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Canada's Youth Want In

Ottawa – Canada's newest generation of citizens – aged 18 to 25 - is by far the largest constituency demanding a role in the country's political processes.

Canadians are used to hearing that this or that region of the country “wants in” on the nation's political decision-making. But, apart from some hand-wringing over the “disaffection of youth with politics”, the country's leading political institutions at all levels, from governments to political parties, have done a poor job of responding to the needs of young citizens.

A new report from CPRN's Public Involvement Network could help to change that. ***Towards an Action Plan for Canada: Our Vision, Values and Actions*** is the product of a 3 1/2 day National Dialogue and Summit attended by 144 randomly chosen young Canadians from every region of the country, all walks of life and diverse cultural backgrounds.

The report presents their vision for Canada, the values that inspire it and actions to make it a reality in the key areas of learning, work, health, the environment and citizenship.

The values that guided participants' thinking are:

- *Accountability and responsibility* – all social actors - are accountable and demonstrate honesty and ethics in public, private and personal life. We all have a role to play.
- *Long-term sustainability and prevention* – decisions consider intergenerational and international dimensions, look beyond the short-term to invest in prevention, and are holistic, taking account of inter-relationships among actions at home and abroad.
- *Equity* – national standards guaranteeing quality of life and equality of opportunity, reduction of poverty and the gap between rich and poor, and particular attention to disabled persons, Aboriginal Canadians and newcomers.
- *Efficiency* – careful use of natural resources; common, high quality standards in health care, education and employment; freedom of movement across the country and facilitated accreditation of foreign-trained workers.

These values underpin the dialogue participants' vision for Canada in five key areas - learning, work, health, environment and citizenship. The Canada they want includes:

- A nation-wide approach to education, work qualifications and health care, to support a mobile population.
- Education for life, not just for a job: preparing us as citizens and life-long learners.
- Access to post-secondary education for all who qualify, not just those with the money.
- Vocational and trade paths, valued and supported by society, beginning in high school, and a more student-centred education.
- Better work / life balance - governments and business work together to improve job quality.

- A health system that emphasizes healthy lifestyles and disease prevention rather than treating illness. People taking more responsibility for their physical and mental health, using accessible information to support wise choices.
- Universal access to coordinated, integrated health care networks. Health disciplines work together to provide patient-oriented care.
- Canadians, our governments and businesses working together for a sustainable environment, with Canada a global leader in this field.
- Examining the long-term implications of our choices and doing the right thing for this and future generations in our actions at home and abroad.
- A population of critical thinkers who take responsibility for becoming informed and engage in civic and political life, supported by our political and education institutions.
- Parliaments and legislatures that mirror the populations they serve.

The young people recommend actions in each policy area and assign responsibility to themselves and others to realize their vision. They recommend:

- A pan-Canadian education system with high quality common standards and accreditation systems that support mobility of learners and workers and improve market efficiencies.
- A balanced approach to improve low wage work - employers raise minimum wages, governments provide wage supplements and health benefits and support a child care system.
- Governments, employers, educators collaborate to develop a national accreditation system, including removing barriers facing foreign-trained workers.
- Establishing and enforcing common standards for quality health care services across Canada and increasing accountability for health results.
- A serious discussion, beginning with a national dialogue, on how best to sustain our health care system and address mounting costs, including the roles of the public and private sectors in health care.
- Bold action on the environment through a combination of stronger penalties and intelligent incentives. Embrace and invest in renewable energy and green technologies, reduce our consumption and pay more for non-renewable goods, to reflect true costs to society.
- Taking citizenship and citizens seriously. Governments need to collaborate instead of bicker over jurisdiction and focus on what is best for Canadians.

“Once again, a group of randomly selected Canadians, this time from the younger generation, have shown a remarkable level of agreement on the kind of country they wish to build together,” says Sharon Manson Singer, President of CPRN. “What we need to do now is to share this vision with those who are in a position to lend support and join with young Canadians to make it a reality.”

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For more information on the Youth Dialogue and Summit, visit

<http://www.cprn.org/en/theme.cfm?theme=102>

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