



Canada Summer Jobs Wage Subsidy Program

**Written Submission to the House of Commons
Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and
Social Development and the Status of Persons with
Disabilities**

October 2023

*Building healthy
communities*

YMCA Canada



Recommendations

1. Increase program funding to allow more youth to benefit from the program and evolve the Canada Summer Jobs program into a year-round Youth Jobs Program with flexibility for part-time positions. This would better reflect how students access the employment market while pursuing education.
2. Include funding for paid mental health/sick days within Canada Summer Jobs employment contracts so that youth can take days off without financial repercussions.
3. Expand hiring to include not just Canadian residents but also those that have a work permit including International Students.
4. Develop and implement a trusted employer mechanism and corresponding multi-year funding to enable employers to better plan for, and meaningfully engage, youth employees.
5. Reduce administrative burden on organizations and increase consistency in reporting requirements across regions. Including:
 - i. Removing the requirement of detailed reporting of short absences such as sick days, not reducing funding for reasonable absences, and to consider allowing organizations with a strong track record of administering the program to report only extended absences.
 - ii. Allowing for a start date window without requiring additional paperwork if there is a change to the start date in the original application.
 - iii. Consolidating reporting to not need an individual report for each staff especially when hiring multiple staff for the same role.
6. Provide greater transparency in how the funding is allocated to organizations.



Introduction

YMCAs thank the Government of Canada for its ongoing commitment to supporting the Canada Summer Jobs program. As one of Canada's largest and longest-standing charities, the YMCA is at the heart of communities serving evolving needs and providing vital programs, services, and connections to over 2 million people through 37 YMCA Member Associations. Together, we are unwavering in our dedication to achieving meaningful outcomes in the communities we serve – including for the youth we employ.

YMCA Canada is pleased to contribute to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities on the Canada Summer Jobs Wage Subsidy Program Study. We are encouraged by the HUMA Committee's commitment to undertake this study as we believe it provides an excellent opportunity to build on the strengths of this program.

Youth Employment in Canada

The COVID-19 pandemic reaffirmed that youth in Canada are at greater risk of unemployment compared to the general population and can face additional barriers to meaningful employment. This is particularly true for marginalized youth. Many young people are entering the labour market for the first time and lack work experience to be hired, and they are more likely to be laid off during an economic downturn. Youth may also experience challenges with their mental health, a lack of access to transportation, barriers to post-secondary education at a time when the labour market requires higher levels of education, and not having a professional network to access opportunities, which further impacts their ability to secure meaningful employment. Many people in Canada can secure casual, part-time, or temporary work, however these jobs lack benefits, income stability, and job security.

In May 2023, the youth employment rate was 57% which is slightly down from the previous month¹. There is usually an increase in youth employment in May, due to the summer break from school, but the increase in May of 2023 was less than expected. In addition, 11% of youth were considered Not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEET) in 2022². These youth are considered furthest from employment and YMCAs across the country provide pre-employment programming to many of these young people.

The nature of work is changing in Canada. The labour market is shifting from required hard skills for jobs in manufacturing to a more service and knowledge focused economy with a greater emphasis on soft skills including problem solving,

¹ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/230609/dq230609a-eng.htm>

² <https://www160.statcan.gc.ca/prosperity-prosperite/neet-eng.htm>



communication, interpersonal skills, and critical thinking. Young people often obtain these skills through work experience.

As stated in the report by the Expert Panel on Youth Employment³, “we depend on our young people to build and support the economy for the next generation. When changes to the nature of work and social conditions make it difficult for them to gain a solid foothold, the very foundation of our society is threatened.”

Canada Summer Jobs Program

YMCAs across the country are a committed partner in providing meaningful job opportunities to young people through the Canada Summer Jobs program. As a significant employer of young people and an employment program provider, we understand that meaningful job opportunities are an important aspect of health and well-being, and help young people grow and shine. Through the Canada Summer Jobs program, the YMCA supports young people to gain employment, skills, and experience as they transition into the labour market.

As a charitable organization that supports youth, and a member of the non-profit sector, we create positive first job opportunities for many young people. We understand the needs of young people and YMCA values inspire us to be good employers that care about the growth, development, and well-being of all of our staff. Non-profits inherently support civic engagement and a sense of belonging which can allow young people to feel comfortable to take on tasks outside of their comfort zone and grow personally and professionally.

Canada Summer Jobs participants at YMCAs are often employed in all areas of our operations, including as camp counsellors, membership service staff, building maintenance staff, lifeguards, child care support staff, and office and administration positions such as a digital coordinator. Young employees in these fields gain important skills such as leadership, conflict-resolution, communication, and problem solving. These are foundational roles that get young employees off on the right foot and support them throughout their entire career trajectory.

One example is Huy, who was employed through the Canada Summer Jobs program at the YMCA of Quebec. Through his time at the YMCA, he developed intervention, interpersonal and project management skills to support the YMCA center, the youth participants, and his professional growth. Huy provided financial literacy activities to the program, weekly cooking activities, supported the Youth Work Cooperative's youth

"During my summer working with the YMCA NDG, I learned to appreciate the time spent with youth and offer my assistance when they need it. I also learned to work outside of my comfort zone and find new ways to overcome a challenge."- Huy

³ <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/youth-expert-panel/report-modern-strategies-youth-employment.html#forward>



financial committee, and was a great support in the building of a tool for community referrals.

The Canada Summer Jobs program often serves as an entry point to longer term careers at the YMCA. Many previous Canada Summer Jobs students will return to work at the YMCA for a second summer or in some cases will join the organization full-time. Through returning to the program or taking on full-time positions staff continue to build their leadership skills and grow into higher levels of responsibility.

YMCAs across Canada live our values and therefore provide leadership opportunities for all young employees. As an example, YMCA Canada hosts the National Young Leaders Advisory Committee (NYLAC) which is made up of youth staff from YMCAs across the country. The role of NYLAC is to advocate for and support the incorporation of youth voice in decision-making within the Canadian YMCA movement. The group provides input on emerging issues, opportunities, programs, priorities, and strategies and builds their leadership capacity to be able to fully participate in decision making spaces.

Recommendations

YMCAs across the country sees the benefit of the Canada Summer Jobs program for young people, particularly those who face multiple barriers to employment. As a significant provider of Canada Summer Jobs opportunities, YMCA Canada has several recommendations for how to build on the strengths of the program.

- 1. Increase program funding to allow more youth to benefit from the program and evolve the Canada Summer Jobs program into a year-round Youth Jobs Program with flexibility for part-time positions. This would better reflect how students access the employment market while pursuing education.**

The Canada Summer Jobs program has a positive impact on youth and offers employment experiences and opportunities to build professional skills. By expanding into a year-round program and allowing for flexibility with part-time positions, this would facilitate better access to the labour market for youth. This is especially important given that the pursuit of education is departing from the traditional semester model. More young people are taking gap years or looking for part time employment during the school year to keep up with the cost of living. Providing year round and part time flexibility would also support youth balance schoolwork and employment during the school year. This isn't reflective of the way the program is currently administered.

In addition, by providing the program year-round this would also allow employers to offer a more comprehensive and diverse mix of roles that would be appealing to a larger and more diverse number of young people. We also recommend providing flexibility within individual positions. For example, allowing for youth to start part-time during spring (a few hours per week) and then expand into full-time positions



during the summer. This would support with facilitating staff training and provide more resources to operations during the summer.

2. Include funding for paid mental health/sick days within Canada Summer Jobs employment contracts so that youth can take days off as needed without financial repercussions.

YMCAs are still seeing the impacts that the pandemic on young people – both in the youth we serve and in our young staff. We are seeing that our youngest staff members are struggling more with mental health than ever before. We want to ensure we can provide youth with a positive work experience as many are managing multiple life challenges. At the YMCA, our goal is to support our youngest workers and ensure they have a healthy and productive work experience. Including a mental health/sick day allocation in the Canada Summer Jobs program would benefit young people who encounter and experience a variety of well-being or health-related challenges or illness resulting in short absences.

3. Expand hiring to include not just Canadian residents but those that have a work permit including International Students.

Within the YMCA's values is inclusiveness. We would therefore welcome the opportunity to hire all youth regardless of if they are a resident of Canada. Under Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, international students are permitted to work full time in Canada while on summer or winter break⁴. With this in mind, we believe international students should also be included within the Canada Summer Jobs program to have an opportunity to develop Canadian work experience and skills. International students are often members of equity-deserving groups that face additional barriers to employment which would also align with the government's priorities.

In addition, we recommend promoting the social integration of young newcomers through the Canada Summer Jobs program. Young newcomers often don't have connections to access employment and may struggle with integrating into the Canadian job market. By supporting newcomer youth through the program, YMCAs can provide youth with a great job experience where they can feel a sense of belonging, and also provide additional supports through our networks and programs.

4. Develop and implement a trusted employer mechanism and corresponding multi-year funding, will enable employers to better plan for, and meaningfully engage, youth employees.

The YMCA is a long-term recipient of the Canada Summer Jobs program and has always been a responsible steward. We provide high quality programming to communities across Canada and meaningful job opportunities to youth. By allowing

⁴ <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/study-canada/work/work-off-campus.html>



the YMCA, and other trusted employers, to receive multi-year funding it would allow us to retain more youth employees. This means employers could recruit for and young people could start their jobs sooner. In addition, with more time to recruit youth for Canada Summer Jobs positions, YMCAs and other organizations could develop strategies for meeting youth where they are at, to better recruit youth from equity deserving groups.

- 5. Reduce administrative burden on organizations and increase consistency in reporting requirements across regions. Including:**
 - i. Removing the requirement of detailed reporting of short absences, not reducing funding for reasonable absences, and to consider allowing organizations with a strong track record of administering the program to report only extended absences**
 - ii. Allowing for a start date window without requiring additional paperwork if there is a change to the start date in the original application**
 - iii. Consolidating reporting to not need an individual report for each staff especially when hiring multiple staff for the same role.**

Many YMCAs have indicated that the need to individually report absences in the Canada Summer Jobs program has become increasingly burdensome. Some regional personnel require that employers document and report any absence – including for a couple of hours. This makes the administration of the Canada Summer Jobs program increasingly difficult for non-profit organizations who do not have significant administration capacity.

Although we are no longer facing COVID-19 restrictions, public health measures during the last three years advised Canadians to stay home if they were feeling sick; we experienced greater absences overall – not just for Canada Summer jobs youth. Reporting of absences can often lead to funding being clawed back, which is difficult for organizations to plan for. While YMCAs follow this requirement where requested, organizations need to have flexibility to determine what is reasonable in terms of a staff absence for the CSJ program without penalty.

6. Provide greater transparency in how the funding is allocated to organizations.

Each Member of Parliament decides which Canada Summer Jobs positions will be funded in their riding. MP's have unique priorities for these positions and the criteria of which organizations are selected may vary by riding. As more organizations are applying for the program and it becomes more competitive, it would be helpful for organizations to know what criteria their applications are being judged on to better their chances of being successful and support equity in the evaluation process.



Conclusion

The Canada Summer Jobs program supports young people – particularly those from communities facing barriers to employment - gain employment, skills, and experience as they transition into the labour market. YMCAs across Canada are very supportive of the continuation and expansion of this program. We believe the recommendation outlined above will continue to contribute to the success of the program and allow more youth to build the skills needed for the future economy.

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