

> FEDERAL ADVOCATE

For the children

In the heat of the 2015 federal election campaign, the Trudeau Liberals promised to appoint a much-needed advocate for children. But like many of their promises, it remains on the backburner.

It shouldn't. A children's commissioner could help ensure that government policies improve the lives of young people and advocate for new legislation and programs to protect and help them.

You don't have to look far to see why Canada needs a children's advocate.

First, while Canada is a wealthy nation, according to UNICEF our children are falling behind those in other affluent countries in four key areas: income, health, education and life satisfaction.

And it's getting worse. In 2013 UNICEF ranked Canada 17th out of 29 affluent countries. In 2016 it ranked this country 26th out of 35.

"The growing gaps suggest that life is becoming more difficult for the most excluded children as social inequality has widened, and it is showing up in their physical and mental health," the report noted.

Second, in 1989 the House of Commons voted unanimously to end child poverty by the year 2000. But in its latest report, Campaign 2000, which measures child poverty annually, found it had actually *gone up* to 18.3 per cent in 2016 from the level of 15.8 per cent it was at back in 1989.

Disturbingly, the study found 1.3 million children in Canada live in poverty.

Third, Canada does not have a national child care program, something that could reduce inequalities that result from poverty, decrease the number of children in special education classes by identifying problems and intervening earlier, and help women get back into the workforce so they can better provide for their children.

Indeed, Canada was tied for last place out of 25 states ranked by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in 2014 in the quality and accessibility of its child-care programs.

Fourth, the Liberal government has yet to act on its promise to repeal Section 43 of the Criminal Code, which protects parents who spank their children, a move that would bring Canada in line with its responsibilities under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

It doesn't have to be this way. The Trudeau government has shown it can introduce policies that make an enormous difference in the lives of children.

The Canada Child Benefit that began being issued last July 1, for example, is expected to raise 300,000 children out of poverty.

Still, there's much work to be done by this Liberal government to protect and provide for children. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau should name a children's advocate to help his government do so.

The Trudeau Liberals promised to name a children's advocate. They should deliver on their commitment

