

# Early Childhood and Youth: A Comparison of Well-Being Indicators Between Newfoundland and Labrador and Canada

## Objective

To compare various determinants of well-being among children and youth in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) and Canada (CA).

## Practice Points

1. Well-being is the experience of health, happiness, and prosperity that allows children and youth to be productive and successful.
2. The well-being of children and youth is a measure of their quality of life. It is influenced by every aspect of their life, including health, education, economic status, family or social life, and safety or security concerns.

3. Children and youth today are faced with an increasingly complex world, thus measuring well-being is essential for understanding how children are coping. By tracking data on well-being indicators for children and youth, we can identify and address areas that need more attention and priority.

## Methods

1. Data on a number of key social and economic indicators were obtained from Statistics Canada.
2. Where available, data for each indicator was compared between NL and CA and NL was ranked in comparison to other Canadian provinces (1 = best and 10 = worst).

## Results

Table 1. A Comparison of Well-Being Indicators for Children and Youth Between NL and CA

Indicators	NL	CA	NL Rank <sup>1</sup>
<b>Quality of Life</b>			
High Life Satisfaction (12–17 yrs) (2022)	86.6% <sup>E</sup>	90.8%	7
High Life Satisfaction (18–34 yrs) (2022)	85.4%	86.9%	6
<b>Prosperity</b>			
Median Income (16–24 yrs) (2021)	\$15,700	\$16,400	9
Employment Rate (15–24 yrs) (2021)	44.4%	48.5%	9
Unemployment Rate (15–24 yrs) (2021)	21.9%	19.5%	7
Job Satisfaction: Very Satisfied or Satisfied (15–24 yrs) (2022)	N/A	64.7%	-
No High School Diploma (20–24 yrs) (2021)	6.1%	7.8%	6
Post-secondary Education (20–24 yrs) (2021)	42.9%	45.8%	6
Future Outlook: Always or Often Hopeful (15–24 yrs) (Q2 2023)	N/A	57.7%	-
Youth Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) (15–29 yrs) (2022)	17.0%	11.0%	10
In Core Housing Need (0–14 yrs) (2021)	N/A	7.8%	-
In Core Housing Need (15–24 yrs) (2021)	N/A	6.6%	-
Lives in Acceptable Housing (0–14 yrs) (2021)	N/A	66.0%	-
Lives in Acceptable Housing (15–24 yrs) (2021)	N/A	65.0%	-
Poverty Rate (Market Basket Measure) (<18 yrs) (2021)	9.9%	6.4%	10
Financial Well-Being (Very Difficult or Difficult to Meet Financial Needs) (15–24 yrs) (Q2 2023)	N/A	24.8%	-
Food Insecurity (<18 yrs) (2022)	28.8%	24.3%	7
% Change in Food Bank Visits (<18 yrs) (2021–2023)	+50.3%	+42.9%	6

Table 1. continued

Indicators	NL	Canada	NL Rank 1
<b>Health</b>			
Self-Assessed Mental Health (Excellent or Very Good) (12–17 yrs) (2022)	54.2% <sup>E</sup>	58.1%	8
Self-Assessed Mental Health (Excellent or Very Good) (18–34 yrs) (2022)	46.4%	47.6%	5
Self-Assessed Health (Excellent or Very Good) (12–17 yrs) (2022)	76.3% <sup>E</sup>	74.8%	4
Self-Assessed Health (Excellent or Very Good) (18–34 yrs) (2022)	68.9%	62.4%	2
Current Smoker (Daily or Occasional) (12–17 yrs) (2022)	x	0.3%	-
Current Smoker (Daily or Occasional) (18–34 yrs) (2022)	17.9%	10.7%	10
Heavy Drinking <sup>2</sup> (12–17 yrs) (2022)	x	3.3%	-
Heavy Drinking <sup>2</sup> (18–34 yrs) (2022)	36.0%	27.2%	10
Overweight or Obese (12–17 yrs) (2022)	37.5% <sup>E</sup>	30.1%	10
Obese (BMI ≥ 30) (18–34 yrs) (2022)	41.3%	24.6%	10
Physical Activity (average of 60 mins/day) (12–17 yrs) (2021)	50.3%	45.2%	6
Physical Activity (at least 150 mins/week) (18–34 yrs) (2021)	55.6%	59.3%	10
Fruit & Vegetable Consumption (5 times or more per day) (12–17 yrs) (2021)	F	22.1%	-
Fruit & Vegetable Consumption (5 times or more per day) (18–34 yrs) (2021)	9.5%	17.8%	10
<b>Society</b>			
Strong Sense of Belonging to Canada (15–24 yrs) (Q2 2022)	N/A	69.4%	-
Strong Sense of Belonging to Local Community (12–17 yrs) (2022)	83.4% <sup>E</sup>	77.7%	2
Strong Sense of Belonging to Local Community (18–34 yrs) (2022)	65.2%	58.2%	3
Always/Often Have Someone to Count On (15–24 yrs) (Q2 2023)	N/A	79.3%	-
Has Trust in Others (15–24 yrs) (Q4 2022)	N/A	43.1%	-
High Satisfaction with Personal Relationships (Family & Friends) (15–24 yrs) (Q3 2021)	N/A	53.9%	-
Always/Often Feels Lonely (15–24 yrs) (Q2 2023)	N/A	18.6%	-
High Satisfaction with Time Use (15–24 yrs) (Q2 2023)	N/A	35.5%	-
<b>Environment</b>			
High Satisfaction with Local Environment (15–24 yrs) (Q2 2023)	N/A	55.0%	-
<b>Good Governance</b>			
Childhood Maltreatment (Self-Reported Physical & Sexual Abuse During Childhood) (15–24 yrs) (2018)	x	20.2%	-
Self-Reported Sexual Assault Since Age 15 (15–24 yrs) (2018)	18.2%	16.5%	5
High Confidence in Institutions – Police (15–24 yrs) (Q2 2023)	N/A	47.7%	-
High Confidence in Institutions – Justice Systems & Courts (15–24 yrs) (Q2 2023)	N/A	37.6%	-
High Confidence in Institutions – School System (15–24 yrs) (Q2 2023)	N/A	39.3%	-
High Confidence in Institutions – Federal Parliament (15–24 yrs) (Q2 2023)	N/A	26.8%	-
High Confidence in Institutions – Canadian Media (15–24 yrs) (Q2 2023)	N/A	22.9%	-

<sup>1</sup>A comparison among the Canadian provinces (1, 2, 3 = Good; 4, 5, 6, 7 = Moderate; 8, 9, 10 = Bad).

<sup>2</sup>Heavy drinking refers to males who reported having 5 or more drinks or women who reported having 4 or more drinks on one occasion at least once a month in the past year.

x-suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the Statistics Act.

<sup>E</sup>Use with Caution. Indicates estimate has a coefficient of variation between 16.6% and 33.3% and has a high sampling variability.

F-too unreliable to be published.

N/A-not available (data for Canada only).

- Children and youth experience a lower life satisfaction in NL compared to CA.
- Compared to CA, NL youth have higher unemployment rates and lower median incomes and rates of employment.
- Compared to CA, young people in NL are less likely to have a post-secondary education but more likely to have at least a high school diploma.
- The proportion of youth who are not in employment, education or training is higher in NL compared to CA.
- Compared to CA, children aged <18 years in NL are more likely to live in poverty and food-insecure households. From 2021 to 2023, NL also saw a larger percentage increase in food bank usage by children <18 years old.
- Self-assessed health status is higher in NL compared to CA for children and youth but self-assessed mental health status is lower in NL.
- Rates of smoking, heavy drinking, and obesity are higher for young people in NL compared to CA. They also tend to be less active and consume less fruits and vegetables when compared to CA.
- Physical activity rates for children in NL are higher than in CA.
- Compared to CA, NL has a higher prevalence of overweight and obese children.
- Children and youth in NL feel a stronger sense of belonging to their local community compared to children and youth in other parts of CA.
- A higher prevalence of young people in NL have experienced sexual assault since the age of 15 when compared to CA.

## Conclusions

1. Compared to the other Canadian provinces, children and youth in NL score very poorly on a number of well-being indicators. Young people in NL have the worst rates for smoking, heavy drinking, obesity, physical activity, and fruit and vegetable consumption, with the exception of physical activity rates for those aged 12–17 years (rank 6). NL also has the highest prevalence of children (aged <18 years) living in poverty and the highest proportion of youth who are NEET. Young people in NL also have one of the lowest employment rates and receive the second lowest median income. As well, fewer children (aged 12–17 years) in NL assess their mental health status as excellent or very good (the third worst rate).
2. In CA, approximately one in four children live in a food-insecure household and one in three children and youth live in unacceptable housing. While the majority of young people say they always or often have someone to count on, almost half report not having high satisfaction with their personal relationships and one in five report that they always or often feel lonely. Additionally, one in five young people reported experiencing physical and sexual abuse during childhood. One in three young people are indifferent or dissatisfied with their job and more than 40% do not have a hopeful view of their future. Approximately 70% of young people have a strong sense of belonging to CA but more than half do not have trust in others nor do they have a high level of confidence in the police, justice system and courts, school system, Federal parliament, or Canadian media.