

Environmental Scan: Extended Age Definition for Youth 15-24

Objective

The objective of this paper is to identify the age range that youth-serving government departments and nonprofit organizations in Canada and Alberta have adopted. As background, the legal definition of adulthood in Alberta is 18 years of age.

Extended transition time frame

The transition from youth to adulthood has traditionally been considered to be finalized in the late teen years and most jurisdictions deemed adulthood to legally occur at age 18 or 19 years. However, the literature indicates that these transitions have now been extended and most youth are not becoming independent adults until their mid twenties and even early thirties.¹ In addition to the delayed completion of this stage, transitions are becoming more non linear, less orderly and more complex resulting in an increased reliance on family resources.² A major contributing factor for this structural change in transition to adulthood is the greater requirement for knowledge as the industrialized countries move to more technology-based economies. Therefore, many youth remain in school longer in order to acquire the required skills, thus delaying their entrance into the workforce and parenthood.³ This extended period of transition may be particularly difficult for vulnerable youth who are less able to draw upon family resources and this vulnerability is compounded when public policy has not been updated to meet these changing needs.

Government of Canada

The Government of Canada has extended the age definition of youth for several of its programs as the implications of delayed youth transitions were considered in policy development. In 2006-07, The Policy Research Initiative (PRI) initiated several studies,⁴ examining youth transitioning, particularly for at-risk youth, on provincial and federal youth policies and practices across the country. The areas of focus, employment, education and marriage and parenthood, align with the core youth transition areas. Therefore, it is not surprising that Government departments mandated in the areas of education and employment have extended their definitions into the mid twenties. For example, Statistics Canada and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) partnered on a *Youth in Transition Survey (YITS)* which is a longitudinal survey that examines the lives of youth 15-28 years. Some key Federal Government programs with extended youth age definitions are below:

Federal Government of Canada		
Organization	Project	Youth Definition
Statistics Canada	National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY)	16-23 years
Statistics Canada	Labour Force Survey (LFS)	15-24 years
Statistics Canada/ Human	Youth in Transition Survey (YITS)	15-28 years

Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC)		
HRSDC	Youth Employment Strategy	15-24 years
Policy Research Initiative (PRI)	Investing in Youth: Evidence from Policy, Practice and Research	15-34 years
Canadian Heritage	Young Canada Works	16-30 years
Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)	International Youth Internship Program	19-30 years
Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada	International Experience Canada, formerly International Youth Programs	18-35 years
Service Canada	Federal Public Sector Youth Internship Program	15-30 years
Environment Canada	International Environmental Youth Corps (IEYC)	30 years and under

Government of Alberta

During the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Government of Alberta began several youth focused initiatives. In 1999, a Youth Secretariat was created within the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, focusing on vulnerable youth 13 to 22 years. The Government of Alberta also struck a cross ministry Youth in Transition Working Group that defined their demographic as 13 to 24 years.⁵ This Committee had representation from Children and Youth Services, AADAC (now Alberta Health Services), Community Development, Persons with Disabilities (now Seniors and Community Supports), Economic Development, Health and Wellness (now AHS), Human Resources and Employment, Justice, Learning (now Advanced Education), Mental Health (now AHS), and the Solicitor General. In 2001, the Committee released a report, entitled, *Youth In Transition: Policy Framework*, which was later published in 2003 as an internal document intended to guide youth investment. In 2010, youth-serving government departments mandated with employment define youth as late teens to mid twenties as follows:

Government of Alberta and City of Calgary		
Organization	Project	Youth Definition
Children and Youth Services	Youth Secretariat	13-22 years
Children and Youth Services	Youth in Transition Policy Framework	13-24 years
Employment and Immigration	Youth Connections	16-24 years
Alberta Health Services (AHS)	Healthy Children and Youth Development Programs	Up to 24 years
Youth in Transition Working Committee	Policy Framework	13-24 years
Calgary Employment Youth Centre	Employment Services	15-24 years

Calgary Nonprofit Organizations

Youth serving nonprofits have also acknowledged delayed transitions for the youth population in Calgary. Many service providers offer services and programs for youth that extend into the late twenties or even early thirties as below:

Calgary Nonprofit Organizations		
Organization	Program	Youth Definition
Alex Youth Health Centre	Youth programs	13-23 years
Aspen	Building Futures	15-30 years
Between Friends Club	Youth programs	5-20 years
Boys and Girls Clubs of Calgary	Beltline Youth Centre	12-24 years
Calgary John Howard Society	Aboriginal Youth Outreach Program	16-24 years
Centre for Newcomers	Youth Possibilities Program	17 - 27 years
Hull Child and Family Services	Bridging the Gap	16-24 years
McMan Youth, Family and Community Services Association	Youth Alternative Program	12-24 years
Momentum	Youth Fair Gains	16-21 years
Motive-Action Training Foundation	Youth Programs	18-30 years
The Doorway	Youth Programs	18-30 years
Wood's Homes	Exit Community Outreach	12-24 years
YMCA	YMCA Achievement Program	15-20 years

International

The United Nations' defines youth as being between the ages of 15 -24 years. The age definition of when someone is legally deemed an adult varies amongst countries but tends to align with the legal age of majority usually at 18 or 21 years. However, internationally more and more countries are extending the age limits for youth in their government services into the mid-20s or early 30's.

Conclusion

It appears that many government agencies and non-profits who serve youth have extended the age limit to the mid-20s or even early 30's, in line with structural changes in our society as youth are taking longer to transition to full adulthood.

¹ Settertson, R. A and B. Ray. (2010) "What's Going on with Young People Today? The Long and Twisting Path to Adulthood." *Transitions to Adulthood*. Vol 20. No 1 (Spring):19-41. Princeton Brookings.

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Osgood, D.W. (2010) "Vulnerable Populations and the Transition to Adulthood." *Transitions to Adulthood*. Vol. 20No. 1 (Spring): 209-229. Princeton Brookings.

² Ibid.

³ Franke, S. (2010) *Current Realities and Emerging Issues Facing Youth in Canada: An Analytical Framework for Public Policy Research, Development and Evaluation*. Research Paper. Policy Research Initiative, Government of Canada. Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. <http://www.policyresearch.gc.ca/2010-0017-eng.pdf> (accessed August 10, 2010); 10.

Bowlby, J.W. and McMullen, K. (2002) *At a Crossroads: First Results for the 18 to 20-Year-old Cohort of the Youth in Transition Survey*. Discussion Paper. Statistics Canada and Human Resources Development Canada. Ottawa, Canada. Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-591-x/81-591-x2000001-eng.pdf> (accessed August 4, 2010); 19.

⁴ Gaudet, S. (2007) *Emerging Adulthood: A New Stage in the Life Course: Implications for Policy Development*. Policy Research Initiative, Government of Canada. Ottawa, Ontario. http://www.policyresearch.gc.ca/doclib/DP_YOUTH_Gaudet_200712_e.pdf (accessed August 4, 2010).

⁵ Government of Alberta (2007) *Youth Secretariat/ Youth in Transition*. Edmonton, Alberta. <http://www.child.alberta.ca/home/924.cfm> (accessed August 10, 2010)

Government of Alberta (2001) *Youth in Transition Policy Framework*. Edmonton, Alberta. <http://www.assembly.ab.ca/lao/library/egovdocs/alchs/2001/157610.pdf> (accessed August 10, 2010)

Government of Alberta (2006) *Guidelines for Supporting Successful Transitions for Children and Youth: Children and Youth in Transition: An Alberta Children and Youth Initiative* [http://www.child.alberta.ca/home/documents/youthprograms/Guidelines_for_Supporting_Successful Transitions for Children and Youth.pdf](http://www.child.alberta.ca/home/documents/youthprograms/Guidelines_for_Supporting_Successful_Transitions_for_Children_and_Youth.pdf) (Accessed August 10, 2010).

United Way of Calgary and Area

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