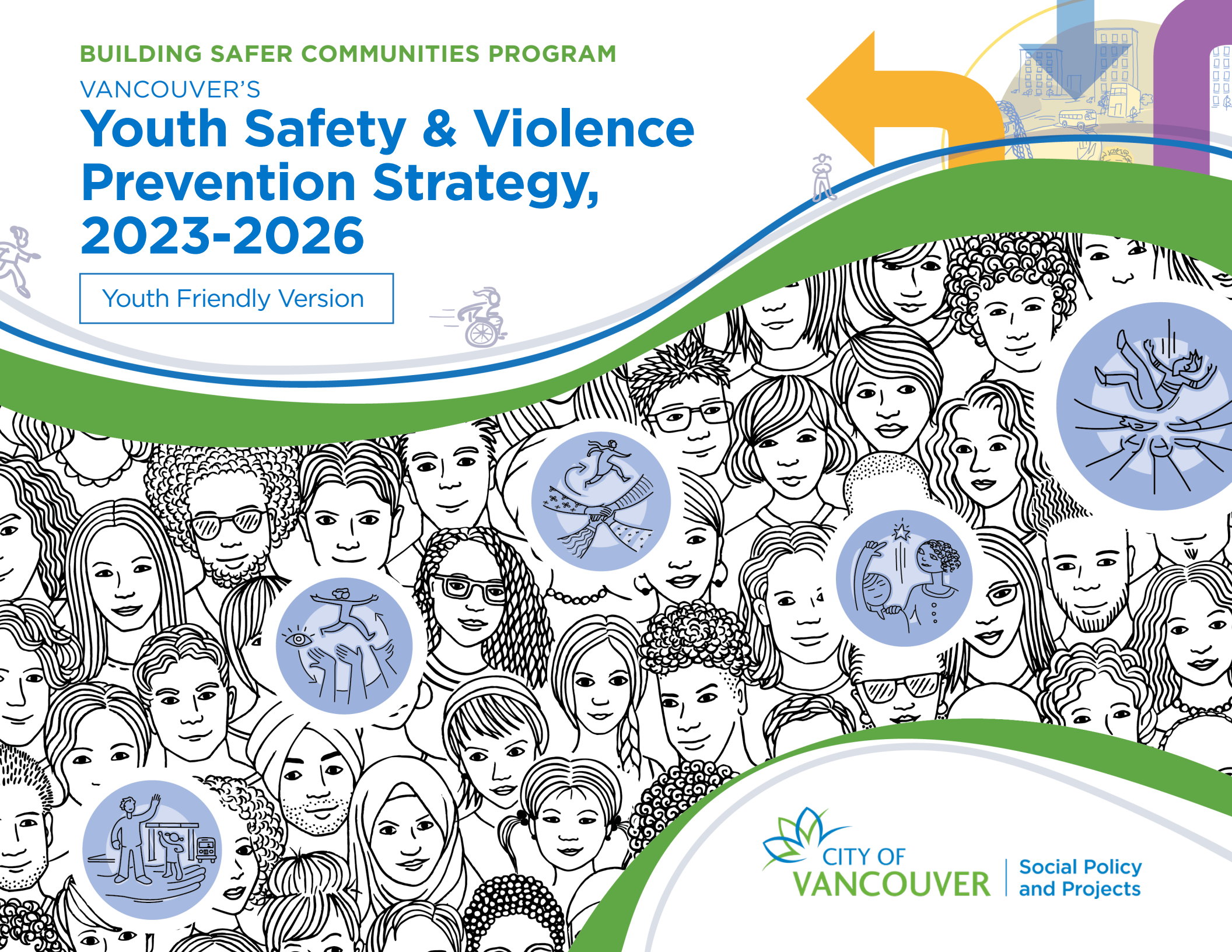BUILDING SAFER COMMUNITIES PROGRAM

VANCOUVER'S
Youth Safety & Violence Prevention Strategy, 2023-2026

Youth Friendly Version

CITY OF VANCOUVER | Social Policy and Projects

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.

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 essential 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 well-being 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.

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

1992
Vancouver Children's Policy

1995
Civic Youth Strategy

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

2014
Reconciliation Framework

2014
Healthy City Strategy

2021
Equity Framework

2022
Accessibility Strategy

2022
Making Strides: Vancouver's Approach to Childcare

2023
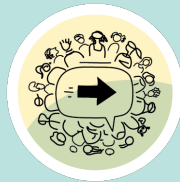Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy

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.
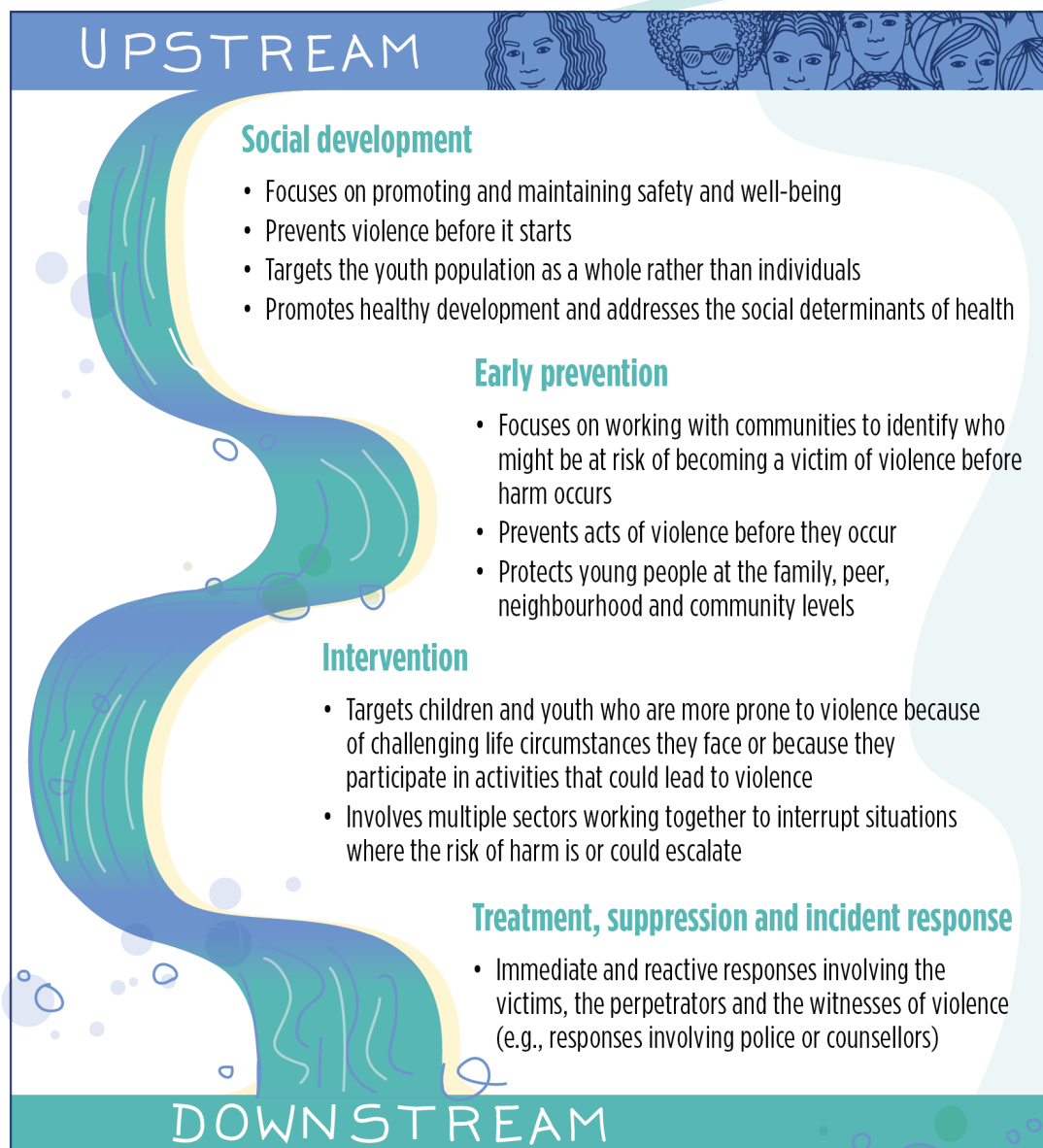
Youth violence prevention continuum

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.
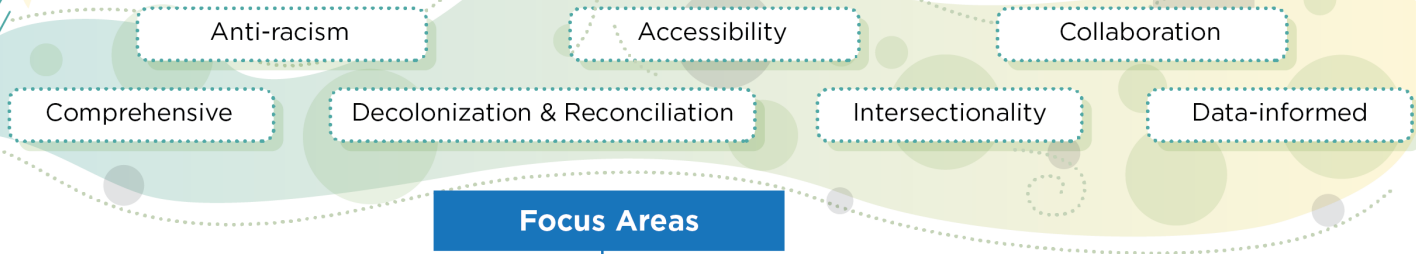
Upstream vs. Downstream

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 pollution in it, you could focus your efforts on cleaning up the pollution downstream from its original source. 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.

UPSTREAM

Social development

- Focuses on promoting and maintaining safety and well-being
- Prevents violence before it starts
- Targets the youth population as a whole rather than individuals
- Promotes healthy development and addresses the social determinants of health

Early prevention

- Focuses on working with communities to identify who might be at risk of becoming a victim of violence before harm occurs
- Prevents acts of violence before they occur
- Protects young people at the family, peer, neighbourhood and community levels

Intervention

- Targets children and youth who are more prone to violence because of challenging life circumstances they face or because they participate in activities that could lead to violence
- Involves multiple sectors working together to interrupt situations where the risk of harm is or could escalate

Treatment, suppression and incident response

- Immediate and reactive responses involving the victims, the perpetrators and the witnesses of violence (e.g., responses involving police or counsellors)

DOWNSTREAM

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:

Anti-racism

Accessibility

Collaboration

Comprehensive

Decolonization & Reconciliation

Intersectionality

Data-informed

Focus Areas

1 Create safer and protective community environments and public spaces for youth

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

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

4 Connect youth to caring adults

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

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

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

Priorities:

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

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 and 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 daily 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%

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

| **5%** 0 to 6 years | **4%** 7 to 12 years | **4%** 13 to 17 years | **8%** 18 to 24 years |

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.

VANCOUVER

Child and youth poverty

13%
Percentage of children under 18 living in low-income households.

46%
As they transition to living on their own, youth 18 to 24 are 46% more likely to be low-income.

Disability[1]

Among Vancouver grade 10 and 11 students
- 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

2 out of 3
Children and youth in Vancouver are either Indigenous or in a racialized (non-white) population group.

Indigenous youth 3%
Compared to the overall population, 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).

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 organizations[1] - and 121 are multi-service organizations that include youth as one of their target communities.
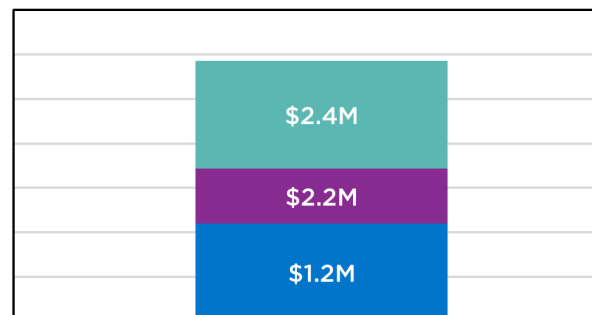
In 2022, the City's Social Policy Department provided $3.4 million in funding to non-profits with a mandate to serve children, youth, and/or families (including childcare operators), and another $2.4 million to multi-service agencies like Neighbourhood Houses and community centres that run children/youth programs**. In this Youth Safety & Violence Prevention Strategy, we are committing $2.7 million in additional funding to this sector[2] between 2023 and 2025.**

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[1] Of the 74 youth-focused organizations, 3 were youth-led.
[2] Excluding childcares
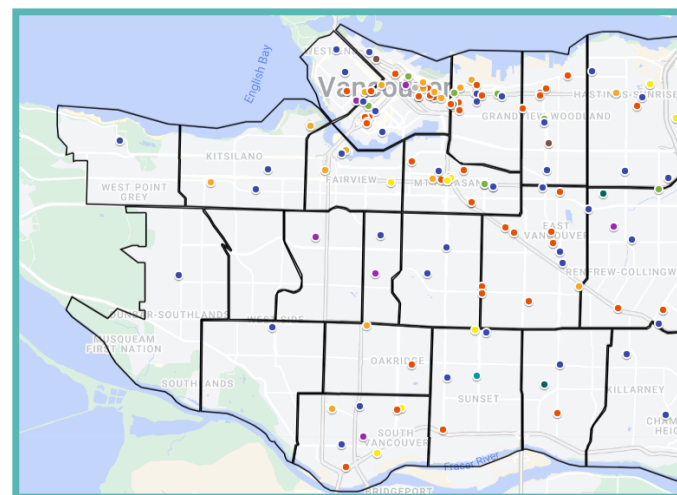
Social Policy department funding to child and youth sector (2022)

- ■ Multi-service organizations with child/youth programs
- ■ Child, youth and/or family-focused organizations
- ■ Childcare operators

$2.4M

$2.2M

$1.2M

Data Source: City of Vancouver, Social Policy Department, 2023

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 and advocacy	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 and related advocacy efforts in the medium- and long-term.	Strengthen or create youth service networks to facilitate collaboration and coordination among youth-serving agencies. Support child- and youth-serving non-profits with training. Host annual gatherings to promote networking and knowledge exchange.	Launch and deliver three grant programs: • Youth engagement project grants • Youth violence prevention program grants • Organizational and youth sector capacity-building grants	Engage a core group of youth in the planning and roll-out of the Strategy (e.g., outreach; public education; event planning; policy-development). Involve youth in the planning and delivery of annual youth conference/capacity-building session.	Conduct research and analyze data on effective community-based solutions to violence affecting youth. Evaluate the Strategy's impact on Vancouver youth and youth-serving organizations.

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 that 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.

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.

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
Ayanle
Brian
Carly
Chung Wang
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

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