



COUNCIL REPORT

Report Date: October 6, 2023
Contact: Wilma Clarke
Contact No.: 604.873.7476
RTS No.: 15828
VanRIMS No.: 08-2000-20
Meeting Date: October 18, 2023
[Submit comments to Council](#)

TO: Standing Committee on City Finance and Services

FROM: General Manager of Arts, Culture and Community Services

SUBJECT: Building Safer Communities Program – Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy

Recommendations

- A. THAT Council adopt the 2023 – 2026 Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy, as described generally in this report and as presented in Appendix A.
- B. THAT Council approve the program plan and funding allocations for the remaining three-years of the Building Safer Communities Vancouver Program as described in this report, including the Granting Program to support community-based youth violence prevention efforts developed through engagement with youth, public partners and non-profit organizations to advance the priorities identified in the Strategy.

Purpose and Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of the Federally-funded Building Safer Communities Program, and seeks adoption of the proposed City of Vancouver Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy and approval of the proposed accompanying granting framework and implementation plan.

Council Authority/Previous Decisions

- Healthy City Strategy: [October 29, 2014](#)
- The Vancouver Children’s Policy: [March, 12, 1992](#)
- The Civic Youth Strategy: [March, 28, 1995](#)

City Manager’s Comments

The City Manager concurs with the foregoing recommendations.

Context and Background

The Building Safer Communities Program (BSCP)

The Building Safer Communities Fund is a Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada contribution program that provides municipalities with funding to develop youth violence prevention strategies and to support community-based interventions to implement these strategies. The primary objectives of the federal program include: a) to support municipalities to develop community-based prevention and intervention plans, b) to increase the knowledge of the nature, scope and challenges of gun and gang violence affecting youth and c) to support recipients to develop a plan to sustain successful prevention and intervention models.

Signed in 2022, the City of Vancouver's contribution agreement allocated \$4,283,535 over four years to the City to support community-based prevention and intervention strategies that address the risk factors associated with gun and gang violence. As part of this program, the City is obligated to provide yearly reporting and distribute funding on an annual basis (See Financial Section for a breakdown of annual allocations).

The recommendations in this report fulfill obligations in the contribution agreement signed with Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada. The adoption of the Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy and the approval of the Building Safer Communities Granting Program provide the framework required to fulfill the City's obligations under the contribution agreement and to support community-based violence prevention programming in the city.

Policy Context: International and Vancouver

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) states that all children and youth have the right to be protected and to live in safe environments. Children and youth also have a right to give their opinions in all matters that affect them, and have these voices heard. Under the CRC, children and youth need to be prepared to evolve into responsible adulthood and – given children's specific vulnerabilities and social status within societies – governments must make sustained efforts to proactively protect children and youth from harm¹. Cities have significant power, influence and responsibility for the environments that children and youth grow up and experience on a daily basis.

The City of Vancouver has a long history of working and investing in children and youth, both through dedicated programs and policy strategies including the Children's Agenda Policy (1992), the Vancouver Civic Youth Strategy (1995) and Making Strides: Vancouver's Childcare Strategy (2022).

The City of Vancouver's Civic Youth Strategy is an explicit commitment to work in partnership with youth, across City departments and the larger community, on issues affecting youth. The Civic Youth Strategy has four core policy objectives:

- a) Ensuring youth have a place in the City;
- b) Ensuring strong youth voice in decision making;
- c) Promoting youth as a resource to the City; and

¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

d) Strengthening the support base for youth.

Through the Civic Youth Strategy, the City committed to involving youth and youth-driven and serving organizations as active partners in the development, assessment and delivery of civic services which have a direct impact on youth and on broad spectrum consultations and initiatives on civic issues.

The BSCP program and the development of the Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy has provided the City with the opportunity to reignite and renew its approach to working on City-wide youth policy and planning in a more systematic and comprehensive way. As part of this project, staff will continue to promote the importance of youth engagement in civic processes and services and will establish a road map for working together to support healthy youth development in the city within our respective municipal institutions and areas of work.

Vancouver BSCP Program Delivery Approach

Over the past 9 months, Social Policy and Projects staff worked with community partners and youth to design the proposed approach to implementing Building Safer Communities Program in Vancouver as presented in this report. This work included setting up a project team, including youth community developers; conducting baseline research on youth wellbeing, the youth service sector and youth violence; coordinating a community engagement process and action research projects; and working with youth, community and public partners (VPD, VFRS, VPL, VPB, VSB, and VCH) to develop the proposed strategy and granting program.

Over 780 children and youth were reached as part of dialogue sessions, community-based research projects, and events. 110 partners from non-profit youth serving agencies, community groups and public partners were involved in the policy discussions that set the direction of the strategy and implementation plan. Please see *Appendix B* for an overview of the engagement process.

Staff also convened other municipalities implementing similar BSCP violence prevention initiatives to promote regional information sharing and communication in recognition that youth engage and travel across the region.

Discussion

The proposed City of Vancouver Youth Safety and Violence Prevention strategy outlines a comprehensive approach to enhancing the safety and wellbeing of youth in Vancouver. It aims to address root causes of youth violence and identify community and public responses that effectively prevent its occurrence and recurrence. The focus is primarily on early violence prevention efforts that promote individual and community well being, safety and belonging in the city. The strategy sets out a plan to create safe spaces and empower young people and communities to develop and implement solutions.

Proposed Strategic Framework

To ensure clear and aligned investments and interventions across all sectors and organizations, the proposed Strategy includes a Vision, 5 Focus Areas, and Priorities for each of the Areas.

Please see *Appendix A* for the proposed Strategy: *City of Vancouver Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy 2023-2026*.

Proposed Vision: a city where youth feel safe, supported, connected, healthy and free of violence.

Focused primarily on upstream early violence prevention and some downstream interventions, the proposed strategy recommends 7 guiding principles that promote community-based solutions to youth violence. These include reconciliation and decolonization, anti-racism, intersectionality, accessibility, collaboration, data-informed and comprehensiveness. Grounded on a life course approach, the proposed Strategy promotes understanding child and youth's needs and experiences of safety along critical developmental stages, including early childhood, middle years, adolescence, and transition to adulthood.

Proposed Focus Areas and Priorities for Youth Safety and Violence Prevention in the City

Youth violence results from the interplay of societal factors, including individual, relationship, family, and community. It is strongly shaped by social determinants of health such as poverty, social exclusion, racism, unemployment, inadequate housing, and community disorganization². It is also a public health issue, which means that an organized effort across many sectors of society and disciplines is required to address the emotional, physical and environmental aspects of this problem. Youth, community and public partners clearly articulated that in order to enhance safety and wellbeing outcomes for children and youth, it is imperative to focus our collective efforts on upstream early prevention initiatives and strategies that address youth violence in its broadest sense, to include racism, lateral and systemic violence, bullying and stigmatization, gun and gang violence, gender based violence, and online violence. The Building Safer in Communities Program will primarily focus on early intervention efforts, which has been discussed and approved by Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada.

Early primary violence prevention efforts promote and enhance protective factors at the family, social, neighbourhood and community level. Protective factors are positive influences that mitigate the impact of risk factors and decrease the likelihood of problem behaviour. Violence prevention efforts with an upstream orientation include community mobilization, provision of personal development opportunities, social intervention through community organizations and organizational change and development for key stakeholders working with youth experiencing risk factors for gang involvement³. Research on effective upstream crime prevention models highlight that successful strategies focus on building positive relationships and patterns of interaction with mentors and pro-social peers; creating positive social environments through community, family and service organizations; promoting social and economic policies that support

² <https://www.camh.ca/-/media/files/pdfs---public-policy-submissions/a-balanced-approach-to-youth-violence-2006-pdf.pdf>

³ <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/231200.pdf>

positive youth development⁴. Family based risk mitigations are also important components of preventive models, including addressing attachment issues, parents/grandparents/adult relatives as primary role models, stable home environments as well as stable housing and employment for the primary caregivers. Recognizing the complex ecosystem of systems, programs, and services with which youth interact and the responsibilities of various government and public entities, staff recommend a focus on early youth violence prevention and enhancing protective factors⁵. Accordingly, the proposed focus areas and priorities are centered on community level protective factors which are positive influences that improve safety and decrease the likelihood of youth violence in the Vancouver context.

Proposed Focus Areas and Associated Priorities

Focus Areas	Priorities
Focus Area 1: Create safer and protective community environments and public spaces for youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured and unstructured spaces for youth to gather • Safety in public spaces and on public transportation • Community based supports attached to schools, community centres and libraries • Community and civic programs that promote youth decision making and engagement in governance
Focus Area 2: Identify and strengthen community-based supports for healthy child development in the middle years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Middle childhood service provision and coordination of early violence prevention programs • Developmentally and culturally appropriate services and supports • Parent, guardian and family engagement in violence prevention and intervention • Trauma informed middle childhood approaches and programs
Focus Area 3: Strengthen the coordination and provision of positive youth development services and programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve service planning and coordination • Targeted and identity specific strategies and programs for equity denied youth • Capacity building of the youth sector • Promotion of youth development through arts, sports, recreation and community participation
Focus Area 4: Connect youth to caring adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness about the importance of caring and supportive youth / adult relationships • Intergenerational programming • Mentorship programs • Youth sector staff development, capacity and recognition
Focus Area 5: Lessen the impacts of serious violence and crime on children and youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES⁶) reducing the risk, harm, criminality and future victimization • Mental health support for victims, offenders and bystanders • Intervention strategies for children and youth affected by cyberbullying, sexual exploitation and youth gang involvement

⁴ Youth gang involvement: what are the Risk factors <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrscs/pblctns/yth-gng-nvlvmnt/yth-gng-nvlvmnt-eng.pdf>

⁵ Protective factors which are positive influences that mitigate the impact of risk factors and decrease the likelihood of problem behaviour, crime or victimization. These may include strong social supports, community engagement, problem-solving, conflict resolution and de-escalation skills, positive adult role models, coaches, mentors, healthy middle childhood development, participation in traditional healing and cultural activities, opportunities for social connectedness, creation of safer online and physical spaces, positive peer relationships, affordable and stable housing and opportunities for steady employment and skills building, availability of social, recreational and cultural services and programs for children and youth etc.

⁶ Adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years), these affect brain development and are associated with major health and violence risk factors in adulthood and poor quality of life. As children and youth can be directly affected by violence either as victims, offenders or witnesses it is important to reduce the risk of future harm

Proposed Granting Program

To support the implementation of the Strategy, staff are proposing a three-year Building Safer Communities Vancouver Granting Program, funded by the federal contribution program.

Staff are recommending an allocation of \$2.7 Million dollars over three years of the federal funding to the BSCP Granting program. Staff have articulated three granting streams to support community-based organizations to build the capacity of the sector, deliver early violence prevention programs and support youth action projects in alignment with the proposed strategy.

Stream 1: BSCP Organizational and Youth Sector Capacity Building Project grants

Focus on supporting non-profit agencies to improve their ability to deliver youth violence prevention programs. Capacity building projects must enhance the ability of community organizations to successfully address youth violence through staff development, strengthening linkages and collaboration between youth serving agencies, and/or improving processes and systems to help ensure equitable access to early youth violence prevention services and programs.

Annual budget: \$100,000 per year. Call for applications: ongoing intake.

Stream 2: BSCP Youth Violence Prevention program grants

Provide multi-year funding to (existing or new) service delivery networks across the City to deliver early violence prevention programs that address community level risk factors associated with gun and gang violence among specific equity denied youth communities.

Annual budget: \$850,000 (year 1 and 2) and \$375,000 (year 3). Call for applications: October 2023, 2024 and 2025:

- Initiatives need to align with the priorities and address the needs identified in the City of Vancouver Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy.
- Programming must focus primarily on children in the middle years and/or adolescent youth belonging to equity denied youth communities.
- Service delivery networks are defined as organizational partnerships between two or more agencies working together to deliver youth programs or services for a particular community.

Stream 3: BSCP Youth engagement project grants

Increase a sense of safety and belonging among Vancouver youth through projects that build social-emotional learning skills that prevent youth violence. Initiatives must incorporate a peer-to-peer approach to project implementation and need to focus on enhancing protective factors that lessen the likelihood of youth violence victimization or perpetration.

Annual budget: \$100,000 per year. Call for applications: January 2024 and 2025.

All grant recommendations will be brought to Council for approval.

Next Steps

Should Council approve the recommendations in the report, project staff will implement the granting program in alignment with the Strategy (Vision, Focus Areas, Priorities), begin to implement the evaluation of the overall program, and continue to convene stakeholders. Federal funding also supports community mobilization, network building, and evaluation so the activities above will continue to be funded by the Federal program.

Financial Implications

The City signed a contribution agreement with Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada to administer \$4,283,535 until March 2026 as per the approved program submission. All costs associated with this project (including grants) are covered through the Federal funding contribution. Quarterly financial and activity reporting is required to be reimbursed for program expenses. No carry forward provision is available.

With the scoping work completed and the proposed strategy and associated granting program presented in this report for Council consideration, staff are also proposing the following disbursement of the remaining three years of federal funding to continue to engage with the community and implement the proposed strategy if approved (highlighted light blue rows below). Please see *Appendix C* for more detail on the proposed program activities and funding breakdown.

Year	Total Federal funding	Community Tables	Network Building and Sector Development	Granting Program	Youth Community Dev. Program	Research, Monitoring and Evaluation	Strategy & Program Dev and Implementation
FY 22/23 April 1 2022 to March 31 2023	\$428,353	\$48,150	\$25,050	\$100,000	\$42,000	\$43,750	\$169,403
FY 23/24 April 1 2023 to March 31 2024	\$1,499,237	\$23,225	\$35,762	\$1,050,000	\$85,000	\$41,250	\$264,000
FY 24/25 April 1 2024 to March 31 2025	\$1,499,237	\$25,025	\$40,212	\$1,050,000	\$90,000	\$30,000	\$264,000
FY 25/26 April 1 2025 to March 31 2026	\$856,707	\$14,230	\$28,477	\$475,000	\$45,000	\$30,000	\$264,000
Total	\$4,283,535	\$110,631	\$129,501	\$2,675,000	\$262,000	\$145,000	\$961,403

Legal Implications

There are no legal implications associated with this report's recommendations.

* * * * *

Appendix A

CITY OF VANCOUVER YOUTH SAFETY AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION STRATEGY

2023-2026



Building Safer Communities Program

DRAFT: SUBJECT TO COUNCIL CONSIDERATION

The City of Vancouver acknowledges that it is situated on the unceded traditional territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam Indian Band), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish Nation) and səliłwətaʔ (Tseil-Waututh Nation)

The City of Vancouver's Building Safer Communities Program is funded by Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada

Table of Contents

Executive Summary 10

Introduction 11

Section 1. Youth Safety and Well-being of Youth in Vancouver: The Case for a Focus on Early Youth Violence Prevention..... 11

 Upstream vs. downstream Interventions 12

 Who are we focusing on and why? 13

 An opportunity to strengthen protective factors for healthy child and youth development 14

 Children and youth participation in the City 15

 Youth engagement as youth violence prevention 15

Section 2. The State of Child and Youth Safety and Well-Being in the City 16

 Concerning trends in child and youth well-being 17

 Factors that affect safety, security and belonging in the city 20

 The child- and youth-serving sector 26

Section 3. A Municipal Approach to Youth Safety and Well-being in Vancouver: Guiding Principles, Focus Areas and Priorities for the City 29

 Guiding principles 29

Section 4. Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Focus Areas and Priorities for the City 32

 Focus area 1: Create safer and protective community environments and public spaces for youth 32

 Focus area 2: Identify and strengthen community-based supports for healthy child development in the middle years 33

 Focus area 3: Strengthen the coordination and provision of positive youth development services and programs 34

 Focus area 5: Lessen the impacts of serious violence and crime on children and youth 37

 Approach to implementation and next steps 38

Section 5. Assessing our Impact and Tracking our Work 39

 Gathering data and reporting progress 39

 Monitoring long-term change 39

Section 6. Demographic Profile of Children and Youth in the City 40

 Where youth reside 40

 Older youth disproportionately experience poverty 40

 Vancouver youth are very diverse 41

 Youth transitioning to independent living are at higher risk of housing insecurity 43

Endnotes 50

Executive Summary

The City of Vancouver Youth Safety and Violence Prevention (YSVP) strategy outlines a comprehensive approach to enhancing the safety and well-being of youth in Vancouver. It aims to address root causes of youth violence and identify community responses that effectively prevent its occurrence and recurrence. Developed as part of the Building Safer Communities Program and in alignment with the Healthy City Strategy, the YSVP strategy primarily focuses on early violence prevention efforts that promote individual and community well being, safety and belonging in the city. The strategy sets out a plan to create safer spaces and empower young people and communities to develop and implement solutions.

A comprehensive community engagement and policy planning process took place over the last year to identify the vision, focus areas and priorities required to enhance youth safety and well-being in the city. Over 780 children and youth were reached as part of dialogue sessions, community based research projects and events. 110 partners from non-profit youth serving agencies, community groups and public partners were involved in the policy discussions that set the direction of the strategy and implementation plan.

The Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy is guided by a *vision of a city where youth feel safe, supported, connected, healthy and free of violence*. Focused primarily on upstream early violence prevention and some downstream interventions, this strategy proposes guiding principles that promote community-based solutions to youth violence. Grounded on a life course approach, the Strategy promotes understanding child and youth's needs and experiences of safety along critical developmental stages including, early childhood, middle years, adolescence and transition to adulthood.

To achieve this vision, the strategy identifies five focus areas and key priorities for collective action. Developed in collaboration with youth, representatives from youth serving organizations, public partners and City departments, the focus areas and priorities are centered on community level protective factors which are positive influences that improve safety and decrease the likelihood of youth violence in the Vancouver context.

- **Focus Area 1:** Create safer and protective community environments and public spaces for youth.
- **Focus Area 2:** Identify and strengthen community based supports for healthy child development in the middle years.
- **Focus Area 3:** Strengthen the coordination and provision of positive youth development services and programs.
- **Focus Area 4:** Connect youth to caring adults.
- **Focus Area 5:** Lessen the impacts on children and youth that have experienced serious violence and crime.

To support the implementation of the Strategy, the City will be administering the Building Safer Communities Granting Program over the next three years with funds from the federal contribution program. Federal funding will also support community mobilization, network building and priority setting efforts to address emerging issues related to youth violence in Vancouver in partnership with youth, community organizations and public partners.

Introduction

This Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy (YSVP or “the Strategy”) is a culmination of extensive research and community engagement that brought together diverse voices with a shared commitment to seeing children and youth in Vancouver thrive. Over the 12 months leading up to the Strategy’s release, Social Policy staff convened key stakeholders including youth, public institutions and community organizations to articulate the state of youth safety and violence in Vancouver and opportunities for action. In addition, staff conducted extensive research on youth safety and the factors that both protect youth from harm and support their healthy development more broadly. This was done via a literature review, analyzing public health data and trends and highlighting pertinent studies from community organizations that helped paint a comprehensive picture of the well-being of youth in Vancouver. Over 780 children and youth were reached as part of dialogue sessions, community based research projects and events. 110 partners from non-profit youth serving agencies, community groups and public partners were involved in the policy discussions that set the direction of the strategy and implementation plan.

Section 1. Youth Safety and Well-being of Youth in Vancouver: The Case for a Focus on Early Youth Violence Prevention

The City of Vancouver Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy outlines a comprehensive approach and three year plan to enhancing the safety and well-being of youth in Vancouver by working together to address youth violence before it occurs and identifying community responses that effectively prevent its recurrence.

Developed as part of the Building Safer Communities Program supported by contributions from Public Safety Canada, the YSVP Strategy emphasizes preventative approaches (i.e. “upstream” interventions) to mitigate social and community level risk factors associated with gun and gang violence in the city. Youth, community and public partners have been clear in articulating that in order to enhance safety and well-being outcomes for children and youth, our collective efforts should be focused on upstream early prevention initiatives and strategies. These initiatives should address youth violence in its broadest sense, to include racism, lateral and systemic violence, bullying and stigmatization, gun and gang violence, gender-based violence and online violence.

Youth violence results from the interplay of individual, relationship, family, community and societal factors. The occurrence of violence is strongly shaped by social determinants of health such as poverty, social exclusion, racism, unemployment, inadequate housing and community disorganization.¹ As a public health issue, the prevention and mitigation of violence requires an organized effort across many sectors of society and disciplines to address the emotional, physical and environmental aspects of this problem.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) explicitly states that all children and youth have the right to be protected and live in safe environments and that children and youth have the right to actively participate in decision-making affecting their lives. Under the UNCRC, children and youth need to be prepared to evolve into responsible adulthood, and given children’s specific vulnerabilities and social status within societies, governments must make sustained efforts to proactively protect children and youth from harm.² Cities have significant power, influence and responsibility for the environments that children and youth experience on a daily basis as they grow. The City of Vancouver has a long history of working and investing in children and youth, both through dedicated programs and through population-based initiatives guided by the City’s Civic Youth Strategy (1995). To enhance safety and well-being outcomes for youth within the context of youth violence prevention, both upstream and downstream strategies need to be considered across a spectrum of potential interventions that target different sub-populations. There is significant research and data illustrating that upstream prevention is more effective than downstream interventions in reducing violence,^{3,4} although midstream and downstream interventions have an important role to play too.

Upstream vs. downstream Interventions

Using the analogy of a river, “upstream” and “downstream” are two different ways to address a problem in society. If you’re standing on the edge of a river and you keep seeing pollution float by, you could focus your efforts on cleaning up pollution *downstream* from its original source, one piece at a time. Or you could go *upstream* and stop the pollution from getting into the river in the first place. *Downstream* means solutions are more reactive and tend to focus on the individual while upstream solutions try and get at the source of the issue and focus on a broader population at-risk of harm.

Youth Violence Prevention Continuumⁱ			
Social development	Early prevention	Intervention	Treatment, suppression and incident response
<i>Upstream</i>	<i>Upstream</i>	<i>Midstream</i>	<i>Downstream</i>
Focuses on promoting and maintaining safety and well-being Prevents violence before it occurs Targets the youth population as a whole	Focuses on working with communities to identify and prioritize risks before crime, victimization or harm occurs Prevents acts of violence before they occur	Targets children and youth at increased risk for violence due to prevalence of risk factors or high-risk activities Immediate responses to violence Involves multiple sectors working	Immediate and reactive responses involving victims, perpetrators and witness of violence Complex interventions after violence has occurred focused on

ⁱ Adapted from the Region of Peel and City of Toronto youth violence prevention models.

<p>rather than individuals</p> <p>Promotes healthy development and equity related to social determinants of health</p>	<p>Promotes and enhances protective factors at the family, social, neighbourhood and community level</p>	<p>together to interrupt situations where the risk of harm is or could escalate</p>	<p>those involved in serious offences</p> <p>Involves emergency responses to lessen the harms of violence and crime among affected communities</p>
--	--	---	--

The Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy is mainly an upstream prevention strategy focused on the social determinants of health which are the non-medical factors that impact health outcomes of individuals.⁵ These factors include:⁶

- Income and social protection
- Unemployment and job insecurity
- Food insecurity
- Early childhood development
- Structural conflict
- Access to affordable health services of decent quality
- Education
- Working life conditions
- Housing, basic amenities and the environment
- Social inclusion and non-discrimination

Meeting these goals also requires a participatory approach, with children and youth actively involved in planning and decision-making. The Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy will work with community and public partners to develop children’s and youths’ capacities and skills in leadership, civic engagement, conflict resolution and de-escalation, employment, advocacy and life-skills. The Strategy will also support the capacity of the City and the sector to engage with and provide services for children and youth, promoting youth safety and well-being and continually reducing the gaps children and youth experience in the determinants of health.

Who are we focusing on and why?

A focus on the middle years (6-12) and adolescence (13-18) are priorities for the City’s Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy. Key experiences during these formative years shape minds and attitudes and play an important role in social identity development. These years include many physical, emotional and cognitive changes, as well as shifts in how children and youth engage with the broader community as they gain more independence.

Middle childhood (6-12) sets the course for success in adolescent and adult years. Research shows that a child’s overall health and well-being during this critical period affects their ability to concentrate and learn, develop and maintain friendships, and navigate thoughtful decision-making.⁷ Similarly, research has consistently shown that adolescence (13-18) requires healthy developmental supports and opportunities. During adolescence, young people reflect on self in relation to others, experiment with their identity, develop feelings of accountability and cultivate the capacity to enjoy life. During this time youth learn

to develop competencies to participate as citizens, gain experience in decision-making, acquire a sense of belonging, formulate their own value system and learn to discuss conflicting values.⁸

As part of the engagement process for the Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy, staff set out to better understand what safe and inclusive cities look like for children and youth. Staff sought the perspectives of children and youth from diverse communities to identify the best ways to support healthy child and youth development and prevent youth violence (See Appendix A: The making of Vancouver’s Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy: Community Engagement and Research Journey that Shaped the Strategy). At our dialogue sessions staff heard that although Vancouver is generally considered to be a safe and inclusive city, some children and youth are struggling to meet basic needs, don’t feel safe within their local neighbourhoods and, unfortunately, a large proportion of children and youth are lacking the supports to thrive during this important phase of their lives.

Research indicates that the overall well-being of children and youth in Vancouver has been deteriorating for some time and the pandemic exacerbated risk factors for this population group. Across communities, mental well-being and socio-emotional development indicators have worsened. Recent studies indicate diminishing health, well-being and resiliency among youth in Vancouver including increasing rates of adolescent obesity, heart disease, mental health issues, major injuries due to violence, use of certain drugs and other risk behaviours. Research has linked these declining indicators in strong part to declining rates of youth engagement in their communities, increased social isolation and reduced access to social and community networks.⁹

An opportunity to strengthen protective factors for healthy child and youth development

A key feature of effective prevention strategies includes a focus on protective factors, those positive influences that mitigate the impact of risk factors and decrease the likelihood of violence promoting behaviours, crimes or victimization. Protective factors, like risk factors, are often overlapping and interconnected at individual, family/peer, community/school and/or societal levels. The Strategy through the Building Safer Communities Program aims at strengthening

social and community level protective factors through the implementation of prevention efforts. These efforts are specifically directed towards community mobilization and planning,

Key protective factors prioritized through the engagement process include:

- Strong social supports
- Community engagement
- Problem-solving, conflict resolution and de-escalation skills
- Positive adult role models, coaches, mentors
- Healthy middle childhood development
- Support during the middle years
- Participation in traditional healing and cultural activities
- Opportunities for social connectedness
- Creation of safer online and physical spaces
- Positive peer relationships
- Affordable and stable housing and opportunities for steady employment and skills building
- Availability of social, recreational and cultural services and programs for children and youth

youth sector development and social interventions through community-based strategies and youth engagement.

Children and youth participation in the City

The City of Vancouver’s commitment to the children and youth in the city can be traced back to 1992 with the adoption of the Children’s Agenda Policy and the development of the Vancouver Civic Youth Strategy in 1995.

As the foundation for the City’s Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy, the Civic Youth Strategy is a statement of commitment to work in partnership with youth, within the City across departments and the larger community.

The Civic Youth Strategy has four core policy objectives:

- a) Ensuring youth have a place in the City;
- b) Ensuring strong youth voice in decision making;
- c) Promoting youth as a resource to the City; and
- d) Strengthening the support base for youth.¹⁰

Through this policy the City is committed to involving youth, youth-driven and youth-serving organizations as active partners in the development, assessment and delivery of civic services which have direct impact on youth. The City is also committed to a broad-spectrum of consultations and initiatives on civic issues.

Strengthening a city that youth can identify as being safe requires the participation of young people in addition to planning and coordination across the youth-serving and public sectors. Creating safer spaces for youth requires meaningful youth engagement and a commitment to take protective measures proactively to ensure that youth are being appropriately supported on a societal level.

Youth engagement as youth violence prevention

The implementation of this Strategy emphasizes youth engagement, since this is a well-established form of violence prevention. Youth engagement is considered an upstream approach to violence prevention that can mobilize the entire youth-serving sector, education system, academia, the business community and government agencies.

The Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy builds on a range of policy work that relates to making Vancouver a safe and inclusive city for children and youth.

- 1989** | Canada signed onto the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- 1990** | Civic Childcare Strategy
- 1992** | Vancouver Children’s Policy
- 1995** | Civic Youth Strategy
- 2002** | Moving Forward – Childcare: A Cornerstone of Child Development Services
- 2014** | Healthy City Strategy
- 2014** | Reconciliation Framework
- 2021** | Equity Framework
- 2022** | Accessibility Strategy
- 2022** | Making Strides: Vancouver’s Approach

Youth engagement is defined as “the meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity that has a focus outside of themselves. Full engagement consists of a behavioral component (such as spending time doing the activity), an affective component (for example, deriving pleasure from participating) and a cognitive component (for example, knowing about the activity).”¹¹

Youth engagement moves beyond the participation of young people. First and foremost, participation must be meaningful to the young person involved in order for them to become engaged. Also, engagement usually involves young people having opportunities to take responsibility and leadership while working in partnership with caring adults who value, respect and share power with them. Further, it should be noted that “engagement is a process, not a particular program – and most importantly, it is reciprocal, dynamic and interactive.”¹²

Scholars have identified three compelling rationales for organizations to engage youth, and more specifically, engage youth in organizational decision-making.¹³

1. Engaging youth in organizations helps to advance social justice and representation – a **rights-based approach** systematically upheld by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990). The UNCRC outlines in articles 12, 13 & 14, the right of children under 18 years of age to fully participate in decisions that affect them; to be able to express their ideas and concerns in any way that is appropriate for them; and to have access to full information about situations that affect them. This perspective on youth engagement is enacted mainly through consultation with young people.
2. Youth engagement **promotes youth development** – involving youth in community or organizational governance is a way for young people to actively participate in their own learning and therefore, a pathway for a young person’s healthy development. This perspective is limited to individual development, often at the cost of organizational/community development, particularly in initiatives that engage youth in ‘practicing’ organizational or community planning or decision-making until they are perceived to be adequately prepared to do so and/or until they are adults.
3. Engaging youth contributes to building civil society and supports youth’s ability to act on their individual rights while exercising their responsibilities to contribute to the common good. This rationale is based upon the notion that communities work better with **diverse stakeholders** that bring various valuable perspectives and competencies. This perspective emphasizes partnership models typically involving youth in adult-created institutional structures and working together in more equitable power dynamics to influence decisions and outcomes.

Section 2. The State of Child and Youth Safety and Well-Being in the City

Children and youth represent a generation full of promise, and yet, to reach their full potential they need to be set up for success. As articulated in Section 6 (Demographic Profile of Children and Youth in the City), recent data demonstrates that young people are faced with significant pressures due to poverty, discrimination, immigration status and housing unaffordability. In this section, we dig into the data to explore how Vancouver’s children and youth are faring and the role community organizations can play in supporting them.

Concerning trends in child and youth well-being

Socio-economic vulnerabilities play a significant role in children’s healthy development. Well-being measurements tailored to the early years, middle years and adolescents offer valuable insight into how children and youth are faring in BC and especially in Vancouver. Key trends are highlighted below for each of these stages of child development.

Early years

According to data collected through the Early Years Development Instrument (EDI) between 2019 and 2022 (wave 8), 33.7% of Vancouver kindergarten students were considered developmentally vulnerable on one or more scalesⁱ (on par with the BC-wide average of 32.9%). Over time there has not been a significant change in vulnerability among this age group. Progress in addressing vulnerabilities in the communication skills scale has been offset by increasing vulnerability in other areas, particularly emotional development. These vulnerabilities mirror the social and economic challenges faced by parents, families and communities.

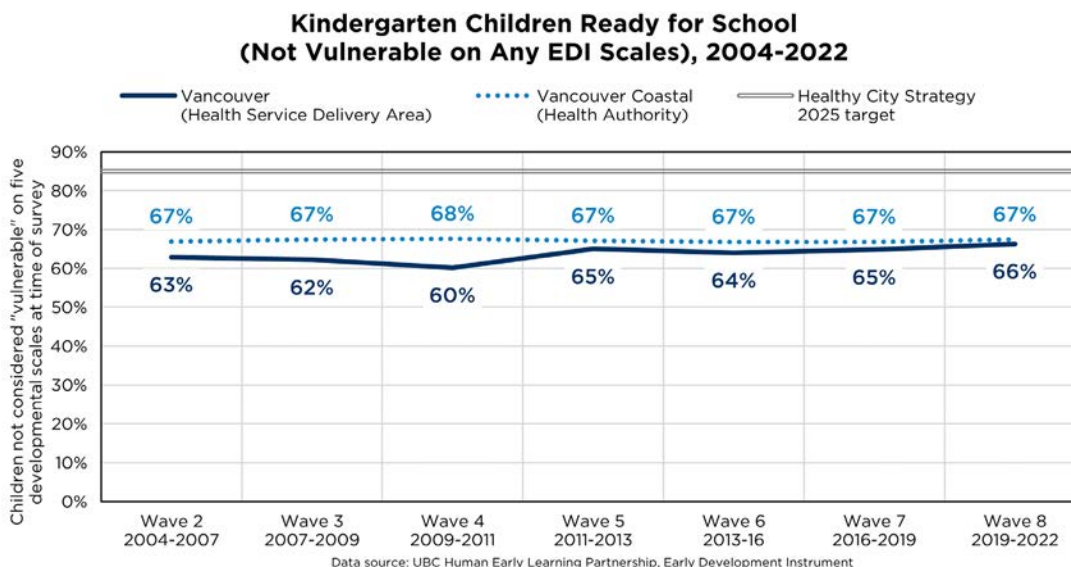


Figure 1 Overall trends in early childhood development, 2004-2022

Middle years

The Middle Years Development Instrument (MDI) surveys children in grade 4 through 8 directly to assess their well-being across five scales.ⁱⁱ When a child scores high on at least four of the five measures and receives no low scores, they are considered to be “thriving.”

ⁱ The EDI’s five scales are 1) physical health and well-being; 2) social competence; 3) emotional maturity; 4) language and cognitive development; and 5) communication skills and general knowledge.

ⁱⁱ The MDI’s five component scales are: 1) optimism; 2) happiness; 3) self-esteem; 4) absence of sadness; and 5) general health.

Across participating Metro Vancouver Districts, grade 4 well-being declined steadily from 2013-2019 with levels evening out through the pandemic. Meanwhile, grade 7s across Metro Vancouver have been experiencing a decline in well-being since 2015 and the pandemic only made things worse (figure 2).¹⁴ Given the central role that school and friendships play in the middle years, the continued decline in well-being levels among grade 7 students is especially concerning. While 2023's numbers suggest well-being in the middle years is showing early signs of rebounding, significant interventions are needed to support children in this developmental stage to thrive.

The MDI's Asset Index then measures whether four key assets that help to promote positive development and well-being are present in children's lives. The panels in figure 3 show scores for Vancouver overall, where we can also see a clear downward trend across Grade 7 children's assets, particularly since the pandemic. Asset scores also differed widely by neighbourhood, with wealthier neighbourhoods scoring higher across the Asset Index compared to neighbourhoods with lower average incomes.¹⁵ For example, grade 7 students in the following neighbourhoods had lower than average scores for at least three of the four asset areas: Hastings-Sunrise, Kensington-Cedar Cottage, Killarney, Marpole, Renfrew-Collingwood, Sunset, Vancouver-Downtown and Victoria-Fraserview.ⁱ

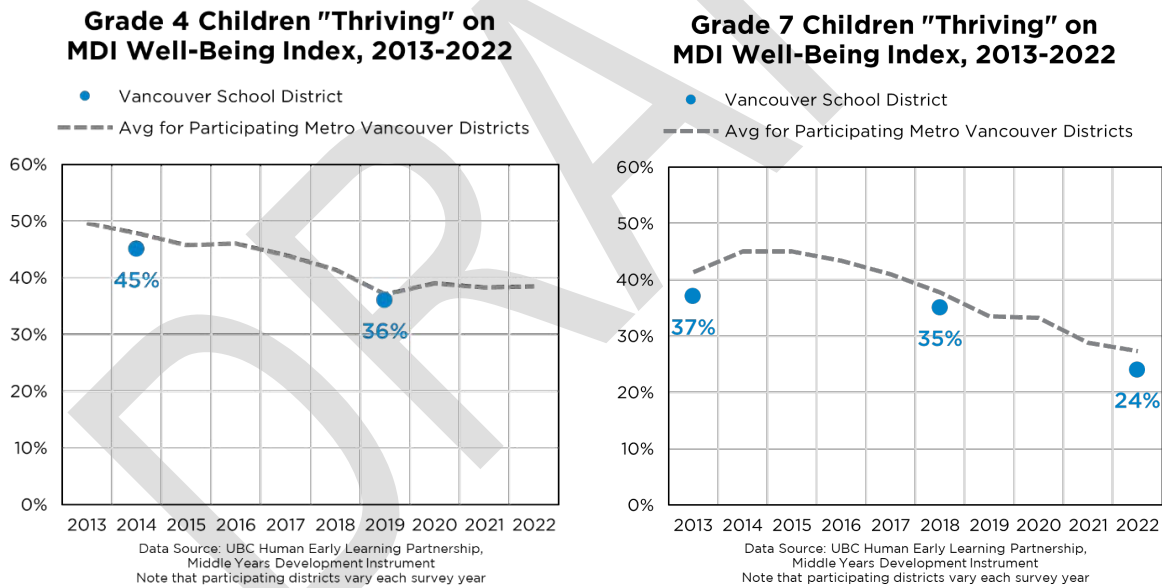


Figure 2 Grade 4 and 7 trends in overall MDI well-being index, 2013-2022

ⁱ Note that Strathcona neighbourhood data was suppressed due to low participation but typically registers as a higher needs neighbourhood due to its overlap with the Downtown Eastside.

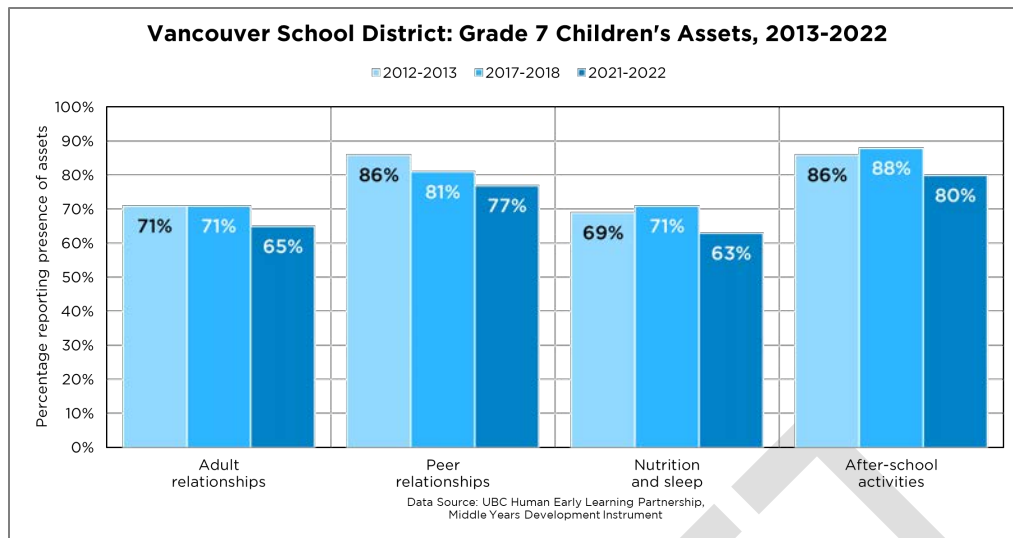


Figure 3 MDI grade 7 youth assets, 2013-2022

Adolescents

One measure of well-being for adolescents is the presence of “positive childhood experiences” (PCEs) that measures a child or youth’s resilience to adversity.¹⁶ The seven PCEs include:

- the ability to discuss feelings with family;
- having family support during difficult times;
- participating in community traditions;
- having a sense of belonging in school;
- feeling supported by friends;
- having two invested non-parental adults; and
- feeling safe at home.

Of the grade 10/11 students who completed the 2023 Youth Development Instrument (YDI) in Vancouver, 30% reported having 6-7 PCEs (high score), 42% reported having 3-5 (medium score) and 28% reported having 0-2 (low score). Nearly three quarters of Vancouver youth feel they have supportive adults at home and have at least one close friend they can confide in. However, only 50% of youth strongly felt belonging to a peer group and even fewer (37%) felt a strong sense of community belonging. Youth in our engagement sessions shared these general sentiments, lamenting the lack of adults in their lives who could offer mentorship, advice and non-judgemental listening – especially for those who had difficulty fitting in, such as immigrants, children of immigrants, or those who hold marginalized sexual or gender identities.

COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted children and youth well-being

The COVID-19 pandemic has had negative effects on the health and well-being of school-age children and youth. The SPEAK Survey – a province-wide study of the pandemic’s impacts on many facets of social and economic well-being – showed a clear decline in children’s levels of well-being, as measured by stress, physical activity, participation in

extra-curricular activities and connection with friends and family – all essential facets to children’s healthy development.¹⁷

Based on data collected in the spring of 2021, 60% of respondents who had children ages 0-17 reported their children’s well-being (physical, learning and behaviour) worsened as a result of the pandemic (figure 4). 83% of those with children 5-17 said their children experienced more stress (figure 5) and 87% were connecting less with their friends than before the pandemic.¹⁸ Such stressors have borne out in a marked decline in young people’s mental health: Even as the acute effects of the pandemic have waned, another study of grade 10/11 youth in 2023 revealed that youth in Vancouver are experiencing a disproportionate rise in symptoms of anxiety and depression compared to other age groups.¹⁹ These trends have played out across the region too.

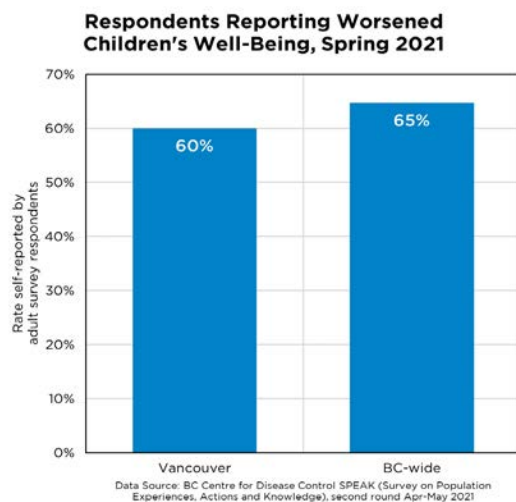


Figure 5 Changes in child well-being during the pandemic, 2020 and 2021

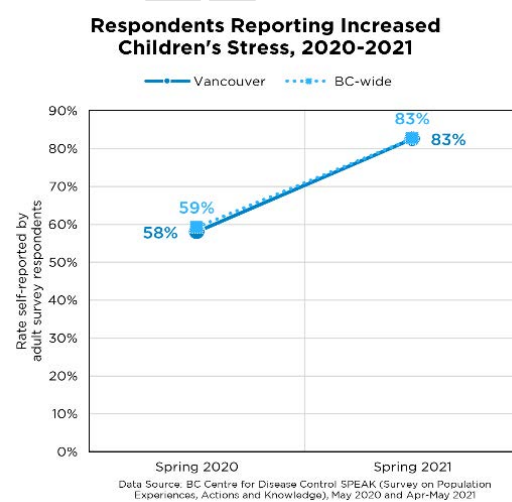


Figure 4 Changes in child stress during the pandemic, 2020 and 2021

Factors that affect safety, security and belonging in the city

It is important to contextualize how children and youth are affected by violence in its many forms including: racism, lateral and systemic violence; bullying and cyberbullying; gender-based violence; and criminal activity. Exposure to such violence erodes the sense of safety, security and belonging youth need to thrive. Due to the stigma associated with violence affecting youth, we anticipate that the data below is an underestimate, as many transgressions go unreported.

Racism, lateral and systemic violence

The link between discrimination and negative health outcomes amongst children and adults is well established.²⁰ In 2018, 36% of Vancouver students had experienced discrimination in the past year (up 4 percentage points since 2013). The three most commonly perceived reasons for such discrimination were physical appearance (19%), race, ethnicity, or skin colour (16%) and weight (13%).²¹ Exposure to discrimination is associated with higher rates of stress, depression and anxiety, as well as poorer physical health and unhealthy behaviours like smoking and excessive drinking.²² Racism, as one particularly insidious form

of discrimination, takes a similar toll. Numerous studies on the effect of racism on children and youth found that it led to lower self-concept, less academic motivation, more associations with deviant peers, and higher levels of hopelessness, depression, substance use and risky sexual behaviour.^{23,24}

Those belonging to equity denied communities experience disproportionately high levels of violence. Between 2022 and 2023 in Vancouver, Indigenous females under 18 years old were nearly 12x more likely to be victims of violence relative to the general population.²⁵ Meanwhile, Hispanic and Middle Eastern females under 18 were approximately 3x more likely to be victims of violence and Hispanic, Middle Eastern and Indigenous males were 3-5x more likely to be victims of violence compared to the general population.²⁶ Additionally, there has been a six-fold increase in the number of hate-motivated anti-Asian incidents reported to the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) in 2022 (56) relative to the pre-pandemic 2017-2019 average (9.3). However, there was an overall decrease since the peak observed in 2020.²⁷ While this data is not specific to youth, it has likely translated to an increase in race-based violence among youth as well.

Bullying, cyberbullying

Bullying continues to be something the majority of Vancouver youth experience. Bullying can be physical (e.g., bodily assault), social (e.g., gossip or purposeful exclusion), or verbal (e.g., teasing or threats). In 2018, 52% of Vancouver students reported being bullied in some way in the previous year.²⁸ Meanwhile, 11% of Vancouver students reported they had bullied someone else at school or on the way to or from school in the past year.²⁹ Since this data was self-reported, this is likely an underestimate – yet it suggests that a small number of youths are doing the bullying, while a large number are victims of it.

Cyberbullying, in particular, is a growing concern as the internet and social media sites have become an essential social space. Yet it unfolds in a highly unmonitored environment compared to school or extra-curricular spaces. The 2023 Youth Development Instrumentⁱ provides a snapshot of how grade 10 and 11 students in Vancouver reported experiencing bullying in 2022/2023 (see figure 6).

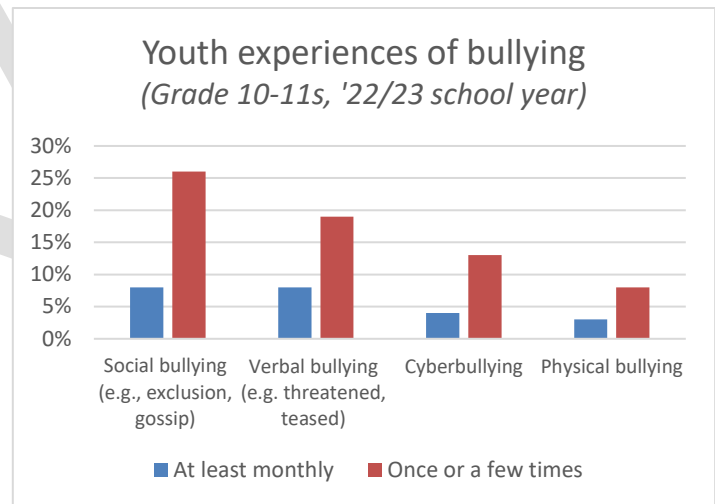


Figure 6

Sexual violence and sexual exploitation

ⁱ The Youth Development Instrument surveyed 1,816 grade 10 and 11 students in the Vancouver School Board.

Patriarchal social norms and systemic power imbalances mean that violence is experienced differently across genders and abilities. Those who are racialized, younger, of marginalized genders (gender identities other than cisgender men), of sexual orientations other than heterosexual, and living with disabilities all experience higher rates of sexual violence.³⁰

Youth are also particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation by adults and in some cases their peers. Sexual exploitation is the sexual abuse of a minor when they are manipulated into exchanging sexual acts for money, drugs, shelter, transportation, etc.³¹ Reports of online child sexual exploitation rose sharply during the pandemic, with stay-at-home orders leading to more opportunities for offenders to engage in and distribute child pornography and more children being kept at home without access to their usual community safeguards.³² Relative to the pre-pandemic 2017-2019 average, Vancouver-based incidents of child pornography were up 152.9% in 2022.

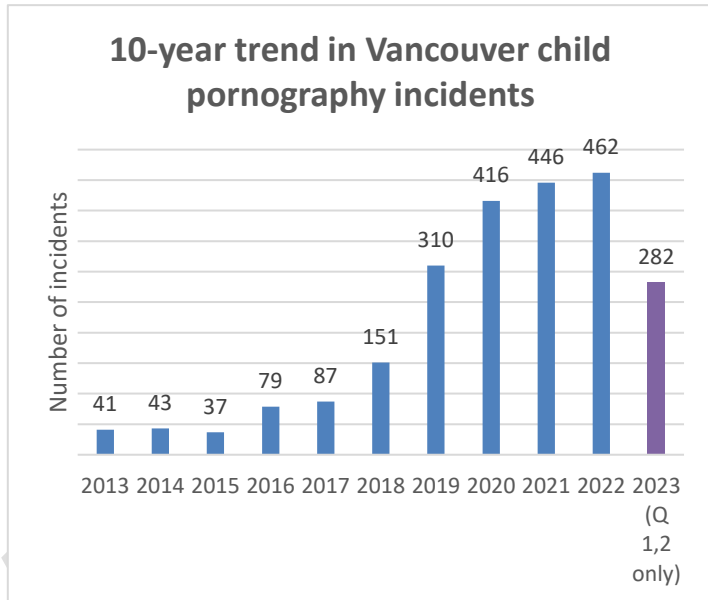


Figure 7

Indigenous women and girls are particularly at-risk of violence and exploitation. They are 16x more likely to go missing or be murdered than white women; Indigenous women are sexually assaulted 3x more often than non-Indigenous women; and the majority of the women and children sex trafficked in Canada are Indigenous.³³

Children and youth in care

Children and youth in care (CYIC)ⁱ are particularly at risk of various forms of violence and harm – during and after their experience in the system. As of 2022, there were 617 CYIC in the Vancouver/Richmond service area, with nearly 100 additional youth transitioning out of care or youth agreements as they reached adulthood (age 19).³⁴ Indigenous children and youth are significantly over-represented in this system.

While Vancouver-specific data was not accessible, BC-wide figures highlight some concerning trends in the number of CYIC who experienced critical injury or death. In 2021-2022 fiscal year, BC’s Representative for Children and Youth (RCY) reviewed 1,518 reports

ⁱ Children or youth who are under the care of the Government of British Columbia and live in a foster or group home

of critical injuryⁱ and 10 reports of death among CYIC. The majority of both kinds of cases involved Indigenous children/youth. RCY reviews cases beyond just the child welfare systemⁱⁱ and has recorded an upward trend. In fact, the number of in-mandate critical injury cases reviewed by their office more than doubled between 2018 and 2022.³⁵

Within the provincial child welfare system – which is under the purview of the Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD) – young people regularly go missing. While there is no complete and accurate measure of this, RCY received over 500 reports between April-December 2022 regarding CYIC who were lost, missing, or away from their placement and who experienced a critical injury or were considered at risk of harm during that time.³⁶ This represented 198 distinct children and an average of 37 children who went missing one or more times per month. While missing, young people are particularly vulnerable to being harmed by others (e.g., sexual violence), suffering mental health crises and using substances which could result in overdose or death.

As youth in care transition to adulthood, research shows that they are at a greater likelihood to engage in violence/commit crime.³⁷ They are also at a higher risk to experience poverty and homelessness: 31% of those surveyed in Vancouver's 2023 Homeless Count were or had been in the care of MCFD or other child welfare system reflecting the gaps in supports for youth who age out of care.³⁸

Exposure to crime

According to VPD data, there has been an increase in youth crime in recent years. While the number of youths between 12 and 17 with adverse police interactions in the violence category decreased by 15% from 2018 to 2020, it rose by nearly 56% over the two years that followed (figure 8). Youth being charged in the violence category shows a similar pattern, sharply rising in recent years (figure 9). Notably, many violent interactions do not result in a charge being laid even if sufficient evidence is present as victims may decide not to press charges, or the charges may be dropped.

ⁱ Types of critical injury include: emotional harm, physical assault, physical harm, sexualized violence, substance-related harm, and suicidal attempts or ideations that resulted in a critical injury or were intended to lead to a possible critical injury or death.

ⁱⁱ Reviewable services under RCY's mandate are: child welfare, children and youth with special needs, addiction services for children, mental health services for children and youth justice services.

Figure 8

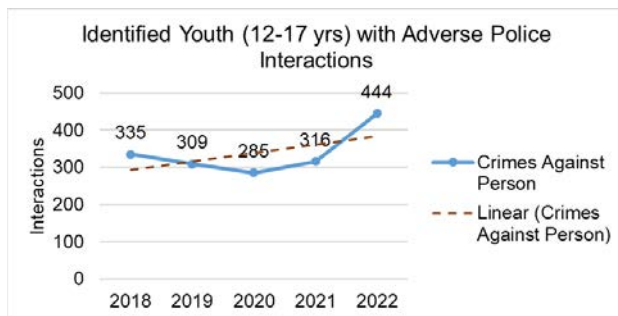
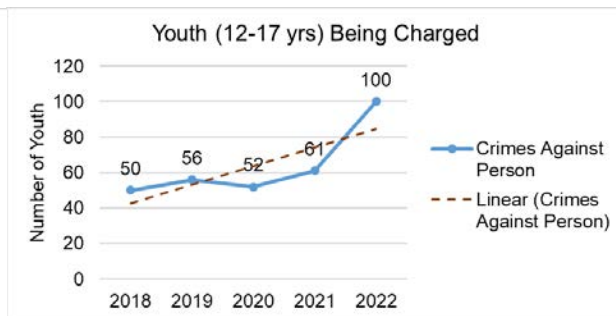


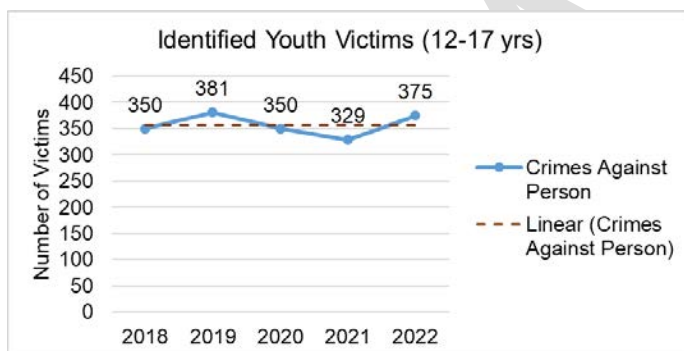
Figure 9



VPD has noted that youth violent offences involving bear spray have been on the rise in recent years. Such offences went up from 100 in 2021 to 115 in 2022. This remains significantly higher than the 2017-2019 average of 57.6 incidents per year.³⁹

Meanwhile, the number of youth victims for violent offences (robbery, assault, sexual assault and domestic assault) has remained relatively steady during the same five-year period (figure 10).^{40,41}

Figure 10



Possession of weapons

Weapons continue to be quite present in schools contributing to a culture of fear and violence among youth. According to Statistics Canada data, the number of youth charged with weapons violationsⁱ has been steadily decreasing over time and reached a record low in 2021 with just two charges.⁴² While the number of Vancouver youth charged with weapons violations may be at an all-time low, many incidents do not result in a charge or do not get reported to police. The 2018 Adolescent Health Survey reported that 5% of students surveyed in Vancouver carried a weapon to school in the past month, including 1% who always carried a weapon. Notably, students who had been the victim of bullying were more likely to carry a weapon. For example, 22% of Vancouver youth who had been physically attacked in the past year carried a weapon, compared to 4% who had not been attacked.⁴³

ⁱ Weapons violations, according to the Canada Criminal Code, includes offences such as the possession, sale, or trafficking of weapons. The use of weapons would fall under the category of violent crime. Within the weapons violations category, nearly 95% of charges have historically been for “possession of weapons.”

This suggests that weapons are increasingly being carried not as a tool of aggression but as a form of protection.

Gun and gang violence

There is limited data on the scale of youth gangs in BC/Vancouver area. As of 2023, BC's anti-gang agency, the Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit, estimates that there are 188 gangs or organized crime groups in British Columbia (adult/youth combined).⁴⁴

Young people join gangs for a range of reasons: excitement, prestige, protection, a chance to make money, or a sense of belonging.⁴⁵ Data gathered from Canadian law enforcement suggests that youth involved in gangs hail from diverse ethnic, geographic, demographic and socio-economic contexts^{46,47} Other studies found that youth who suffered from social inequality, were at a higher risk of gang involvement.^{48,49}

There is a strong link between gang presence in urban high schools and the availability of both guns and drugs in schools.⁵⁰ Becoming a “dialer” – someone hired to deliver drugs to a specific location – is the typical first step into gang life for youth. New dialers are often forced into debt with their dealers, which, along with threats of violence, keeps youth under their control.⁵¹ Research also shows that youth who drop out of school and get involved in selling drugs are at higher risk of being involved in gun-related violence.⁵²

Cultural pressures towards gang ideation

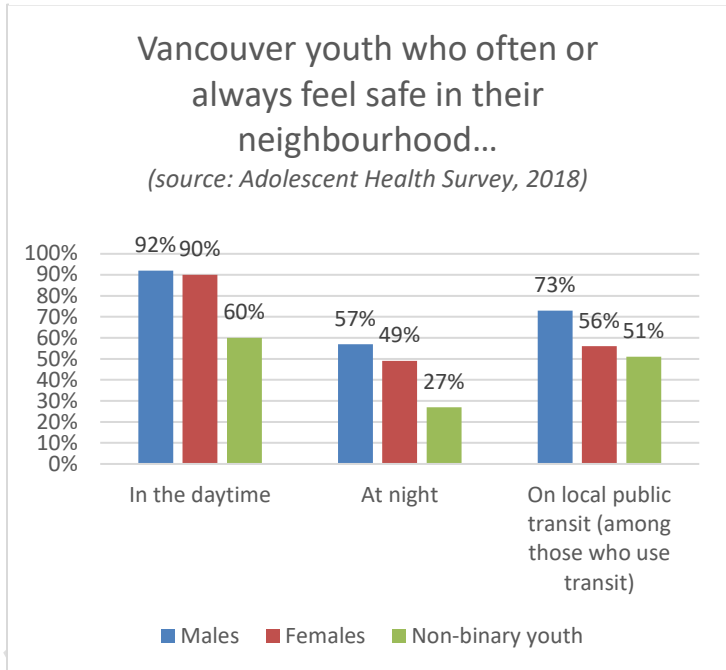
Males tend to be overrepresented in gangs and as perpetrators of physical violence. Aggressive and domineering representations of masculinity in movies, video games and social media establish unhealthy norms to which boys can easily aspire. A US study on the state of gender equality among American adolescents found that a third of boys think society expects them to ‘be a man’ and ‘suck it up’ when they feel sad or scared.⁵³ This was reflected in our youth engagements as well.

On top of that, we are in a crisis of connection: youth across genders are feeling starved for authentic relationships. Some participants in our youth engagement sessions reflected feeling like they had to “mask” to fit in. When boys struggle to develop a healthy sense of self and form healthy relationships with peers, they may find the acceptance they seek in gang life.

When and where youth feel unsafe

Echoing what participants shared in our engagement sessions, many youths do not feel safe in public space at night and on public transit. Data from the 2018 Adolescent Health Survey reveals gender strongly influences how youth experience their neighbourhoods, with females and non-binary youth feeling less safe than males (see figure 11). In our engagement sessions, some participants reflected that it wasn't as much about the space that made it unsafe as it was about whether they were in the company of people they knew and trusted. When young people perceive their neighbourhood as safe it has a positive effect on their development. They do better socially and emotionally, experiencing fewer internalizing problem behaviours (e.g., depression, anxiety) and fewer externalizing problem behaviours (e.g., aggression, substance use).⁵⁴

Figure 11



The child- and youth-serving sector

Community organizations are among the many players in the ecosystem that foster safety and support the healthy development of children and youth. Provincially, the Ministry of Child and Family Development has a mandate to protect vulnerable children, support their mental health and operate key services such as the foster care system. The public school system also falls under provincial jurisdiction. Meanwhile, the federal government plays a key role in delivering policies and programs that contribute to child and youth well-being more broadly such as settlement for newcomers, employment programs and income supports. The programs and services offered by non-profits have emerged as an essential safety net for children and families, especially where various levels of government have failed to adequately protect them. Although child and youth services are not generally the purview of municipal governments, cities are well-positioned to collaborate with and fund non-profits who work closely with community.

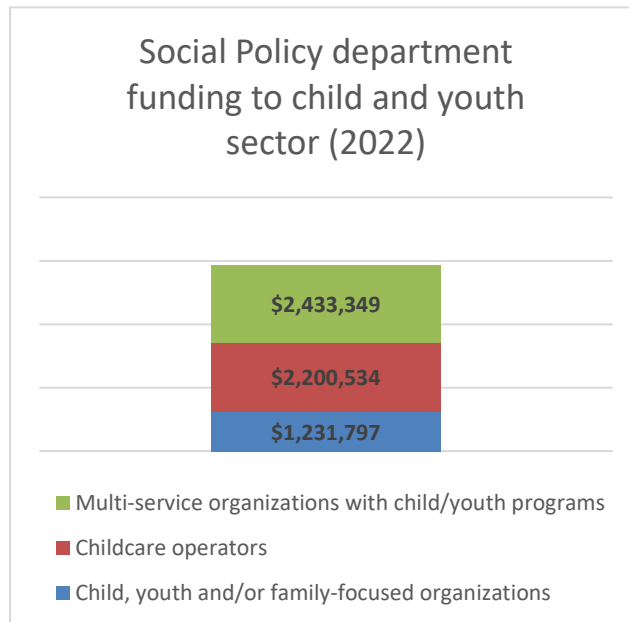
The City of Vancouver directly reaches children and youth by delivering services related to:

- park and playground infrastructure;
- public libraries;
- community centres; and
- recreation programs.

In addition, the City invests in the non-profit sector through:

- social and urban planning interventions;
- providing lease subsidies and funding capital projects for non-profits; and
- funding non-profit service delivery.

Figure 12



In 2022, the City’s Social Policy Department provided \$3.4 million in funding to non-profits with a mandate to serve children, youth and/or families (including childcare operators) and another \$2.4M to multi-service agencies like Neighbourhood Houses and community centres that run children/youth programs (figure 12).

The case for community-based responses to violence prevention

Given their close connection to community, non-profit service providers are a powerful tool for fostering the healthy development of children and youth. As the data in the previous illuminates, many youth feel unsafe in their neighbourhood, do not have a trusted adult they can turn to for help or advice, and feel disconnected from their community (something that was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic). Access to safer spaces and supportive programming in the community can give young people the foundation they need to navigate life’s challenges, helping fill developmental gaps caused by systemic inequities and difficult life circumstances. Research demonstrates a positive link between child development programming and reduced poverty in adulthood, an increased sense of social responsibility, stronger moral reasoning and decreased juvenile delinquency.⁵⁵ Particularly for adolescents, participating in structured social, arts and recreational programs is likely to improve academic achievement, psychosocial and behavioural functioning, increase life satisfaction and lower rates of depression.⁵⁶ Community programs also help increase a sense of community belonging and build out a web of trusted adults and older teens to be leaned on for support. In a time when so many youth do not feel safe outside their homes, community centres are one of the few environments offering respite.

Snapshot of Vancouver's child- and youth-serving sector

Vancouver is home to 195 non-profits that serve children and youth. Of these, 74 are youth-focused organizationsⁱ and 121 are multi-service organizations that include youth as one of their target communities. Across all non-profits serving this demographic, social service agencies are the most common, comprising nearly 30% of the sector, with development and housing, sports and recreation, and arts and culture each playing a significant role as well.ⁱⁱ

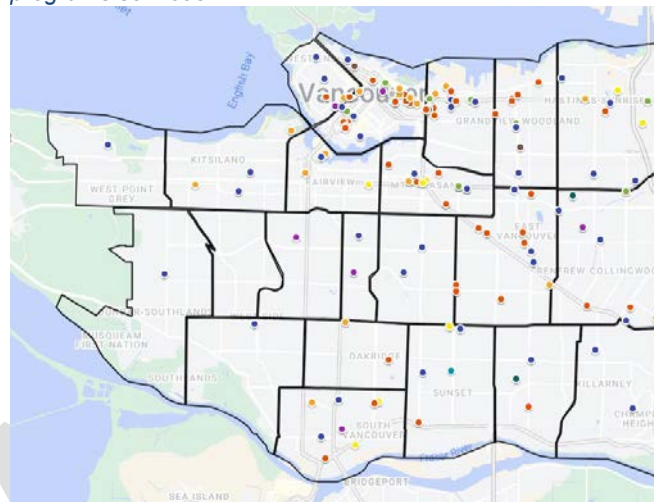
The vast majority (65%) of Vancouver's child and youth-serving non-profits offer in-person, place-based programs or services at 141 sites across the city.⁵⁷ Place-based services are most concentrated in Vancouver's Downtown and Strathcona neighbourhoods, reflecting the relative density of populations at riskⁱⁱⁱ (figure 13).

Youth sector capacity strengths and challenges

Child- and youth-serving organizations bring many assets to the table: staff are able to meaningfully connect with youth and meet their needs; program staff are diverse and tend to represent the community they serve; and there is a strong sense of community within the organization which promotes a positive culture and staff retention.⁵⁸ There is also a high degree of support for collaboration with other agencies, which contributes to their ability to remain nimble, responsive and efficient.⁵⁹ Through COVID, youth organizations rapidly pivoted online and many have been able to reach even greater numbers by now offering a blended of online and in-person programs.⁶⁰

Yet the sector is not without its challenges. Similar to other social service non-profits, youth-serving organizations face being stretched thin; rising staffing and program costs; limited time/resources to do fundraising and reporting; restricted grant funds; and high levels of staff stress and burnout.^{61,62} While many non-profits struggle to recruit and retain skilled staff, the child- and youth-serving sector seems to be disproportionately afflicted with this challenge.⁶³ In addition to delivering on their core mandates, non-profits are also being called to step up their supports amidst the pressures presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, the overdose crisis and the movement for racial justice. Without adequate resourcing, the sector's ability to do its best work will be hindered.

Figure 13 Map of Vancouver's place-based child and youth programs/services



ⁱ Of the 74 youth-focused organizations, 3 were youth-led.

ⁱⁱ Non-profits were categorized based on the International Classification of Non-Profit Organizations (ICNPO)

ⁱⁱⁱ An interactive version of this map is available [here](#)

Section 3. A Municipal Approach to Youth Safety and Well-being in Vancouver: Guiding Principles, Focus Areas and Priorities for the City

The Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy is guided by a ***vision of a city where youth feel safe, supported, connected, healthy and free of violence.***

In order to achieve this vision youth, community and public partners convened several times over the last year to collaboratively develop a set of principles recommended to guide the Strategy going forward. These principles align with best practices in the literature as well as existing commitments made by the City of Vancouver. The 7 principles are set out below along with how they are intended to be reflected in *what* the Strategy focuses on and *how* the work will be approached.

Guiding principles

Principle 1: Decolonization and Reconciliation	
<i>Related City of Vancouver policies: UNDRIP, MMIWG2S, RF</i>	
Rationale	How this principle is reflected in the Strategy
<p>Decolonization is a way of deconstructing ideologies that privilege Western thought and approaches. Decolonization involves dismantling structures that perpetuate imbalanced power dynamics that contribute to different forms of violence.⁶⁴</p> <p>Meanwhile, reconciliation speaks directly to Indigenous rights and title. As a City of Reconciliation, the municipal government has a responsibility to uphold and protect Indigenous Rights.</p> <p>Decolonization is a process of addressing past and current impacts of colonialism and as such, reconciliation and decolonization efforts are central to advancing Indigenous Rights. Given that Vancouver is also home to three Host Nations and a large urban Indigenous population (those who hold Indigenous identity but are not of the three local Host Nations), the needs of this wider community must</p>	<p>Host Nations and urban Indigenous organizations will be invited to participate in reference groups and sector development opportunities.</p> <p>Cultural safety will be a lens applied to all youth engagements (e.g., presence of an Elder).</p> <p>Evaluation methods will include qualitative methods that invite oral storytelling.</p> <p>Networking and capacity-building events will emphasize non-hierarchical knowledge sharing and Indigenous perspectives.</p> <p>Grant adjudicated process will involve City staff and community representatives rather than solely City staff. This helps share power and influence in a more horizontal way.</p> <p>Grant program will encourage culturally-informed services and programs.</p> <p>Granting intake and reporting processes will be reviewed for cultural sensitivity with processes adapted where possible to be more accessible for Indigenous and grassroots organizations.</p>

<p>also be centred throughout this Strategy.</p>	
<p>Principle 2: Anti-racism <i>Related City of Vancouver policies: HCS, EF, ARS</i></p>	
<p>Rationale</p>	<p>How this principle is reflected in the Strategy</p>
<p>Applying an anti-racism principle allows us to identify and challenge racism by changing systems, organizational structures, policies and practices, and attitudes to redistribute power in an equitable manner.</p>	<p>Organizations with a focus on racialized youth are part of the Community Partner Reference Group.</p> <p>Grants to organizations serving racialized youth at a higher risk of violence and harm will be prioritized.</p> <p>The Strategy’s upstream, approach ensures equity-denied youth, who are at an increased risk of various forms of violence, receive additional resources to support their healthy development.</p>
<p>Principle 3: Intersectionality <i>Related City of Vancouver policies: HCS, EF, ARS, WES</i></p>	
<p>Rationale</p>	<p>How this principle is reflected in the Strategy</p>
<p>An individual’s lived experience is deeply shaped by the multiple, overlapping identities they hold including but not limited to race, gender, sexuality and dis/ability. Intersectionality provides a basis for understanding how these individual identity markers work with one another.⁶⁵ By taking an intersectional approach, we are shining a light on how systems can reinforce oppression from different angles which can then compound negative effects on certain populations.</p>	<p>Grants to organizations serving equity-denied communities at a higher risk of violence and harm will be prioritized (e.g., those experiencing multiple forms of marginalization due to intersectionality).</p> <p>When possible, data analysis is disaggregated to examine how those with intersecting marginal identities experience safety/violence compared to those with dominant identities.</p>
<p>Principle 4: Accessibility <i>Related City of Vancouver policies: HCS, AS</i></p>	
<p>Rationale</p>	<p>How this principle is reflected in the Strategy</p>
<p>There are a range of mental and physical conditions that can make it difficult for some members of the community to access programs, services and public spaces. This Strategy aims to ensure the activities/actions herein are inclusive to diverse accessibility needs.</p>	<p>Staff will develop a checklist of accessibility considerations that forthcoming public engagement events falling within the YSVP Strategy will meet.</p> <p>Grantees will be asked how they are taking steps to ensure their proposed program/service is inclusive of diverse accessibility needs.</p>

<p>Principle 5: Collaboration</p> <p><i>Related City of Vancouver policies: HCS</i></p>	
<p>Rationale</p>	<p>How this principle is reflected in the Strategy</p>
<p>When we collaborate across organizations and sectors we are more able to break down silos and support young people in a holistic way. Collaboration is key to creating systems change.</p>	<p>The making of the Strategy was highly collaborative, involving stakeholders from community agencies, public institutions and diverse youth voices. The implementation of this Strategy will continue in the same spirit.</p> <p>The Strategy will establish cross-sectoral networks that support collaboration between community agencies and public institutions including the City and other levels of government where appropriate.</p> <p>Grants that involve collaboration within and between sectors will be prioritized.</p> <p>Advocacy work will pursue collaboration between the City, community agencies and higher levels of government.</p>
<p>Principle 6: Data-informed</p> <p><i>Related City of Vancouver policies: HCS</i></p>	
<p>Rationale</p>	<p>How this principle is reflected in the Strategy</p>
<p>Information is power. Collecting community-based data is an important part of tracking community progress and identifying community strengths, opportunities and challenges. This information gathering empowers stakeholders to make decisions with the benefit of data that is relevant and based on each community's unique needs, preferences and contexts.</p>	<p>The Strategy is grounded in academic and practitioner literature; population level data; findings from community based research grantees; and qualitative data that came from our community consultations.</p> <p>Going forward, we will continue to learn from community-based research, incorporate research/data insights into engagements, and monitor and evaluate the Strategy's impact through a robust evaluation framework.</p> <p>Desired outputs and outcomes will reflect the Strategy's equity-related principles.</p>
<p>Principle 7: Comprehensive</p> <p><i>Related City of Vancouver policies: HCS</i></p>	
<p>Rationale</p>	<p>How this principle is reflected in the Strategy</p>
<p>A comprehensive strategy gives upstream prevention programming the time required to demonstrate success and system change. Having a varying timeframe for goals allows the City and youth-serving sector to track progress on multiple fronts from specific quick wins to comprehensive visionary aspirations that require time and patience to realize.</p>	<p>Short-, medium- and long-term objectives are built into the Strategy.</p> <p>Proposed interventions support action at the individual, community and systems levels.</p> <p>Proposed interventions emphasize upstream solutions while acknowledging the important role of mid-stream and downstream efforts.</p>

Legend:

ARS - Anti-racism strategy/action plan (forthcoming)
 EF - Equity Framework (2021)
 RF - Reconciliation Framework (2014)
 RF - Reconciliation Framework (2014)
 WES - Women's Equity Strategy (2018-2028)

AS - Accessibility Strategy (2022)
 HCS - Healthy City Strategy (2014)
 MMIWG2S - City of Vancouver MMIWG2S Response Report (2022)
 UNDRIP - UNDRIP Action Plan (2022)

Section 4. Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Focus Areas and Priorities for the City

In order to achieve the vision for a safer Vancouver where youth feel supported, connected, healthy and free from violence, the YSVP Strategy identifies five focus areas and key priorities to recommend for collective action.

These areas and priorities were developed in collaboration with youth, representatives from youth-serving organizations, public partners and City departments, and are centered around community-level protective factors which are positive influences. These factors improve safety and decrease the likelihood of violence affecting youth in the Vancouver context by improving the lives of children and youth within their local communities.

In this section, focus areas and associated priorities are described along with a summary of research that helps make the case for the importance of each focus area. Throughout our engagement events, youth shared a wide range of ideas that could be considered actions within this strategy. These ideas have been summarized in Attachment 1: Youth Ideas for Action and will be utilized in the forthcoming community planning process to help develop a detailed action plan.

Strategy focus areas, priorities and rationale

Focus area 1: Create safer and protective community environments and public spaces for youth.

Cities can significantly influence and shape the environments that children and youth grow up in and experience on a daily basis. In safe and protective spaces children and youth can express themselves and feel confident that they will not be exposed to any type of physical or emotional harm (e.g., discrimination, harassment or bullying).⁶⁶ These spaces can accommodate the needs of racialized youth, especially those vulnerable to marginalization or violence, providing opportunities to build skills and participate in decision-making processes.

Priorities:

- Structured and unstructured spaces for youth to gather
- Safety in public spaces and on public transportation
- Community based supports attached to schools, community centres and libraries
- Community and civic programs that promote youth decision-making and engagement in governance

Why this is important:

- The media coverage and narrative surrounding incidents of violence reported on the news and through social media creates both a physical and mental environment of fear.
- A majority of youth at the Vancouver Youth Voice: Violence Prevention Forum shared that the lack of safety on transit creates an environment where youth feel in danger and find it essential to think about defensive safety measures (e.g., sunscreen cans, big water bottles).
- A common theme in community discussions established that poorly lit areas and dark streets are areas that youth feel unsafe. Youth try to avoid these areas, to not be exposed to violent activities/gangs. However, when poorly lit areas are their neighborhoods, they are unavoidable.
- Youth who feel connected to their community are more likely to feel safe in their neighbourhood, to have post-secondary aspirations, and to feel hopeful for the future. They are less likely to engage in binge drinking and other health risk behaviours. They are also less likely to miss out on mental health services when they need them.⁶⁷
- Meaningful engagement: The majority of youth (62%) felt the activities they took part in were meaningful to them and 42% felt their ideas were listened to and acted upon in these activities. Youth who experienced meaningful engagement in their activities were more likely to report positive mental health, to feel an adult in their community cared about them and to feel connected to their community.⁶⁸

Focus area 2: Identify and strengthen community-based supports for healthy child development in the middle years

Children between the ages 6 and 12 are at a critical developmental stage in which their experiences set a foundation for the habits, perceptions and attitudes they will have for a lifetime. Families, extended families, community-based organizations and caring public institutions all play a central role in supporting the well-being of children. However, the middle years provide key opportunities for early interventions that will have a significant impact in preventing youth violence in the future. Having a strong sector of community-based organizations that understand and are able to respond to the challenges and opportunities of this population group is critical to ensuring safer and inclusive communities for children and youth.

Priorities:

- Middle childhood service provision and coordination of early violence prevention programs
- Developmentally and culturally appropriate services and supports
- Parent and family engagement in violence prevention and intervention
- Trauma-informed middle childhood approaches and programs

Why this is important:

- Youth identified at the Vancouver Youth Voice: Violence Prevention Forum that family members can significantly contribute to a sense of security and safety for youth if there is a healthy dynamic.

- When citing the spaces in which they felt safest, *at home* and *in their room* was a recurring theme. This sense of safety is connected to feeling protected in their own spaces. Potentially, the impact of COVID has intensified this and the outcome is that fewer youth are experiencing the extracurricular and out-of-home activities that help them grow, develop and thrive in the middle and adolescent years.
- Youth dialogues established that the lack of safe spaces and supports results in youth putting on a mask to fit in within their community and in turn losing a sense of self.
- Research shows that children with positive peer relationships feel better about themselves, experience greater mental health, are more prosocial and perform better academically. On the contrary children who do not feel part of a group or feel cast out by their own group are at risk of anxiety and depression. They are also at higher risk of low school attendance and future school drop-out.⁶⁹
- Social competencies and friendship-building skills can buffer children against bullying, anxiety and depression. Social and emotional competencies include children's ability to recognize, understand and effectively respond to emotions, manage stress and be optimistic. They also include showing concern for others, sustaining healthy relationships and making effective personal and social decisions.⁷⁰
- Promoting children's social and emotional competence is critical for their successful development across the lifespan. Social and emotional competencies can be best promoted when children experience supportive environments across multiple contexts: at school with teachers and peers; in the home with elders, family, or caregivers; and in after-school programs with peers and community members.⁷¹

Focus area 3: Strengthen the coordination and provision of positive youth development services and programs

Positive youth development programs strengthen young people's sense of identity, belief in the future, self-regulation and self-efficacy, as well as their social, emotional, cognitive and behavioral competence.⁷² As an approach, Positive Youth Development focuses on protective factors rather than on risk behaviours related to a single condition of marginalization. It promotes asset building, meaningful youth engagement and considers young people as resources and equal partners. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted various areas of young people's lives, including access to youth services, programs and supports. As a result, the youth serving sector in Vancouver is experiencing a transformation and resurgence to ensure youth reconnect with programs and opportunities that support their healthy development.

Priorities

- Improve service planning and coordination
- Targeted and identity-specific strategies and programs for equity-denied youth
- Capacity-building of the youth sector
- Promotion of youth development through arts, sports, recreation and community participation

Why this is important

- Research demonstrates a positive link between child development programming and reduced poverty in adulthood, an increased sense of social responsibility, stronger moral reasoning and decreased juvenile delinquency.⁷³ Particularly for adolescents, participating in structured social, arts and recreational is likely to improve academic achievement and psychosocial and behavioural functioning, increase life satisfaction, lower rates of depression and reduce delinquency.⁷⁴
- Community programs also help increase a sense of community belonging and build out a web of adults and older teens beyond a young person’s immediate sphere who they can lean on for support. In a time when so many youth do not feel safe outside their homes, community centres are one of the few environments offering respite.⁷⁵
- Community youth programs also present an opportunity for young people to cultivate their leadership skills and give back to their community in various ways which are important for their sense of agency and belonging.⁷⁶ Deeper engagement, such as contributing to municipal planning processes and sitting on youth advisory councils, are valuable ways for young people to have their voices heard and shape their environments.
- Community dialogues highlighted that there is need to strengthen the youth service sector, due to the impact of the pandemic which fractured communities and displaced youth from those core pillars of community belongingness.
- Participants in the City’s Youth Violence Prevention Forum shared that community programs are often inaccessible. Vancouver’s reputation as a lonely city or the perception that certain neighbourhoods are unsafe added to these challenges.
- Community partners have highlighted current challenges resulting from the pandemic, social distancing restrictions, limited access to resources and a narrowed pool of youth workers and youth experts to work in the field. Service delivery models had to be adjusted to reach out to youth while at the same time delivering quality and user-tailored activities with limited resources, causing strain in many organizations.

Focus area 4: Connect youth to caring adults

Children and youth grow and develop in an environment of relationships. The presence of a caring adult can positively influence a child’s life and promote resilience and healthy development. Safe, stable, nurturing relationships help build resilience and buffer the negative impact of adverse experiences. Positive adult role models are an importance source of mentorship, advice and non-judgemental listening. Supportive adults can come in many forms, including trained youth workers, counsellors/therapists, club/team leaders, caring parents and caregivers and teachers who are willing to go the extra step to offer students emotional support.

Priorities:

- Awareness about the Importance of caring and supportive youth / adult relationships
- Intergenerational programming
- Mentorship programs
- Youth sector staff development, capacity and recognition

Why this is important:

- Research from the Adolescence Health Survey has identified that youth were more likely than five years earlier to feel that an adult in their neighbourhood or community (outside their family or school) really cared about them (59% vs. 50% in 2013). However, youth in Vancouver were less likely than those across the province to have such an adult in their life (65% provincially).⁷⁷
- Similarly, youth who have a supportive adult in their life are more likely to feel comfortable refusing to do something they do not want to do, such as engaging in unwanted sexual activity or sexting and are less likely to miss out on needed mental health care. They are also more likely to feel happy if they have an adult who cares about them.⁷⁸
- Around a quarter of youth (24%) reported having an adult outside their family they could talk to when faced with a serious problem, which was lower than five years earlier (29% in 2013). Vancouver youth were less likely than students across BC to have this type of supportive adult in their life (24% vs. 27% provincially).⁷⁹
- As a result of the COVID pandemic, overall children and youth well-being decreased and stress levels increased and protective factors such as community connectedness, physical and social activities were negatively impacted.⁸⁰ There was increased levels of social isolation, loss of opportunities for activating and a reduction of those buffering supports that act as protective factors for violence prevention.
- A common theme at the Vancouver Youth Voice: Violence Prevention Forum was that parents can be good role models, if they have a healthy relationship with the youth. The consensus was that sometimes it's hard for friends to give critical feedback, but parents will provide advice that youth may not want to hear, but need to hear.
- Dialogue participants indicated that lack of connection makes it more difficult to trust people and as a result it makes it harder to have a safe, inclusive space and inclusive city. There is a general feeling of mistrust between younger and older generations. Youth commonly experience a lack of validation from adults and other peers about the challenges that youth are uniquely facing. This often results in youth feeling the need to prove themselves which can result in carrying weapons, threatening others and other intimidation tactics.
- Youth Forums events like the Vancouver forum, where youth can go and share their opinions and adults will actually listen results in youth continuing to share their experiences and voice.

Focus area 5: Lessen the impacts of serious violence and crime on children and youth

Many risk factors for youth violence are linked to experiencing “adverse childhood experiences” (ACEs) and toxic stress that is prolonged and repeated. Toxic stress can negatively change the brain development of children and youth and can result from situations such as living in impoverished neighborhoods, experiencing food insecurity, experiencing racism, limited access to support and medical services, as well as direct experiences with violence, mental health concerns, substance abuse and other instability. ACEs are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years). These are associated with major health and violence risk factors in adulthood and poor quality of life. As children and youth can be directly affected by violence either as victims, offenders or witnesses it is important to reduce the risk of future harm.

Priorities

- Focusing on ACES in order to reduce the risk, harm, criminality and future victimization
- Mental health support for victims, offenders and bystanders
- Intervention strategies for children and youth affected by cyberbullying, sexual exploitation and youth gang involvement

Why this is important:

- Vancouver is an inequitable city that faces many longstanding barriers to social sustainability. The city has high rates of poverty, a high cost of living, unaffordable housing and a polarized distribution of income and wealth.
- Youth at risk or already involved in gangs tend to be from groups that suffer from the greatest levels of inequality and social disadvantage.⁸¹ Some children and youth in Vancouver experience significant gaps across the social determinants of health including early childhood development, mental health, perceptions of belonging, safety and access to services.
- In a recent longitudinal study that looked at the profile of 1,719 young offenders in British Columbia from 1998-2022, it was determined that the risk of persistent justice system involvement increases with negative experiences associated with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, foster care involvement and self-identity challenges. For girls, a negative self-identity and running away from home were informative of persistent justice system involvement.⁸²
- Youth dialogue participants consistently stated the need for greater accessibility to mental health support such as counselling services. They also brought up youth have stigma against people in the downtown eastside and have expressed the need for support for individuals who struggle with addictions. Reducing the stigma and stereotypes about certain groups of people is crucial to building an inclusive, safe city.

Approach to implementation and next steps

With Federal funding secured until March 2026, the City is well-positioned to launch into a multi-faceted planning, engagement and sector capacity-building phase. Four broad areas of work are outlined below, with a community planning process in place to help City staff articulate an action plan for the medium and long-term.

	Community tables & advocacy	Network building and sector development	Granting program	Youth engagement	Research, monitoring and evaluation
Broad actions	<p>Convene public partners, community partners and youth in a process to narrow in on key actions the City and partners could take to enact the Youth Strategy and associated advocacy efforts in the medium and long-term.</p>	<p>Strengthen or create youth service networks to facilitate collaboration and coordination among youth-serving agencies.</p> <p>Offer sector development opportunities including training, resourcing collaboration processes (aligned with granting stream).</p> <p>Host annual gatherings to promote networking and knowledge exchange.</p>	<p>Launch and deliver three grant programs:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Youth engagement project grants 2) Youth violence prevention program grants 3) Organizational and youth sector capacity-building grants 	<p>Engage a core group of youth in the planning and roll-out of the Strategy</p> <p>e.g.: outreach, public education; event planning; policy-development</p> <p>Involve youth in the planning and delivery of annual youth conference/capacity-building session</p>	<p>Conduct research to advance knowledge on youth safety and violence prevention</p> <p>Analyze emerging social and demographic trends on safety and belonging for children and youth</p> <p>Coordinate monitoring and collective reporting across key outcomes and indicators</p>

Section 5. Assessing our Impact and Tracking our Work

In order to monitor, evaluate and communicate progress of the work included in the Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy, the City will work closely with funders and community partners in implementing a program evaluation framework that will highlight learnings and impact of our collective action.

Throughout this Strategy's implementation, remaining accountable to youth, our community partners, our public partners and our funders is essential. The following accountability principles will be incorporated in our assessment of impact.

- **Transparency:** honest sharing of facts, information and context needed to ensure informed and equitable decision-making
- **Consistency:** regular, ongoing, frequent progress reports on the status of actions to youth, the project funder and community and public partners
- **Proactivity:** proactively identifying opportunities for collaboration and joint interventions for violence prevention
- **Responsibility:** a culture of self-reflection and taking responsibility for errors or oversights
- **Openness:** creating opportunities for expression and discussion of dissenting views, needs, concerns and priorities

Gathering data and reporting progress

The key system levels focus for the Vancouver Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy is on the peer, social and community levels. Therefore, data being collected from stakeholders should reflect analysis on multiple levels of individual, social and expanding systems layers (family, school, community, other systems).

- The individual level focuses on reporting on changes for individual youth and adult allies.
- The social level focuses on reporting on changes in relationships. For example: how youth interact with other youth or how youth interact with other adult allies.
- The system level focuses on reporting on changes for programs, organizations and policymakers. For example, how youth influence program design or how youth influence government policy.

This data will be analyzed and reported back to community stakeholders as well as the funder. At the end of each reporting year, an evaluation report will be published to further engage the community and generate an understanding of the impact of programming on the different systems levels.

Monitoring long-term change

This Strategy is rooted in the Healthy City Strategy (approved by Council in 2014) which sets out 13 long-term goals for the well-being of everyone in Vancouver. The Healthy City Strategy is an overarching framework with targets and associated indicators that measure progress towards a healthy city for all. The Vancouver Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy supports Goal #6: *A safe city in which residents feel secure* which includes targets related to sense of belonging and perceived sense of safety. Upon approval of this Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy, staff will work with partners

to identify outcomes and indicators to evaluate progress on the Strategy’s objectives and we will continue to monitor population level data through the Healthy City Strategy to gauge how these efforts are translating to systems change.

Section 6. Demographic Profile of Children and Youth in the City

Vancouver is home to nearly 141,000 children and youth under age 25, representing 21% of the city’s population (table 1). The number of children and youth has remained stable, or declined in some age groups, even while the city’s overall population continues to grow (figure 14). Vancouver’s proportion of people under 18 is lower than most other cities in the region and in Canada, and there is an ongoing trend of families leaving Vancouver when their children reach school age due to affordability and other housing challenges. While there was a decline in the total number of young adults (18-24) since the last census, this age group still comprises a significant portion of the population.

City of Vancouver: Child/Youth Population by Age, 2001-2021

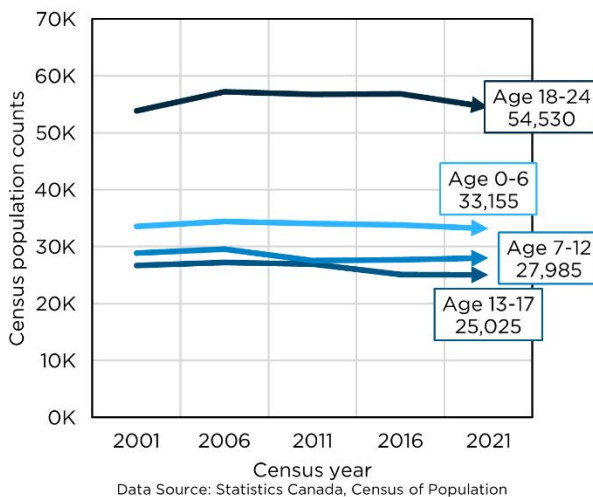


Table 1 City of Vancouver: Child/Youth Population by age, 2021 Census

Age group	Total population	% of population
0-6	33,155	5.0%
7-12	27,985	4.2%
13-17	25,025	3.8%
18-24	54,530	8.2%
Total	140,695	21.2%

Figure 14 Child/youth population by age, 2001-2021

Where youth reside

School-age children and youth tend to live in neighbourhoods farther away from downtown, with less access to transportation, services and networks that could support their sense of connection and belonging. As youth move out on their own past age 19, they begin to make up a larger share of the population in central neighbourhoods.

Older youth disproportionately experience poverty

In Vancouver, 12% of children ages 0-6, 13% of youth ages 7-12 and 14% of youth ages 13-17 are part of individual or family households that fell below the low-income measure in

2020.¹⁹ This is on par with the average low-income rate across all ages in the city (13%). However, 19% of older youth (age 18-24) are considered low income and youth living independently are particularly likely to be below the low-income measure.

Note that all income statistics in 2020 were significantly impacted by COVID-19, with a loss of employment income in some sectors and widespread access to government income benefits such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB). Among people with income in 2020, 61% of youth aged 18-24 accessed CERB in 2020, more than double the rate of the overall population with income. Low-income rates for youth have likely increased since the CERB program ended.

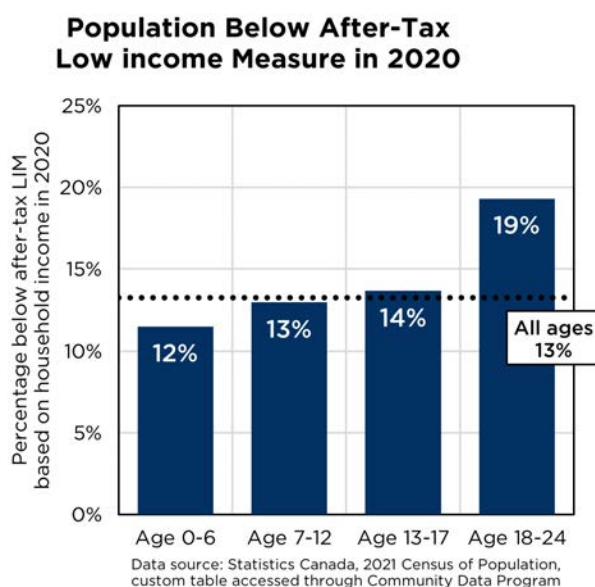


Figure 15 Low-income rate by age, 2020

Vancouver youth are very diverse

- **Indigenous:** Compared to the overall population, children and youth are more likely to identify as Indigenous: approximately 3% of children/youth (age 0-24) identify as Indigenous, with school-age children and youth having a higher percentage (figure 16). Note that these statistics include people living in the Musqueam community in southwest Vancouver, but the census program may also undercount many Indigenous people.
- **Racialized:** More youth are in a racialized group compared to the general population. Two-thirds of children and youth in Vancouver are either Indigenous or in a racialized population group (figure 17).

¹⁹ The after tax low-income measure (LIM) defines a low-income household as having income less than half the national median, adjusted to household size. (e.g., a 4 person household earning below \$53,000 after tax was considered low income in 2020). See [StatCan](#) for more information.

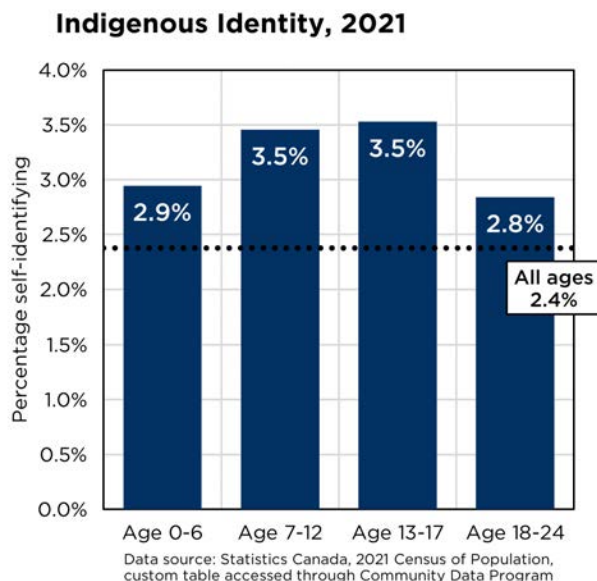


Figure 16 Indigenous identities by age, 2021

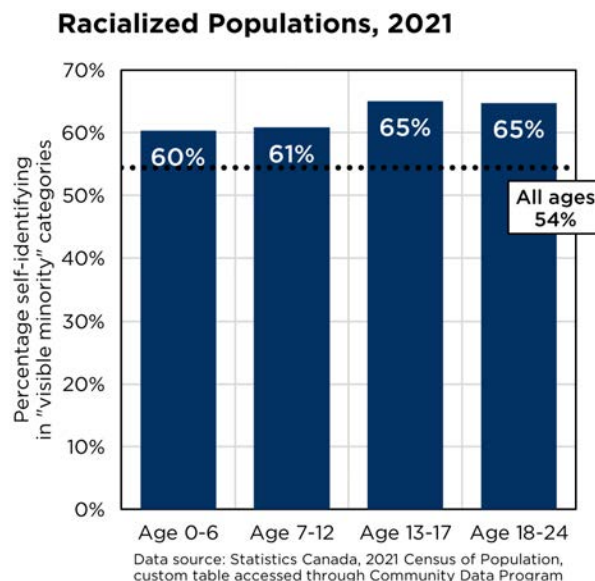


Figure 17 Racialized populations by age, 2021

- Gender & sexual orientation:** Many identities are not captured in the census. According to Vancouver respondents to the 2018 BC Adolescent Health Survey of youth in grades 7-12: 2% were non-binary and another <1% were transgender. 18% identified a sexual orientation other than straight.
- Disability:** As of the 2022-2023 school year, 11% of students in the Vancouver School District were designated as having special needs.^{20,83} A snapshot of grade 10 and 11 students in the 2023 Youth Development Instrument survey found that 9% of Vancouver respondents self-reported as having a learning disability, 6% reporting having a chronic health condition and 4% reported having a physical or sensory disability (e.g., use a wheelchair, vision-impaired).⁸⁴
- Newcomers/recent immigrants:** Overall, Vancouver youth are more likely to be second generation immigrants (i.e. to have a parent born outside of Canada) than be immigrants themselves. Younger children (0-6) are over twice as likely to have at least one parent born outside of Canada, while older youth (age 18-24) are the more likely than other children/youth to be immigrants themselves (figure 18).

²⁰ Note the Ministry includes “gifted” as one type of special need. For more details on how this term is defined, visit <https://studentsuccess.gov.bc.ca/glossary#162>

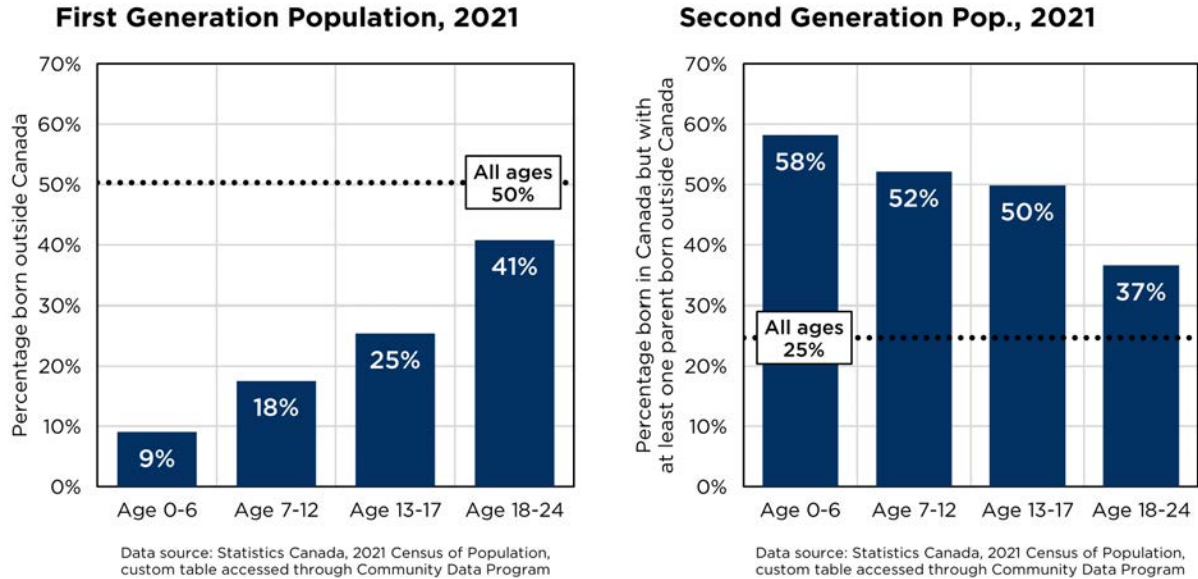


Figure 18 First and second generation population by age, 2021

Youth transitioning to independent living are at higher risk of housing insecurity

While nearly all children 12 and under live with at least one parent, 4% of 13-17 year-olds are living separately from their parents, including 470 living with relatives other than parents and 420 living with non-relatives. Among 18-24 year-olds, 47% live separately from their parents (figure 19). A growing independence with age is to be expected; however, housing security can pose a particular challenge for young adults in Vancouver as they set out on their own. When youth under 25 form their own households, 86% rent their homes and many experience affordability challenges. Participants in the City’s youth engagement sessions were concerned about the high cost of living they would face once they moved out on their own.

When youth form their own households, they are...

- 13% more likely to live in an apartment building
- 1.5x more likely to be rented
- Almost 5x more likely to be made up of roommates

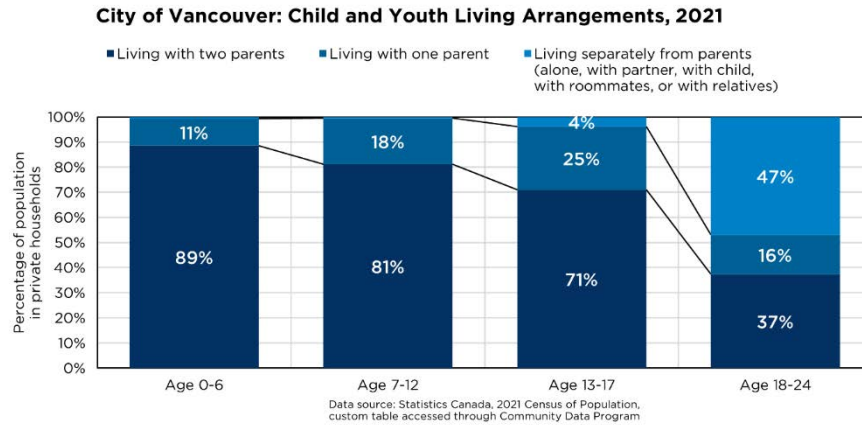
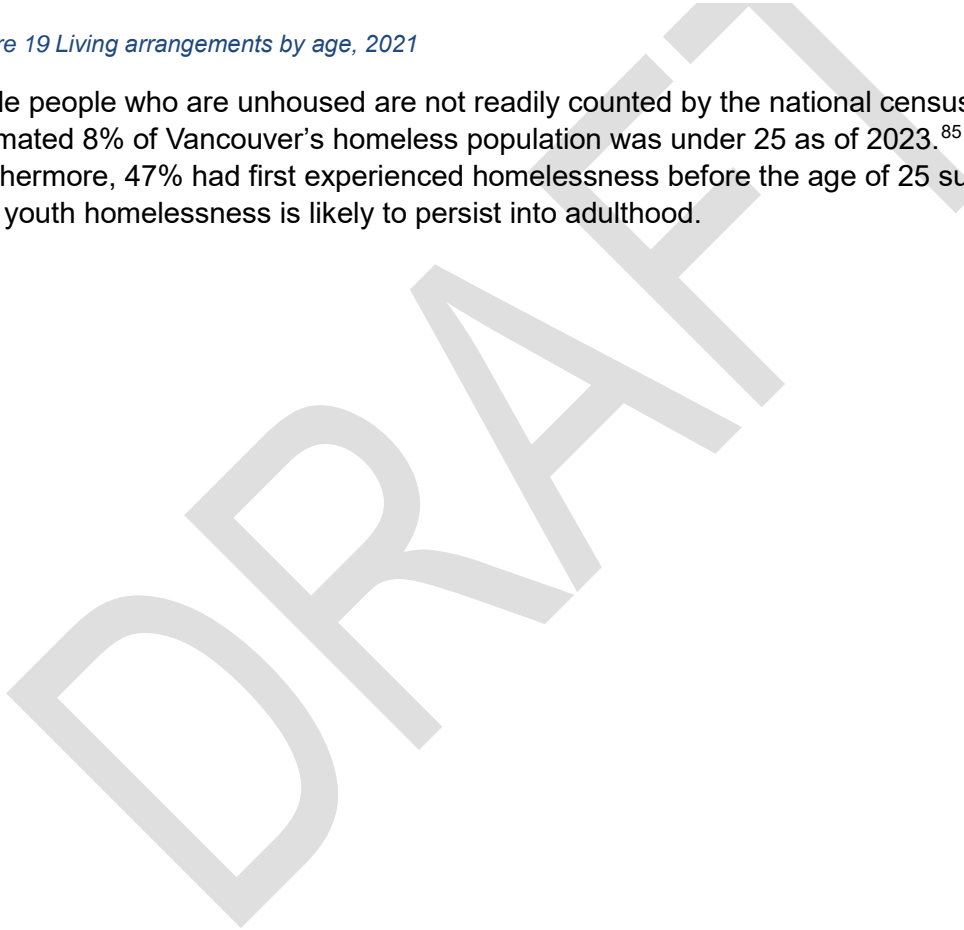


Figure 19 Living arrangements by age, 2021

While people who are unhoused are not readily counted by the national census, an estimated 8% of Vancouver’s homeless population was under 25 as of 2023.⁸⁵ Furthermore, 47% had first experienced homelessness before the age of 25 suggesting that youth homelessness is likely to persist into adulthood.



Attachment 1: Partner and Youth Ideas for Action

Throughout the various engagement sessions, youth and staff from partner agencies shared many ideas for the kinds of changes they’d like to see unfold to make Vancouver safer for young people. These ideas are summarized below and will be included for consideration as part of the proposed community planning process.

Focus Area 1: Create safer and protective community environments and public spaces for youth.	
<p><i>Partner Recommended Actions:</i></p> <p>Inform the design of public spaces through the lens of disability justice.</p> <p>Provide housing subsidies through schools.</p> <p>Examine the current active travel and transit accessibility to spaces and places for youth in the city and improve upon the gaps.</p> <p>Integrate youth into the planning process of city planning, alongside facilities, engineering, social infrastructure as a way to effectively involve young people in planning and design.</p> <p>Generate more frequent, informal platforms for youth to speak directly to decision makers, not filtered through bureaucracy.</p> <p>Compensate youth for their input and participation.</p> <p>Identify ways to engage youth in discussions and planning processes for positive police engagement.</p>	<p><i>Youth Ideas:</i></p> <p>Security posts set up around the city similar to the ones at the University of British Columbia. These posts will connect directly to a security or police phone line and will make youth feel safer. In situations where they do not have access to a mobile phone, they will still be able to contact local authorities if they need help.</p> <p>Sit-on transit guards: Youth would feel safer at night on specific bus lines if there was one security guard or a transit police officer travelling en route with them. This would also allow youth to build stronger relationships with police, security personnel in their communities.</p> <p>Brighter streetlamps to ensure that the streets of the Vancouver are well lit. This will increase visibility and the degree of safety youth feel transiting around Vancouver at night.</p> <p>Affordable transportation for youth. Transit fares can pose as a barrier for youth to use transportation especially in cases where youth are using public transportation regularly. Having free compass cards for youth would give them greater freedom to access to more community services and safe spaces around the city.</p> <p>Increased shelter option for young people. Not all youth- have access to housing and not all housing they have access to is safe.</p>

	<p>Youth would like there to be a focus on ensuring that there are safe shelter options for youth who may not be supported by their caregivers.</p> <p>Advocating for more accessible and well-known youth shelters would make youth feel safer in their communities.</p>
--	---

<p>Focus Area 2: Identify and strengthen community-based supports for healthy child development in the middle years</p>	
<p><i>Partner Recommended Actions:</i></p> <p>Identify protective factors and increase support for them (individual, family, community, and societal levels).</p> <p>Teach conflict resolution early in life.</p> <p>Prioritize teaching trauma informed curriculum in low barrier pre-teen programming.</p> <p>Convene youth service providers to understand current state of sector and opportunities for enhanced violence prevention programming.</p> <p>Engage directly with children in the middle years to hear their perspectives on safety and belonging in the city.</p> <p>Promote children’s social and emotional competence through early violence prevention programs through schools and community organizations.</p>	<p><i>Youth Ideas:</i></p> <p>City funded sports teams for youth will increase the sense of belonging that youth feel within their communities. It will allow youth to build connections with their peers and gain intergenerational mentorship from trusted adults such as coaches.</p> <p>More funds for afterschool care. Youth want a space where they feel accepted, welcomed and safe but not all youth have access to spaces like this. Afterschool care can be costly which can create a barrier for many families. As well, most programs don’t support older youth. Some youth don’t feel safe at home and feel an extrinsic pressure to belong – somewhere. This pushes them into connecting with bad people. To avoid this, we should work on increasing the accessibility and quality of afterschool care.</p> <p>City funded sports teams for youth will create other positive opportunities for belonging, allowing youth to build connections with their peers and gain mentorship from trusted adults such as coaches.</p>

Focus Area 3: Strengthen the coordination and provision of positive youth development services and programs	
<p><i>Partner Recommended Actions:</i></p> <p>Design an easily accessible dashboard for members of the community to participate in self-reporting and tracking progress on community programming and efforts. Collect both qualitative and quantitative data from the community ethically, through informed consent.</p> <p>Design more arts and sports-based community programming and initiatives to increase the opportunity for youth seeking social connection within their communities.</p> <p>Support organizations/agencies to self-evaluate and implement changes to make their cultures more inclusive.</p> <p>There needs to be a clear understanding of institutional power that continues to enforce barriers to true youth involvement.</p> <p>Integrate a long-term strategy that embeds project goals into service goals to extend beyond project funding scope.</p>	<p><i>Youth Ideas:</i></p> <p>Invest more into community centers to ensure that all services are accessible and up to date. Community centers should also have a designated space for youth to gain access to resources they may need, including contacts for therapists, access to computers to complete schoolwork and receive guidance from youth workers.</p> <p>Provide supplementing funds for certificates, relieving the cost of youth gaining certain certifications such as the Canadian Red Cross Babysitting certificate. Certificates would increase - opportunities to gain valuable work experience and financial independence.</p> <p>Fund and support more professional development for the youth serving sector, creating opportunities f to develop a common approach and language for supporting youth in Vancouver. This would increase their capacity to support youth.</p> <p>Advocate for culturally sensitive resources. There are programs and resources in Vancouver communities which increase the safety and knowledge youth have. The issue with these resources is that not all of them consider cultural sensitivity. It is important that there are people advocating for these programs to adopt some culturally sensitive protocols so they can ensure there are no barriers to accessing their programs.</p> <p>Invest in living wage rather than minimum wage. Youth should have access to obtain a living wage; minimum wage does not supply youth with enough money to support themselves in situations where their parents/guardians may fail to. Youth want</p>

	<p>access to living wage jobs with enough income to meet their needs and rights.</p> <p>Fund care that supplement youth with some of the necessities they need such as food, hygiene products, and single fare bus passes.</p>
--	--

Focus Area 4: Connect youth to caring adults	
<p><i>Partner Recommended Actions:</i></p> <p>Increase in the amount of mentorship opportunities available for youth.</p> <p>Facilitate additional community forums such as the Youth Violence Prevention Forum, to create spaces for youth to connect with other like-minded youth on cause-based opportunities.</p> <p>Increase engagement with youth, providing them with platforms to be peer leaders.</p> <p>Set standards, increase wages and benefits and raise the profile of staff working with youth in community-based agencies.</p> <p>Apply anti-oppressive, emancipatory and equity-focused secular approach that recognizes Indigenous teachings and stewardship.</p>	<p><i>Youth Ideas:</i></p> <p>More youth forums: Youth feel safe when they have a say in what happens in their communities. Giving youth more opportunities to voice their opinions and share their knowledge will not only offer new and refreshing ideas; it will help youth build a stronger connection to their community.</p> <p>Communications strategy: Youth want to be more involved in their communities but sometimes lack the resources to gain information on how to get more involved. Centralized information hub, website information or monthly newsletters/communications published by the city that outline the events and opportunities for youth around Vancouver.</p>

Focus Area 5: Lessen the impacts of serious violence and crime on children and youth

Partner Recommended Actions:

Design partnerships between organizations that are providing culturally safe programming and issue-based organizations.

Ensure collaborative and integrative approach for the prevention of youth violence in the city. Non-profits and The City are equally accountable stakeholders.

Create a referral/promotion plan across the service providers in the city to foster collaboration while considering the current strain on the sector and resources.

Integrate restorative justice into programs: Resolve conflict and teach conflict resolution based on Indigenous principles to address low impulse control, trauma, and anger.

Build programs and safe spaces for at-risk youth affected by violence without stigmatization.

Youth Ideas:

Free, accessible and customizable therapy. Youth have identified that there are few free therapy solutions and the ones that do exist have long wait times or other barriers of entry. Youth want more options for free therapy both in and out of school. This would also increase the network of trusted adults for youth in their community.

Invest more funds into skills building programs. Youth want to build on their professional skills to gain financial independence. Some programs could include financial literacy programs and resume building workshops.

Invest in Youth Specific Positions in youth serving agencies. The City could supplement funds for Community Centers and youth serving agencies around Vancouver to hire more youths with lived experience to help provide work experience.



Endnotes

-
- ¹ Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. "A Balanced Approach to Youth Violence" (2006). <https://www.camh.ca/-/media/files/pdfs---public-policy-submissions/a-balanced-approach-to-youth-violence-2006-pdf>.
- ² Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. "Convention on the Rights of the Child," adopted November 20, 1989, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/crc.pdf>.
- ³ Bharmal, N., Pitkin Derose, K., Felician, M., Weden, M.M. "Understanding the Upstream Social Determinants of Health," working paper prepared for the RAND Social Determinants of Health Interest Group, 2015. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/working_papers/WR1000/WR1096/RAND_WR1096.pdf
- ⁴ National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health. "Let's Talk Moving Upstream" (2014). https://nccdh.ca/images/uploads/Moving_Upstream_Final_En.pdf
- ⁵ World Health Organization, "Social Determinants of Health" Accessed July 2023 at <https://www.who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/violence-prevention>
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ UBC Human Early Learning Partnership. *The Middle Years Development Instrument: Research Brief* (2016).
- ⁸ M. Resnick. "Protective Factors, Resiliency and Healthy Youth Development" (2000). https://www.handinhandparenting.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Resnick_ProtectiveFactors.pdf.
- ⁹ Vancouver Coastal Health. *How Local Governments Can Promote Mental Wellness of Children and Youth*, draft paper, (2023).
- ¹⁰ City of Vancouver, "Civic Youth Strategy – New Directions and Pilot Model" (2002) <https://council.vancouver.ca/020423/a12.htm>
- ¹¹ Pancer, S.M., L. Rose-Krasnor, and L.D. Loiselle. "Youth Conferences as a Context for Engagement," *New Directions for Youth Development* 2002, no. 96 (Winter 2002): 49, doi:10.1002/yd.26.
- ¹² S. McCart and S. Clark. *Guidelines for Youth Engagement for Canadian Practitioners and Professionals in the Tobacco Control Field*, report prepared for Health Canada, Office of Programs and Mass Media, 2005.
- ¹³ Zeldin, S., Christens, B. D., & Powers, J. L. (2012). The Psychology and Practice of Youth-Adult Partnership: Bridging Generations for Youth Development and Community Change. *American Journal Community Psychology*, 385-397.
- ¹⁴ UBC Human Early Learning Partnership. *The Middle Years Development Instrument Dashboard* (2023). <https://earlylearning.ubc.ca/monitoring-system/mdi/mdi-overview/>
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ H. Samji, J. Maloney, J. Whitehead, B. Low, J. Lee, J. Herring, R. Correia, J. Wu, J. Kaufmann, and D. Long, *2022-2023 Youth Development Instrument School District Report: SD39: Vancouver* (Burnaby, BC: Simon Fraser University, 2023). <https://chartlab.ca/about-ydi/reports/#school-reports>
- ¹⁷ British Columbia Centre for Disease Control, *BC COVID-19 SPEAK Round 2 - Dashboard*, accessed August 1, 2023, <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/data-reports/bc-covid-19-speak-dashboard>.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Samji et al., *2022-2023 Youth Development Instrument: Vancouver Report*.
- ²⁰ Vancouver Coastal Health. *How Local Governments Can Promote Mental Wellness*.
- ²¹ McCreary Centre, "Balance and Connection in Vancouver: The Health and Wellbeing of our Youth" (2020).
- ²² Vancouver Coastal Health. *How Local Governments Can Promote Mental Wellness*.
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Vancouver Police Department, 2023. "Public Safety Indicators (PSI) Report for Q1" <https://vancouverpoliceboard.ca/police/policeboard/agenda/2023/0420/R%2015.%20Q1%202023%20PSI%20Report%20FINAL-%20Agenda%20Item%209.3.pdf>
- ²⁶ Ibid.

- ²⁷ Vancouver Police Department (2023) "Public Safety Indicators (PSI) Report for Year-End 2022." <https://vancouverpoliceboard.ca/police/policeboard/agenda/2023/0223/Year-End%202022%20PSI%20Report%20FINAL%20TO%20BOARD.pdf>
- ²⁸ McCreary Centre, "Balance and Connection in Vancouver."
- ²⁹ McCreary Centre, "Balance and Connection in Vancouver."
- ³⁰ City of Vancouver. "UN Safe Cities & Public Spaces Scoping Study: Literature Review." (2021). Unpublished manuscript.
- ³¹ Children of the Street Society, "Key Definitions" (2022), accessed August 1, 2023, <https://www.childrenofthestreet.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Key-Definitions.pdf>.
- ³² Vancouver Police Department (2023) "Public Safety Indicators (PSI) Report for Year-End 2022." <https://vancouverpoliceboard.ca/police/policeboard/agenda/2023/0223/Year-End%202022%20PSI%20Report%20FINAL%20TO%20BOARD.pdf>
- ³³ Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019).
- ³⁴ Ministry of Child and Family Development, "Permanency for Children & Youth in Care – Case Data and Trends," (2023). <https://mcfcd.gov.bc.ca/reporting/services/child-protection/permanency-for-children-and-youth/case-data-and-trends>
- ³⁵ Representative for Children and Youth, "Annual Report 2021/22 and Service Plan 2022/23 to 2024/25," (2022). Access via <https://rcybc.ca/reports-and-publications/reports/>
- ³⁶ Representative for Children and Youth, "Missing: Why are children disappearing from B.C.'s child welfare system?" (2023). <https://rcybc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/RCY-Missing-April2023.pdf>
- ³⁷ Yang, J., McCuish, E., & Corrado, R. (2020). "Is the foster care-crime relationship a consequence of exposure? Examining potential moderating factors." *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 19, 94-112.
- ³⁸ City of Vancouver, "Homelessness & Supportive Housing Strategy," (2020). <https://council.vancouver.ca/20201007/documents/pspc1presentation.pdf>
- ³⁹ Vancouver Police Department, "VPD Responds to Youth Violence," published May 10, 2022, accessed August 1, 2023, <https://vpd.ca/news/2022/05/10/vpd-responds-to-youth-violence/>.
- ⁴⁰ Vancouver Police Department, "VPD Responds to Youth Violence."
- ⁴¹ CBC News, "School Violence: Marketplace," published August 9, 2019, accessed August 1, 2023, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/school-violence-marketplace-1.5224865>.
- ⁴² Statistics Canada, "Table 35-10-0184-01 Incident-based crime statistics, by detailed violations, police services in British Columbia," accessed August 1, 2023, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tb1/en/tv.action?pid=3510018401>.
- ⁴³ McCreary Centre, "Balance and Connection in Vancouver."
- ⁴⁴ Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit - British Columbia (CFSEU-BC), "Gangs in British Columbia," accessed August 1, 2023, <https://cfseu.bc.ca/gangs-in-british-columbia/>
- ⁴⁵ Public Safety Canada, *Youth Gangs in Canada: What do we know?* (2017), <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrscs/pblctns/gngs-cnd/gngs-cnd-eng.pdf>
- ⁴⁶ Public Safety Canada, *Youth Gangs in Canada: What do we know?*
- ⁴⁷ End Gang Life, "Understanding Youth in Gangs, 2022 Edition," accessed August 1, 2023, <https://endganglife.ca/understanding-youth-in-gangs-2022-edition/>
- ⁴⁸ Public Safety Canada, *Youth Gangs in Canada: What do we know?*
- ⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid.
- ⁵¹ End Gang Life, "Understanding Youth in Gangs, 2022 Edition"
- ⁵² Public Safety Canada, *Youth Gangs in Canada: What do we know?*
- ⁵³ Plan International, "State of Gender Equality for US Adolescents" (2018), accessed August 1, 2023, <https://www.planusa.org/report/executive-summary-the-state-of-gender-equality-for-u-s-adolescents/>.
- ⁵⁴ Vancouver Coastal Health. *How Local Governments Can Promote Mental Wellness*.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Claire Shepansky, "Capacity Assessment of Youth Focused Organizations in Vancouver," University of British Columbia, accessed August 1, 2023, https://sustain.ubc.ca/sites/default/files/2023-095_Capacity%20Assessment%20of%20Youth%20Focused%20Orgs%20Vancouver_Shepansky_0.pdf

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Vantage Point, "Safety Net: 2023 State of BC's Non-Profit Sector," accessed August 1, 2023, <https://thevantagepoint.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Safety-Net-2023-State-of-BCs-Non-Profit-Sector.pdf>

⁶² Claire Shepansky, "Capacity Assessment of Youth Focused Organizations in Vancouver."

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Cull, I., R.L.A. Hancock, S. McKeown, M. Pidgeon, and A. Vedan. *Pulling Together: A Guide for Front-Line Staff, Student Services, and Advisors* (Victoria, BC: BCcampus, 2018), <https://opentextbc.ca/indigenizationfrontlineworkers/>.

⁶⁵ Kimberlé Crenshaw Williams. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, 139-67, p. 149.

⁶⁶ SickKids | About Kids Health, "The right to safe spaces," (2021). <https://www.aboutkidshealth.ca/Article?contentid=3980&language=English#>

⁶⁷ McCreary Centre, "Balance and Connection in Vancouver."

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ UBC Human Early Learning Partnership, "Middle Years Development Instrument: Vancouver School District Report, 2022-2023," (2023). <https://earlylearning.ubc.ca/school-district/vancouver/>

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Positive Youth Development," accessed August 1, 2023, <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/safe-supportive-environments/positive-youth-development.htm>.

⁷³ Vancouver Coastal Health. *How Local Governments Can Promote Mental Wellness of Children and Youth*.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ City of Vancouver, "The making of Vancouver's Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy," (2023).

⁷⁶ Vancouver Coastal Health. *How Local Governments Can Promote Mental Wellness of Children and Youth*.

⁷⁷ McCreary Centre, "Balance and Connection in Vancouver."

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ British Columbia Centre for Disease Control, *BC COVID-19 SPEAK Round 2 – Dashboard*.

⁸¹ Public Safety Canada, *Youth Gangs in Canada: What do we know?*

⁸² McCuish, E., P. Lussier and R. Corrado. "Cohort Profile: The Incarcerated Serious and Violent Young Offender Study," *CrimRxiv* (2022), <https://doi.org/10.21428/cb6ab371.7f0521be>

⁸³ BC Ministry of Education, "2022/2023 Student Enrollment Data for Vancouver School District," accessed August 1, 2023, <https://studentsuccess.gov.bc.ca/school-district/039/report/contextual-information>

⁸⁴ Samji et al., *2022-2023 Youth Development Instrument: Vancouver Report*.

⁸⁵ City of Vancouver, "Homelessness & Supportive Housing Strategy"

Attachment 1

The making of...

VANCOUVER'S YOUTH SAFETY & VIOLENCE PREVENTION STRATEGY



The community engagement and research journey that shaped the Strategy

- Program Overview
- Youth and Partner Engagement Process
 - Engagement Overview
 - Youth Forum
 - Junior Years Forum
 - Accessibility Engagement Analysis
 - Youth Community Developers & Youth Reference Group
 - Community & Public Partners Reference Group
- Research Process
 - Community-based research grants
 - Youth sector capacity study
 - Socio-demographic profile
 - Program evaluation
- Findings from Youth Engagements
 - Findings from the Youth Violence Prevention Forum
 - Findings from the Junior Youth Forum
 - Findings from the Accessibility Engagement Analysis
- APPENDIX A: COMMUNITY PARTNERS REFERENCE GROUP LIST
- APPENDIX B: 2023 COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH GRANTEES

Guiding Vision:

A city where youth feel safe, supported, connected, healthy and free of violence

Scope:

Address youth violence in its broadest sense, to include racism, lateral and systemic violence, bullying and stigmatization, gun and gang violence, gender based violence, and online violence.

Goals:

- address the root causes of youth violence through prevention efforts that promote individual and community well being, safety and belonging in the city
- create safer spaces and empower young people and communities to develop and implement solutions
- align with the Healthy City Strategy

Grounded in a life course approach, the Strategy promotes understanding child and youth needs and experiences of safety along critical developmental stages including early childhood, middle years, adolescence and transition to adulthood.

YOUTH & PARTNER ENGAGEMENT PROCCCESS

- Engagement phase: November 2022 – August 2023
- 250 youth and 110 reps from 40 community partners were engaged in dialogue circles over 7 engagement events
- Dialogues explored:
 - perceptions of safety, community, and belonging for children and youth in Vancouver;
 - the supports needed to create a safe and youth-friendly city and youth sector.

 - **Project Launch** | November 30, 2022 | Official launch of BSCP Vancouver.
 - 85 participants

 - **Community Dialogues** | February 2023
 - 60 participants across 4 dialogue sessions at the Vancouver Library

 - **Youth Violence Prevention Forum** | April 2023
 - 170 participants

 - **Junior Youth Forum** | August 2023
 - 45 participants

- **APRIL 2023** | *Vancouver Youth Voice: Violence Prevention Forum*
- Convened 170 high school youth at risk of gun and gang violence with support of 40 community partners
- Included 15 dialogue circles + 5 skill building workshops to:
 1. Inspire youth to participate in building more positive and safe communities for all youth in Vancouver
 2. Build youth skills to identify different forms of violence and learn strategies to safely address violence
 3. Connect youth with relevant local resources that support youth mental health, support, and connection
 4. Engage youth in dialogue on what youth violence means to them, hear their ideas for solutions, and explore different forms of youth violence.
- [See page 18 for detailed findings \(equivalent of page 70 for overall package\)](#)

- **AUGUST 9, 2023** | *Junior Youth Forum*
- Hosted by KidSafe BC with support from CoV and EQUITAS
- 45 children and youth, age 9-12
- This event was a first of what will become a series of dialogues with children and youth in this age group.
- See [page 28 \(equivalent of page 80 of overall package\)](#) for preliminary findings

- While an accessibility-focused youth engagement session wasn't held, themes of accessibility, disability, and inclusive spaces were discussed in the youth engagement sessions.
- In addition, the City had extensive data from a series of accessibility engagement sessions conducted as part of the Accessibility Strategy.
- A student was hired in summer 2023 to analyze notes from both Youth and Accessibility engagements and identify key themes common to both or those specific to youth.
- See [page 29 \(equivalent of page 81 of overall package\)](#) for findings

To ensure the Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy resonated with youth, two youth groups were formed to elicit direction as the Strategy developed:

Youth Community Developers (YCD)

- 8 youth hired to support youth engagement process
- YCDs met between January and August 2023
- Planned and executed the Youth Violence Prevention Forum (April 24, 2023). After this event, this team played a supporting role in conducting research for the COV Social Policy Division for BSCP strategy development as well as helping facilitate the Youth Reference Group.

Youth Reference Group (YRG)

- 20 youth who expressed interest at the Youth Violence Prevention Forum in providing their input into the Strategy development
- 6 sessions, May – June 2023
- Sessions facilitated by EQUITAS (consultant hired to support youth engagement) and the Youth Community Developers
- YRG shared their experiences, indicating what direction and actions that they would like to see the strategy take.

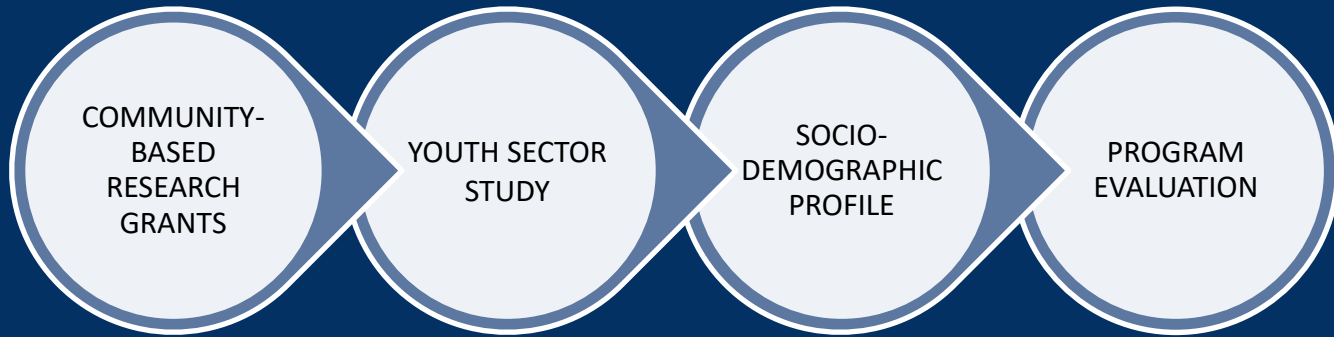
Community and Public Partner Reference Groups were created to provide guidance and input on program deliverables and help identify actions for years 2-4 of the program based on engagement, research findings, and community based knowledge.

November 2022 onwards | Monthly planning and policy meetings

- **COMMUNITY REFERENCE GROUP:**
 - 110 representatives from 40 community agencies spanning various youth focus areas (e.g. wrap-around services, mentorship programs, youth hubs, arts-based programming, sports-based programming). See Appendix A for member list.
- **PUBLIC PARTNERS REFERENCE GROUP:**
 - 12 representatives of public partners including 3 City of Vancouver staff departments, Vancouver Police Department, VFRS, Vancouver Park Board, VPL, Vancouver School Board, and Vancouver Coastal Health

BSCF project staff have also been convening bi-monthly conference calls with fellow BSCF grantees across the Lower Mainland.

These calls have provided opportunities to network, share strategy and program development updates, and are building a foundation for future collaboration across the region.



RESEARCH PROCESS

- 15 community-based research project grants (\$10,000 each)
 - January – December 2023
- Convened grantees quarterly to report on findings and discuss local trends
- Findings incorporated into the Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy and subsequent action plans
- Grants reached over 530 youth
- See Appendix B for grantee list

THEMES EXPLORED BY THE CBR GRANTS:

- **Youth wellbeing and the social determinants of health:**
 - How can we map the connections between youth experiences of violence and broader systems of inequities?
- **Youth safety and belonging in the city:**
 - What factors are needed to enable a stronger sense of belonging and safety among youth in Vancouver?
- **Middle childhood and violence prevention and early intervention:**
 - How can youth violence prevention programs be integrated into broader interventions to support healthy child development?
- **Gun and gang violence:**
 - What targeted or other identity-specific strategies should be developed to prevent gun and gang violence?
- **Prevention of child and youth exploitation:**
 - What strategies are needed to prevent child and youth sexual exploitation?
- **Wrap around prevention services:**
 - What would help build capacity for the youth sector to implement effective wraparound service delivery models in Vancouver?

- In partnership with UBC Sustainability program, we commissioned a study to scan Vancouver's youth sector. This study helped establish a baseline of the breadth and geographical distribution of youth services in the city.
- Titled [*Capacity Assessment of Youth Focused Organizations in Vancouver Final Report*](#), the study identified Vancouver-specific trends and challenges in service delivery, coordination and organizational capacity.
- Key findings were incorporated into the City's Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy

- To paint a picture of children and youth in Vancouver in the Strategy, staff gathered and analyzed data from Statistics Canada and local research on child/youth populations.
- This analysis explored...
 - Population size by age sub-groups
 - Geographic distribution of children by age group
 - Prevalence of child and youth poverty
 - Child/youth identities (e.g. race, Indigeneity, gender, recent immigrant)
 - Housing and living arrangements
 - Trends in child and youth wellbeing through the COVID-19 pandemic

- City staff engaged the Students Commission of Canada to support the creation of an evaluation framework for the project and its associated grants.
- The framework identifies key outcomes and indicators guided by a collective impact approach and includes performance-based indicators from the national BSCF program.

FINDINGS FROM YOUTH ENGAGEMENTS

Findings from the
**Vancouver Youth Voice:
Violence Prevention Forum**

APRIL 2023



- When presented with the statement “**all youth feel safe in Vancouver,**” the vast majority of participants voted “**strongly disagree.**”
- When presented with the statement “**all youth feel a sense of belonging in their community,**” the vast majority of participants voted “**strongly disagree.**”
- Where participants felt safe:
 - At home, bedroom
 - School (depending)
 - Busy public spaces
 - Healthy friendships
 - Community Centres
 - Family
- Where participants felt unsafe:
 - Downtown Vancouver
 - Being alone in public
 - Poorly lit areas
 - Transit
 - School (depending)
 - Everywhere (as violence in broad daylight is normalized)

Sense of Belonging

Protective factors:

- Presence of healthy, trusting friendships and family relationships increases sense of belonging in community
- Online groups can “create a sense of belonging as a bridge to making friends in real life.”
- Youth-friendly community spaces & programs to connect over common interests

Risk factors

- Low sense of self; inability to be authentic leads youth to “mask” to fit in and increases chance of gang involvement
- Pandemic fractured youth communities and sense of belonging

“Most people put on a mask to fit in with the community and lose a sense of belonging themselves”

School Environment

Protective factors:

- Supportive, non-judgmental teachers and counsellors
- Diversity in counsellors – gender, racial identity, etc.
- Access to supportive peers which builds sense of belonging
- Participating in extracurriculars fosters belonging

Risk factors

- Absence of wrap-around youth development supports – built in or connection to supports/services
- Limited/lack of counsellors reduces access to important source of support
- Counsellors can also shame or invalidate youth experiences

Community Programs

Protective factors:

- Community centre/non-profit programs
 - Important features included: free, youth-friendly after-school drop-ins, youth-specific hours, programs tailored to different age groups
- Culturally relevant/sensitive programs
- Volunteer opportunities
- Youth councils
- Online groups can “create...a bridge to making friends in real life.”
- Access to trained youth workers
- Youth-specific harm reduction programs

Risk factors

- Absence of community programs through pandemic fractured communities and sense of belonging
- Lack of night time programming

“Another top problem is not having a place they can go and feel safe that is free, where they can hang out with their friends. Not having places to go is a big danger issue, at night when it’s dark out, and because of the high crime rate in Vancouver.”

Role of Adults

Protective factors:

- Adults as a source of mentorship, advice, non-judgmental listening
- Healthy male role models
 - Especially valuable to immigrants or children of immigrants as they experience more difficulty fitting in
- Trust is built when adults actually hear and act on the perspectives youth share.
- **Who:** caring parents, teachers, counsellors, therapists, club/team leaders, trained youth workers, and law enforcement

Risk factors

- Lack of validation from adults about youth experiences can lead to youth feeling need to prove themselves – can result in intimidating others or carrying weapons.
- Downtown Vancouver associated with dangerous adults, acts of racism, and predatory behaviour

“Adults say they want to hear youth voices, but there is never an understanding of action taken and what happens with what I share.”

Youth Engagement

Protective factors:

- Youth engagement as a whole is a protective factor
- Provides opportunities for youth voice across systems & decision-making spaces
- Environments where youth voice is actually heard and acted on

Mental Health

Protective factors:

- Widely accessible, free mental health supports
- Diverse forms of mental health supports (e.g. youth workers, therapists, social workers, therapy dogs)
- Culturally sensitive MH services

Risk factors

- Many youth mentioned they aren't getting the mental health support they need (lack of resources, long wait lists, unaffordable services)
- Stigma around therapy prevents youth from accessing it
- Loneliness (especially through COVID)

Exposure to Violence

Protective factors:

- Programs that promote healthy masculinity
- Continued connections/resources for youth who aged out of foster care
- Gender-diverse sex ed (ideally peer-led)
- Specific spaces/supports for gender diverse youth

Risk factors

- Culture of violence is prevalent and normalized
 - Toxic masculinity
 - Gender based violence
 - Sexual abuse
 - Physical violence
 - Cyber-bullying

Public Space

Protective factors:

- Busy areas feel safer
- Transit is frequent and reliable
- Quick lines to security in public spaces/transit
- Free/affordable transit (especially if it helps youth access services/safe spaces)
- Safe and clean public washrooms

Risk factors

- Stigma around certain neighbourhoods (downtown, DTES)
- Stigma around Vancouver being a lonely city “Keep to yourself”
- Public transit feels unsafe (bus stops and on transit) – especially for younger people, girls, and Indigenous girls
- Poorly lit areas/dark streets where gangs might hang out
- Being alone in public spaces, amongst strangers

Preliminary findings from the Junior Youth Forum

AUGUST 2023

Below are how some participants answered the question:
“What does community mean to you? Is KidSafe part of your community? Why/how?”

"People, family and friends. KidSafe is a part of my community because of the people that I know for a long time." (Age 11)

"It means people around me like my neighbours, stores (Corner stores because you can get anything), and school. KidSafe is a part of my community because it is around me." (Age 12)

"Queen Alexandra [school] is my community because I have a lot of friends and teachers that I've known for while. Moving to a new school feels scary but also exciting. I want to feel accepted and have friends at my new school. I don't really know how to make friends. KidSafe is a part because I have been going to KidSafe for a long time. My sister also came to KidSafe when she was younger. My brother also comes to KS." (Age 12)

"...KidSafe is a place like a hospital where people can come and get more help in the moment. KidSafe helps more to calm me down." (Age 10)

"It means like you have friends that you can trust, surrounded by loving people, and where you feel safe. KidSafe is a part because a lot of friends here like me and I don't have to give attention to the friends that doesn't like me. I feel safe here because I know KidSafe, whatever happens I can trust the leaders to talk to, and I also trust my friends a lot." (Age 9)

"Many people together.' I think of the Community Centre and a lot of holding hands. KidSafe is part of my community because everyone is together, safe, happy, and talking together." (Age 11)

Findings from the

Targeted analysis of accessibility engagement data

- What youth think would make for a more accessible city:
 - Improved wheelchair accessibility
 - Affordable community programs (currently hard for people with disabilities to fully participate in their community)
 - Not having to constantly prove one's disability (e.g. to access programs)
 - Public spaces are designed with diverse forms of accessibility in mind: better lighting, safe crosswalks, more rain-sheltered spaces in public
 - More investment in mental health and addictions programs, especially for those who are unhoused
 - Safer, more reliable transit that is planned with PWD in mind (e.g. a card confirming you are a PWD to avoid hassle accessing a reserved seat on the bus)

Findings from the

Targeted analysis of accessibility engagement data

(continued)

- Selected recommended accessibility actions that would benefit youth:
 - Plain language documents
 - Barrier-free access to public spaces (e.g. beach, parks, pools, some wheelchair friendly hiking paths) and an online directory for which spaces are barrier-free.
 - Free hospital parking to prevent youth from missing appointments due to the cost or bar friends/loved ones visiting them if hospitalized.
 - More accessible signage (avoid small fonts, complex language, minimize the number of signs in a space, and have audio-signage available) will especially help those with visual impairments.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: COMMUNITY PARTNERS REFERENCE GROUP LIST

Public Partners:

- CoV Arts Culture and Community Services Department
- CoV Planning Department
- CoV Engineering Services Department
- Vancouver Park Board
- Vancouver Public Library
- Vancouver Police Department
- Vancouver School Board
- Vancouver Fire Rescue Services
- Vancouver Coastal Health

Community Partners:

- AfroVan connect
- Big Brothers of Greater Vancouver
- Big Sisters of BC Lower Mainland
- Boys and Girls Clubs of BC
- Britannia Community Centre
- CityYhive
- Covenant house
- Disability Foundation
- EQUITAS
- Family Services of Greater Vancouver
- Immigrant Services Society
- KidSafe
- LOVE
- MOSAIC
- Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House
- Night Hoops
- Pacific Community Resources Society
- PeerNET
- PICS
- Red Fox
- Simon Fraser University - School of Criminology
- South Vancouver NH
- Takeover Skateboarding
- TRRUST
- UNYA
- Vancouver Park Board - Youth Worker
- WATARI
- Yarrow Society

1. Britannia Community Services Centre Society (Teen Centre)
 - Youth Creating Safer Communities (YCSC)- “From the Youth, For the Youth”
2. Britannia Community Services Centre Society (VCAT)
 - Exploring opportunities for youth-led health promotion strategies in the context of mental health and substance use policy and planning in Vancouver
3. Collingwood Neighbourhood House Society
 - C.R.A.V.E. (Collingwood-Renfrew Anti-Violence Education) Project
4. Gordon Neighbourhood House
 - By Us, For Us: Advancing Youth-Driven Violence Prevention Strategies in the West End-Downtown Peninsula
5. Hastings Community Centre
 - Hastings Youth Skateboarding Committee (HYSC)
6. KidSafe Project Society
 - KidSafe Project BSCF Initiative
7. MOSAIC
 - Youth Projects – Explicit Youth Dialogues

8. Progressive Intercultural Community Services (PICS) Society
 - Progressive Data
9. Red Fox Healthy Living Society
 - Red Fox Middle Years Mentorship Pilot Project
10. Society for Children and Youth of BC
 - Safety Circles: Deep Listening with Youth
11. South Vancouver Neighbourhood House
 - Deep Dive Dialogue
12. Simon Fraser University
 - Taking Stock of Youth Serving Programs in Vancouver
13. Thunderbird Neighbourhood Association
 - Youth Incentive Program
14. Trout Lake Community Centre Association
 - Youth Belong Initiative at Trout Lake
15. Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre
 - Indigenous Youth Recreation

APPENDIX C - Building Safer Communities Program Vancouver

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION SUBMISSION SUMMARY V. MARCH 21 2023

BSCP Vancouver is a youth violence prevention initiative aimed at promoting individual and community well-being, safety, and belonging in the city. Through this program, the City, youth and community and public partners will work together to prevent and address the root causes of youth violence, create safe spaces, and empower young people and communities to develop and implement solutions. With a primary focus on early prevention efforts, BSCP Vancouver will mobilize partners to promote community co-operation for violence prevention through social development initiatives. This includes developing a Youth Safety and Violence Prevention strategy, administering a granting program to support community-based early violence prevention programs for youth and strengthening the capacity of youth sector to collaborate and provide services.

Policy Development and Implementation	Community Tables	Network Building & Sector Development	Granting Program	Youth Community Development Program	Research, Monitoring and Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •City of Vancouver Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy (YSVPS). •Vision, principles, goals and strategic priorities for collective action. •High-level strategic framework identifying community level priorities for prevention of youth violence in the city. •An assessment of the nature and scope of youth violence in Vancouver, Conceptual framework, inventory of community based youth services and a capacity assessment of the current state of the sector. •Presented to council in Fall 2023 •BSCP Steering group to oversee the implementation of strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Targeted community mobilization and engagement through the creation of action plans for YSVPS priority areas • Focus efforts on addressing specific emerging issues •Action plans will outline tasks, steps, changes needed to address YSVPS priority areas •Developed through working groups or established newly formed networks •Actions identified will inform BSCP grants and funding priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Strengthen or create youth service networks to facilitate collaboration among youth serving agencies to deliver wrap around services or provide a coordinated approach to deliver early violence prevention programming within local communities. •In alignment with policy priorities and the development of action plans •3 local level service networks based on priority areas, communities of interests or placed based service networks •Sector development opportunities including trainings, resourcing collaboration and partnership development processes (aligned with granting stream) •Annual gatherings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •BSCP Youth engagement project grant: To enhance protective factors among equity denied youth at risk of getting involved in gun and gang violence through grass roots youth engagement community action projects. <i>(Call for applications January –March 2024, 2025 - \$100K annually)</i> •BSCP Youth Violence Prevention program grants: To develop and delivery early violence prevention programs that address risk factors associated with gun and gang violence. <i>(Call for applications October-December 2023, 2024, \$850 - 2025 -\$450)</i> •BSCP Organizational and Youth Sector Capacity Building grants: To build the capacity of youth serving organizations to establish community-based wraparound service networks to coordinate early prevention and intervention programs and initiatives at the community level. <i>(open all year \$100,000 from 2023 - 2024)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Youth engagement program involving youth from equity denied communities, backgrounds, and life experiences to participate and promote BSCP •Team will lead and support youth engagement activities including research, outreach, public education, event planning and policy development. • Up to 4 youth •Peer to peer community engagement model to support outreach, raise awareness about youth violence prevention efforts •Plan and deliver annual youth conference / dialogue / capacity building session 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Implement research projects to advance knowledge on early prevention of gun and gang violence at the community level •Ongoing social and demographic trends analysis and reporting on local level indicators on safety and belonging for children and youth •Implementation of the BSCP evaluation framework * Building capacity of the sector to conduct evaluation •Set up systems for monitoring and collective reporting
<p><i>Project staff</i> BSCP steering committee -public and community partners</p>	<p><i>Project staff – community partners</i></p>	<p><i>Project staff – existing or newly formed service networks</i></p>	<p><i>Project staff – existing or newly formed service networks</i></p>	<p><i>Project staff – Youth engagement consultant</i></p>	<p><i>Project staff – Evaluation consultant (s) – Community Partners</i></p>
<p><i>Tentative annual program budget allocation – City staffing costs Y2-Y3-Y4 \$264,000</i></p>	<p><i>Tentative annual program budget allocation – Engagement \$10,000</i></p>	<p><i>Tentative annual program budget allocation – \$20,000</i></p>	<p><i>Tentative annual program budget allocation Y2-Y3: \$1.050,000 Y4: \$500,000</i></p>	<p><i>Tentative annual program budget allocation Y2-Y3 \$90,000 Y4 - \$45,000</i></p>	<p><i>Tentative annual program budget allocation Y2-Y3: \$50,000 Y4: \$10,000</i></p>

VANCOUVER'S

Youth Safety & Violence Prevention Strategy, 2023-2026

DRAFT

Youth Friendly Version



© City of Vancouver | 23-237



The City of Vancouver acknowledges that it is situated on the unceded traditional territories of the xʷməθkʷəyəm (Musqueam Indian Band), Sḵwxwú7mesh (Squamish Nation), and səliłwətał (Tseil-Waututh Nation)

The City of Vancouver's Building Safer Communities Program is funded by Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada





DID YOU KNOW?

The municipal, provincial and federal governments each hold different kinds of responsibility towards children and youth.

- **Municipal governments** oversee local transportation infrastructure (transit, roads, bikeways); they decide where infrastructure like schools and daycares can go; and they operate key services like parks, libraries, law enforcement and community/rec centres. While not all municipalities do this, the City of Vancouver also provides grants to community non-profits, including those that serve children and youth.
- The **province** oversees the Ministry of Education and Childcare (i.e. public schools, childcare subsidies), WorkBC (which includes youth employment programs) and the Ministry of Child and Family Development (which protects vulnerable children, supports their mental health and operates key services like foster care and youth justice programs).
- The **federal government** delivers policies and programs that contribute to child and youth wellbeing more broadly such as settlement for newcomers, employment programs and income supports.
- **Indigenous Peoples** have the right to self-government. In Vancouver, the three host nations (Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations) along with the Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council (which represents urban Indigenous service providers) coordinate with other levels of government to deliver culturally appropriate child and youth services.

The what and why of a strategy

For us at the City of Vancouver, a strategy is a policy document that asserts the municipal government's commitment to a particular issue and outlines a path forward.

In 2022, the City of Vancouver received \$4.2M from Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada (a branch of the federal government) through the Building Safer Communities Program to reduce gun and gang violence and improve safety overall for the city's children and youth.

While the City has developed a range of strategies that impact children and youth in different ways, it's been over 20 years since we last had a youth-focused strategy. The Building Safer Communities Program has allowed us to kick-start the process and lay a solid foundation for a long-term plan to make sure Vancouver is a place where all children and youth can live safe and violence-free lives.



KEY CITY POLICIES

The new Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy builds on a range of policy work that relates to making Vancouver a safe and inclusive city for children and youth.

➤ **1989** | Canada signed onto the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child committing to the idea that everyone 18 and under has a right to safety.

1990
Civic
Childcare
Strategy

1995
Civic Youth
Strategy

2014
Reconciliation
Framework

2021
Equity
Framework

2022
Making Strides:
Vancouver's
Approach to
Childcare

1992
Vancouver
Children's
Policy

2002
Moving Forward -
Childcare: A
Cornerstone of
Child Development
Services

2022
Accessibility
Strategy

2014
Healthy City
Strategy

2023
Youth Safety and
Violence Prevention
Strategy



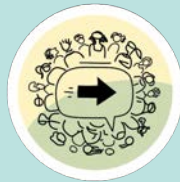
The making of the strategy

This Strategy is the result of lots of bright minds. Here's who was involved in helping us understand the issues and shape the Strategy:



Youth Community Developers

- 8 youth hired to support youth engagement and organize the Youth Violence Prevention Forum.



Youth Reference Group

- 20 youth provided input into the Strategy's development.



Youth Engagement

- 250 youth participated across 7 engagement events providing a youth perspective on issues of safety, belonging, and the impacts of violence.
- 530 children and youth reached through community-based research projects.



Community & Public Partners Reference Groups

- 110 reps from community organizations and 12 reps from local/regional public agencies shared their knowledge and experience to help shape the Strategy's direction.

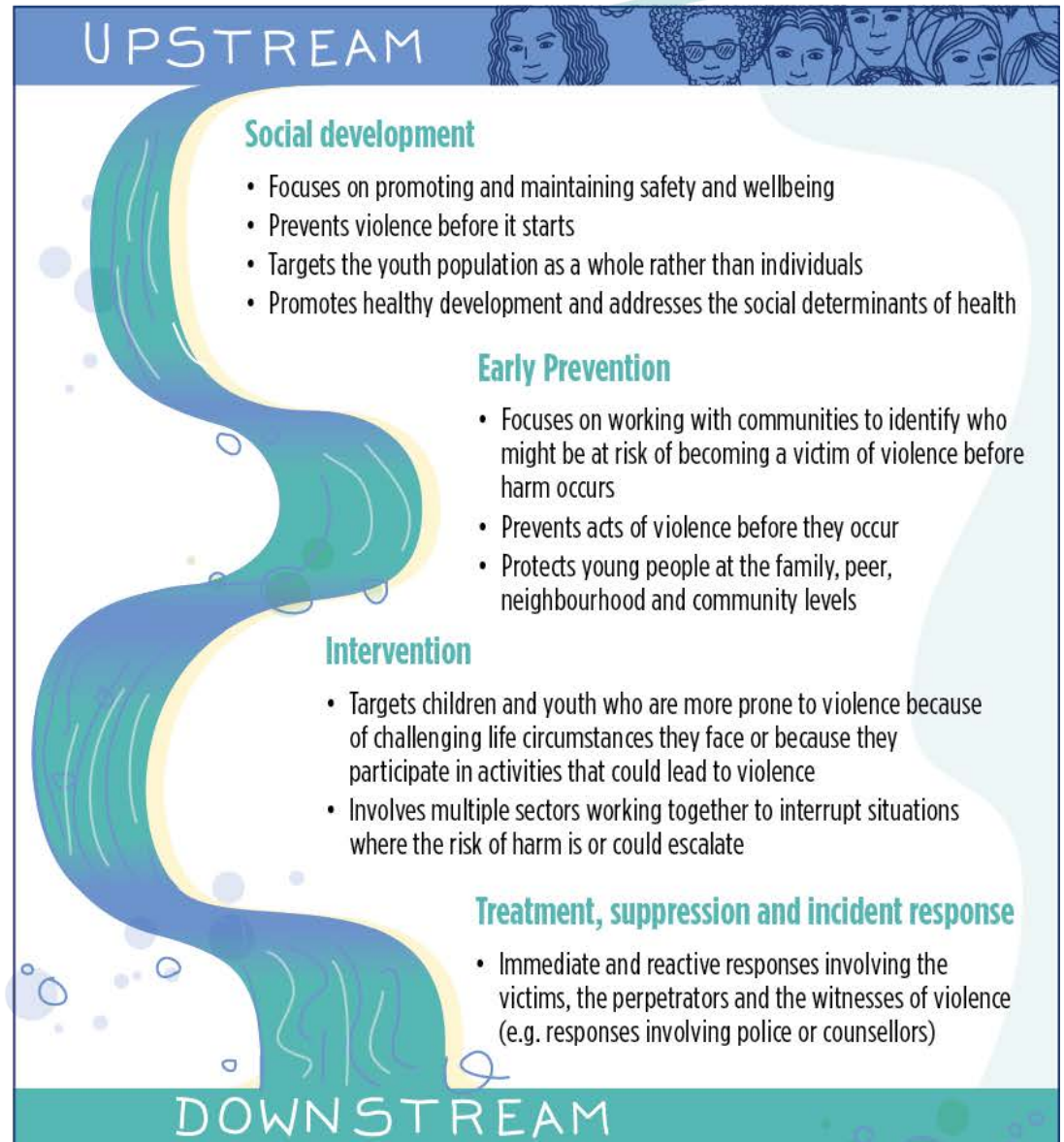
Youth violence prevention continuum

Our approach

There are a range of ways we can work to reduce violence and increase safety for youth. From preventative intervention (“upstream”) to more effectively responding to incidents of violence when they occur (“downstream”). During our engagements we heard that the Strategy should mostly focus on upstream interventions – and it does! Although we think mid-stream and downstream interventions have an important role to play too.

Upstream vs. Downstream

Using the analogy of a river, “upstream” and “downstream” are two different ways to address a problem in society. If you’re standing on the edge of a river and you keep seeing garbage float by, you could focus your efforts on cleaning up the river by removing the garbage downstream from its original source, one piece at a time. Or you could go upstream and stop the garbage from falling into the river in the first place. Downstream means solutions are more reactive and tend to focus on the individual while upstream solutions try and get at the source of the issue and focus on a broader population at-risk of harm.



YOUTH SAFETY AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION STRATEGY

Guided by a vision of a city where youth feel safe, supported, connected, healthy and free of violence

Guiding Principles:



Focus Areas

1



Create safer and protective community environments and public spaces for youth

Priorities:

- Structured and unstructured spaces for youth to gather
- Safety in public spaces and on public transit
- Programs and supports attached to schools, community centres and libraries
- Programs that promote youth involvement in local government

2



Identify & strengthen community-based supports for healthy child development in the middle years (age 6-12)

Priorities:

- Service provision and coordination of violence prevention programs for youth age 6-12 (“middle years”)
- Services and supports that are appropriate to children in this age group
- Parent and family engagement in violence prevention and intervention
- Programs that are specially designed to be supportive of children who have experienced trauma

3



Improve the coordination and delivery of positive youth development services and programs

Priorities:

- Improve the planning and coordination of youth services
- Targeted and identity-specific strategies and programs for equity-denied youth
- Strengthen the youth services sector by investing in training and knowledge sharing
- Promotion of youth development through arts, sports, recreation and community participation

4



Connect youth to caring adults

Priorities:

- Awareness about the importance of caring and supportive youth-adult relationships
- Intergenerational programming
- Mentorship programs
- Training for staff in the youth services sector

5



Lessen the impacts of serious violence and crime on children and youth

Priorities:

- Focus on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) that reduce the risk of harm, criminality and future victimization
- Mental health support for victims, offenders and bystanders
- Intervention strategies for children and youth affected by cyberbullying, sexual exploitation and youth gang involvement



Key issues affecting youth safety

Time and place

- Youth are less likely to feel safe at night compared to during the day.
- Public transit and certain neighbourhoods feel unsafe for many youth.

Gender

- Females tend to feel less safe in public than males, and non-binary youth feel even less safe than their cis-gendered peers.

Racism and discrimination

- Young people who face discrimination are more likely to suffer negative health consequences such as stress, depression, and poorer physical health.
- Those with marginalized identities are at a higher risk of becoming victims of violence. This is especially true for those who hold multiple marginalized identities such as Indigenous girls or youth who are racialized and queer.

Bullying & cyberbullying

- Over half of Vancouver high school students reported being bullied in some way in the previous year, while 11% said they had bullied someone in the last year. This suggests that a few bullies are targeting a lot of people.
- Cyberbullying (taunting, threats, harassment online) is also common and much more difficult to address compared to in-person spaces.

Sexual violence and sexual exploitation

- Those who are racialized, young, queer, women, trans, or living with a disability experience higher rates of sexual violence.
- Child sexual exploitation rose sharply during the pandemic with more children being kept at home without access to their usual community safeguards.

Children and youth in care (CYIC)

- CYIC are particularly at risk of various forms of violence and harm. Between April 2021 and March 2022, there were over 1,500 reports of serious injury and 10 reports of death among CYIC across BC. The majority of cases involved Indigenous children/youth.

A culture of disconnection, a culture of violence

- Youth in our engagement sessions repeatedly voiced that violence was normalized in their lives. Some saw their peers as “masking” their authentic selves to fit in. There is a lot of pressure for boys to be tough which can translate to acts of violence.

Presence of weapons

- While the stats say weapons-related offences are down among youth, local police services have recently noticed a

sharp rise in the possession and use of bear spray.

- It's also possible that weapons are showing up more as a form of self-defence. Vancouver teens who have been bullied are more likely to carry a weapon to school.

To counter these issues, the Strategy focuses on the following “protective factors” that have been shown to prevent or reduce the effects of violence:

- Strong social supports
- Community engagement
- Problem-solving, conflict resolution and de-escalation skills
- Positive adult role models, coaches, mentors
- Healthy middle childhood development
- Support during the middle years
- Participation in traditional healing and cultural activities
- Opportunities for social connection
- Creation of safer online and physical spaces
- Positive peer relationships
- Affordable and stable housing
- Opportunities for steady employment and skill-building
- Social, recreational and cultural programs for children and youth



Vancouver youth by the numbers

What do we know about Vancouver's youth today? To find out, we dug into some stats from the latest national census (2021).



21% of the city's population is under 25 (141,000).
Here's how it breaks down...



Where do young people live?

School-age children

School-age youth tend to live farther away from downtown, with less access to transportation, services, and programs that could support their sense of belonging.

Youth after age 19

After age 19, they begin to make up a larger share of the population in central neighbourhoods as they move out on their own.



Child and Youth Poverty

13%

Percentage of children under 18 living in low-income households.

46%

Youth between 18 and 24 are more likely to be low-income as more transition to living on their own.

Disability¹

Among Vancouver grade 10 and 11 students

Respondents reported that...

- 9% self-reported as having a learning disability
- 6% reported having a chronic health condition
- 4% reported having a physical or sensory disability (e.g. use a wheelchair, vision-impaired).

Racial identity



Children and youth in Vancouver are either Indigenous or in a racialized (non-white) population group.

Indigenous youth

3%

Compared to the overall population, indigenous children and youth are more likely to identify as Indigenous. About 3% of those under 25 identify as Indigenous, with school-age children and youth having a higher percentage.

Youth experiencing homelessness

9% of youth under 25 homeless

Youth under 25 make up about 9% of Vancouver's homeless population. **48% of Vancouver's homeless population had first experienced homelessness before the age of 25** suggesting that youth homelessness is likely to continue into adulthood.²

Living arrangements

Youth under 25
1.5x as likely to rent

When youth under 25 move out on their own, they are 1.5x more likely to be renters and nearly 5x more likely to live with roommates (compared to the city-wide average of private households).

¹ Youth Development Instrument, 2023. Vancouver Report
² Vancouver Homeless Count, 2020

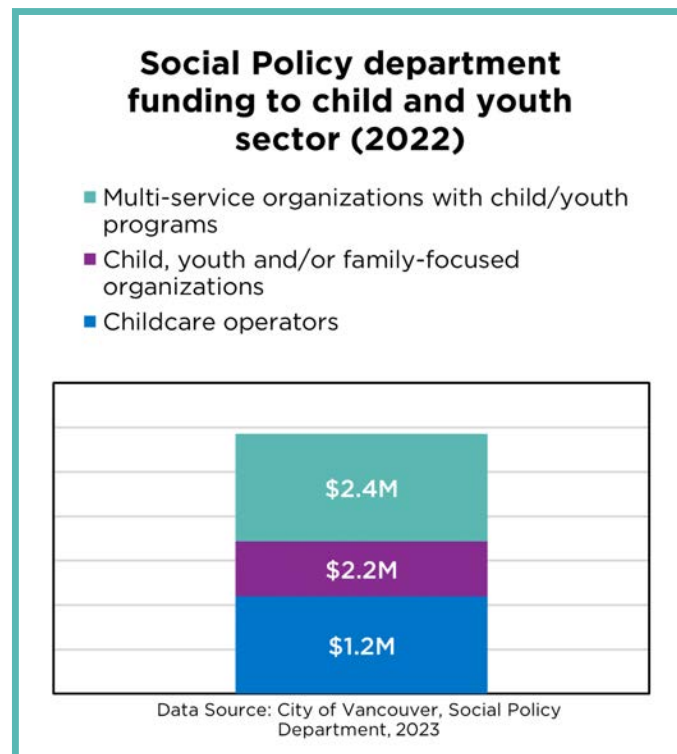
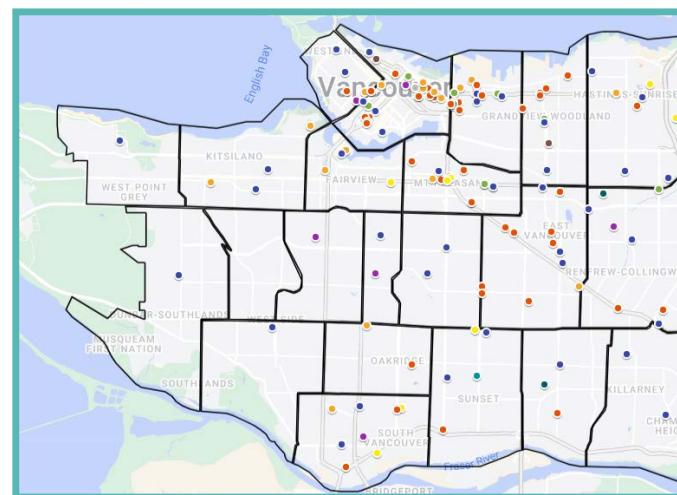
Investing in the youth services sector

Vancouver-level data shows that many youth feel unsafe in their neighbourhood, do not have a trusted adult they can turn to for help or advice, and feel disconnected from their community – especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. Community-based organizations can provide access to safer spaces and supportive programming that can give young people the foundation they need to navigate life’s challenges. Such programs can also help young people minimize the negative effects of any social inequities or difficult life circumstances they may face.

Vancouver is home to **195 non-profits that serve children and youth**. Of these, 74 are youth-focused organizations¹ - and 121 are multi-service organizations that include youth as one of their target communities.

In 2022, the City’s Social Policy Department provided \$3.4 million in funding to non-profits with a mandate to serve children, youth, and/or families (including childcare operators), and another \$2.4 million to multi-service agencies like Neighbourhood Houses and community centres that run children/youth programs. **In this Youth Safety & Violence Prevention Strategy, we are committing \$2.7 million in additional funding to this sector² between 2023 and 2025.**

¹ Of the 74 youth-focused organizations, 3 were youth-led.
² Excluding childcares



Next steps

The City is set to launch into an exciting phase that will bring partner agencies and youth together to learn, deliver much needed programs, and collaborate on systems change. Our work over the coming years will fall under five broad areas, starting with a community planning process that will help City staff create a detailed action plan for the medium and long-term.

	Community tables	Network building and sector development	Grants to community non-profits	Youth engagement	Research, monitoring and evaluation
Broad Objectives	Convene public partners, community partners, and youth in a process to narrow key actions that the City and its partners can take to implement the Youth Strategy in the medium- and long-term.	<p>Strengthen or create youth service networks to facilitate collaboration and coordination among youth-serving agencies.</p> <p>Support child- and youth-serving non-profits with training and by helping to convene new networks.</p> <p>Host annual gatherings to promote networking and knowledge exchange.</p>	<p>Launch and deliver three grant programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth engagement project grants • Youth violence prevention program grants • Organizational and youth sector capacity building grants 	<p>Engage a core group of youth in the planning and roll-out of the Strategy (e.g.: outreach; public education; event planning; policy-development).</p> <p>Involve youth in the planning and delivery of annual youth conference/capacity-building session.</p>	<p>Conduct research and analyze data on effective community-based solutions to violence affecting youth.</p> <p>Evaluate the Strategy’s impact on Vancouver youth and youth-serving organizations.</p>

GET INVOLVED!

Interested in being a part of upcoming youth engagement opportunities?
 Learn more at: www.vancouver.ca/people-programs/youth.aspx



Key terms

Children & Youth

Definitions of children and youth vary widely. Because this strategy focuses on preventing violence before it begins, we're focusing on children ages 6-12 (what we are calling the "middle years") and teenagers ages 13-18.

Children and youth in care

Those <19 who are under the guardianship of the Provincial government (i.e., foster care) or are 19-24 and are transitioning out of care.

Protective factors

Positive influences that minimize the impact of risk factors and reduce the likelihood of violent behaviour or becoming a victim of violence.

Public partner

"Public" agencies are government agencies. For this Strategy, the City is working closely (partnering) with other branches of municipal government (e.g., police, parks, library) and the local health authority.

Reference group

A group that meets regularly to help guide a process.

Risk factors

Life experiences that increase the likelihood someone will engage in violent behaviour or criminal activity.

Safety

A multi-faceted concept that includes physical, psychological, and social safety experienced at home and at school, in the neighbourhood and in the community. All this also falls within broader scales of safety at the built, natural, and political environments.

Sexual exploitation

The sexual abuse of a minor when they are manipulated into exchanging sexual acts for money, drugs, shelter, transportation, etc.

Social determinants of health

Non-medical factors that influence our health. They are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live and age and the wider forces and systems shaping daily life (e.g., housing, income, access to food and social inclusion).

Systemic inequalities

The result of when some groups of people experience more difficulties in life not because of personal failings but because of the ways systems (e.g., policies, economies) are designed.

Systems change

The idea of addressing the causes, rather than the symptoms, of a societal issue. To do so, it requires an approach that looks at interconnections across a big picture rather than narrowing in on one issue.

Youth engagement

A process of sustained meaningful involvement of young people in an activity that has a focus beyond themselves. It usually offers young people opportunities to take responsibility and leadership while working in partnership with caring adults who respect and share power with them. Engagement is a process and is reciprocal, dynamic and interactive.³

Youth violence

The many forms of violence that impact youth including not just physical violence but emotional or psychological violence like racism, discrimination, bullying and cyberbullying.

³ McCart & Clark, 2005, p. 3

Acknowledgements

The Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy would not have been possible without the time and thoughtful input of our public and community partners. Special thanks to the Youth Community Developers who supported the youth engagement process and the members of the Youth Reference Group who gathered regularly to provide feedback on aspects of the Strategy in its development.

Public Partners

CoV Arts Culture and Community Services Department
CoV Planning Department
CoV Engineering Services Department
Vancouver Park Board
Vancouver Public Library
Vancouver Police Department
Vancouver School Board
Vancouver Fire Rescue Services
Vancouver Coastal Health

Community Partners

AfroVan Connect
Big Sisters of BC Lower Mainland
Boys and Girls Clubs of BC
Britannia Community Centre
Covenant House

EQUITAS
Family Services of Greater Vancouver
KidSafe
Leave Out Violence
MOSAIC
Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House
Pacific Community Resources Society
PeerNEt
Progressive Intercultural Community Services
Red Fox
Simon Fraser University - School of Criminology
South Vancouver Neighbourhood House
The Students Commission of Canada
TRRUST
Urban Native Youth Association
Vancouver Park Board - Youth Worker Collective

2023 Youth Reference Group

Almas
Anahita
Arshia
Asher
Ayanle
Brian
Carly
Edison
Erin
Faith
Jamie
Long
Matt
Maya
Micah
Ruth
Sebastian

2023 Youth Community Developers

Cheylene Moon
Emma Lefebvre-Tatti
Lilia Hessabi
Maeve Sheen
MaryLou Djida
Naya Tait
Nola Charles
Sondor Ganduulga

