

2023

# NATIONAL LITERACY STRATEGY

WRITTEN SUBMISSION FOR  
PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS IN  
ADVANCE OF THE 2023 FEDERAL BUDGET

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Canadian  
Children's  
Literacy  
Foundation

Fondation pour  
l'alphabétisation  
des enfants  
canadiens

[childrensliteracy.ca](http://childrensliteracy.ca)



EST. 1899

United for Literacy  
Littératie Ensemble

[unitedforliteracy.ca](http://unitedforliteracy.ca)

# INTRODUCTION

**ABC Life Literacy Canada**, the **Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation**, and **United for Literacy** are national literacy organizations.

We work together with over 500 partners each year to provide innovative literacy, numeracy, and foundational skills support for under-represented groups in Canada.

Our programs reach nearly 30,000 children, youth, and adults in over 200 communities each year. These programs are free, high-impact, adaptable, and are delivered by community hubs and networks across the country.

Canadians, and Canada's economy, need us to invest in both the skills of adults with low literacy and in the early literacy skills of all young children.

Literacy skills are crucial during tumultuous times like today. They allow us to separate fact from fiction, share critical information, make informed decisions, and work differently.

Yet a recent OECD study found that 49% of working-age Canadians have literacy scores below Level 3—the level needed to succeed in a 21st-century knowledge-based economy like Canada's. A further 17% of working-age Canadians have scores of Level 0-1.<sup>1</sup> Indigenous people are particularly affected by low literacy skills: one Canadian study found that an estimated 60% lacked the literacy skills that the labour market requires.<sup>2</sup> These low foundational skills are a barrier to education and training opportunities. They also correlate with other issues, such as poverty, housing instability<sup>3</sup>, poor health<sup>4</sup>, and justice involvement.<sup>5</sup>

We commend the Government of Canada's recent investments in the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) system and the Skills for Success framework: these initiatives will contribute to a better today and tomorrow.

We urge the Government of Canada to build on that landmark work by establishing a national literacy policy. This new investment in strategic and coordinated planning will both improve the low literacy skills of Canadian adults, and will ensure that children are set up to achieve high literacy levels in school. It will focus on reversing Canada's literacy level decline, and will account for and address the unique needs of learners who need it most: those from under-represented and low-income communities in urban, rural, and remote locations.

Canadians and employers stand with us. Research data shows that not only does increased investment in literacy benefit employers, but that it is a priority for Canadians.

**A 2017 Environics public opinion poll confirmed that 87% of Canadians agree that more should be done to improve literacy rates in Canada.**<sup>6</sup>

# RECOMMENDATIONS

This submission recommends that the Government of Canada invest \$1 million to design a National Literacy Strategy (2023–2025). This strategy will establish national standards for child, youth, and adult literacy and foundational skills proficiency. It will provide a framework for effective data sharing, coordinated skills improvement planning, and sharing of best practices and high-quality resources for learners, including those from Indigenous and Newcomer communities.

Additionally, it will align the efforts of the many bodies responsible for promoting the quality and effectiveness of education, training, and labour market performance.

An implemented national literacy strategy will tangibly improve the lives and prosperity of Canadians. It will reduce the percentage of adults on the lower half of the literacy scale<sup>7</sup>, and it will increase literacy rates in vulnerable communities. It will build a more inclusive, flexible, and prosperous economy and labour market in Canada.

## Model for support

Improve literacy levels in Canada by establishing a coordination team at Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) to develop a national literacy strategy. Our proposed model includes convening and consulting with community stakeholders; leveraging existing federal, provincial, and territorial expertise, infrastructure, and data systems; and aligning standards and performance frameworks to international assessment exercises.

We propose a 2023–2024 budget that builds the strategy through convening and consulting, and a 2024–2025 budget that implements that strategy. Implementation will incorporate the cost of foundational literacy and numeracy education and prevention into federal initiatives, and will connect the strategy to healthcare-based early literacy counselling and other programs.

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## CITATIONS

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7. Statistics Canada. (2013) Skills in Canada: First Results from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) Page 17.