climate deficit. All of this impacts youth mental health at a critical stage of youth development that is already marked by anxiety and uncertainty.

If we are to build a resilient, inclusive economy for the future, we must prioritize investment in youth mental health as a core component of any economic solution. Supporting young people today means strengthening Canada's social and economic fabric for generations to come.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to building a stronger, more inclusive Canada. I hope you will consider youth mental health as a strategic investment in our shared future and would be happy to elaborate further in a meeting with you.

Yours Truly,

Gordon Matchett

Chief Executive Officer