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## Canada's Youth – An Untapped Policy Resource

Ottawa – Canada's youth are ready to play a major role in the country's future, despite the evidence of their disengagement from voting and political parties. Changing the country's political practices to facilitate youth engagement will reap significant rewards.

No one taking part in or observing CPRN's National Youth Dialogue and Summit last November could conclude otherwise. The event brought together 144 randomly chosen, representative young people, aged 18 to 25 to share their vision for Canada and to meet with 40 decision-makers from the public, private and non-profit sectors. In more than three days of discussion they laid out a road map for change and the role they and other social actors should play in achieving it.

*Connecting Young People, Policy and Active Citizenship*, a new report from CPRN, presents the policy implications of this youth vision for Canada.

The vision is, above all, pan-Canadian. It stresses high quality common standards in public services like education and health, the workplace, and the environment, and equity of access and mobility across jurisdictions for all citizens. It is guided by the shared values of equity, accountability and transparency, long-term sustainability and prevention, and efficiency in the federation. It values diversity and insists upon both the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

"It is a pragmatic and balanced vision, not pie in the sky," says Sharon Manson Singer, CPRN President. "It dovetails with what citizens in other CPRN dialogues have said."

The Dialogue and Summit participants crafted an action plan in five key policy areas: learning, work, health, the environment and citizenship. CPRN has distilled the following actions for policy makers and business and community leaders from their proposals:

- *Build connections for a stronger Canada*
  - Increase support for pan-Canadian experiences through exchanges and youth internships;
  - Treat bilingualism as a national and personal asset – study limitations of current approaches and involve youth in reshaping language programs.
  
- *Update Canadian governance*
  - Make democratic renewal a necessity – provide meaningful opportunities for participation in public policy at the constituency level, with government departments, legislatures and political parties. Tap into the potential contribution of youth;
  - Foster citizenship skills – Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) in collaboration with the federal government should convene a national working

group including municipalities, educators, academics and students to find a better way to prepare and support students as active citizens.

- *Sustainability, decisions that reflect a holistic long-term approach*
  - Measure success holistically – with indicators that go beyond economic measures to put sustainability at the heart of decision-making;
  - Need for individuals and businesses to play a larger role and governments to lead stronger action on the environment;
  - Focus on determinants of health and prevention, expand patient-focused interdisciplinary team approach to primary health care, and open up the conversation on public and private roles in health care.
  
- *An equitable and efficient federation, aligning education, work, health and environment systems to work in harmony*
  - Regular First Ministers Meetings, linked to legislatures;
  - Joint FPT initiatives to develop common standards in critical public services and resolve mobility issues;
  - Convene a meeting on compliance and enforcement of employment standards.
  
- *Connect education, quality of life and productivity*
  - Governments to create an integrated system of post-secondary financing;
  - Rebalance funding for research and improved teaching may be called for;
  - Strengthen entrepreneurial options in secondary and post-secondary levels;
  - Incentives for greater employer investment in skills upgrading and private/public efforts to develop quality workplaces.
  
- *Knowledge and information as catalysts for action*
  - Citizen-focused government information and reporting;
  - Public institutions should engage citizens in defining meaningful information, how to deliver and evaluate it.

“It is a substantial agenda with an important dividend – the integration of our younger citizens in the public life of the country,” says Manson Singer. “CPRN intends to shape its research agenda and activities accordingly. We urge other players in the public, private and non-profit sectors to do their part.”

**Note:** Two companion reports are also available today; ***Post-secondary Education in Canada: A Vision from Canadian Youth***, by Patrice de Broucker, reports on the discussion of learning issues at the Youth Dialogue, especially PSE. ***Lancer sa propre entreprise: les jeunes adultes et l'esprit d'entreprise***, by Alain-Désiré Nimubona, draws on the Dialogue, as well as other research concerning youth entrepreneurship and self-employment, and identifies policy implications. Both are available on-line at [www.cprn.org](http://www.cprn.org)

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