

“We acknowledge the land we are meeting on is the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit.” -*Native Land*

*Let's Get Together*

# The Neighbourhood Post

Youth Political Opinion Journal

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## EDITORIAL TEAM

### **Editor-in-Chief**

Marisa Capano

### **Associate Editor**

Nicolas Kaiser

### **Design**

Mishthi Saini

### **Special Thanks**

Abhishek Taneja

Alison Canning

Paolo Leone

# Preface

The Neighbourhood Post is a youth-led political journal that aims to give Canadian youth a chance to discover and express their political opinions. The aim of this journal is to provide youth the space to hone their writing and research skills while also introducing their views into the wider political discourse through journalism and activism. This free journal strives to provide an essential service for the community by providing ready access to information for voters as well as widening the scope of participation in the political discourse.

The writers of this youth journal showed tremendous determination through the weeks of researching, writing, and several rounds of editing. This project was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, where all team members contributed their talents from the safety of their homes. We thank the youth for continuing to express their voice in politics in these precedent times.

The Neighbourhood Post would like to thank the Government of Canada for their generous backing and support. We would also like to thank Branding Centers for their technical support and their patience. As well as Let's Get Together, and Alison Canning in particular, without whose guidance this project would not be possible. Lastly, we would like to thank you, the reader. Thank you for reading these pieces with an open mind and allowing the youth to express themselves.

**Editor-in-Chef and The Neighbourhood Post Editorial Team**

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## Ontario's Government versus High School Students

Author: Dee, Grade 11

Everyone has heard that high school is what you make of it. High school is in fact what you make of it, but it is also a time of great change for teenagers. They say high school is the best part of growing up and being a teenager and it is where we have many new experiences.

Being a teenager is hard, even more so being an Ontario high school student in 2021. Earning a good education is not easy especially during the ongoing pandemic.

Students from Ontario know that their high school time is the critical period in their life when they form their outlook on life. Students also discover what they want to do in the future, all while being facilitated by the government, meaning the government is supposed to oversee and contribute greatly to education, as they are training future leaders.

While campaigning for their electoral positions, the government makes promises to high school students and unsuspecting parents for a better educational system year after year. But is there proof to show that they are working, or are these just empty promises?

Considering the pandemic, the Ontario government unveiled more than two billion dollars to help keep schools safe and support learning recovery and renewal. The government also invested over 85.5 million dollars to help the education sector, switching the educational system to synchronous and asynchronous virtual learning, but there has been little to no work done to improve the system. Courses were shut down and class sizes doubled while students were forced to learn a three-month

curriculum in a month and a half, leaving high school students stunned and overwhelmed. Students are forced to learn new topics each day and master them by the end of the class without any time to process the course materials.

The limitations of this type of learning are overwhelming for both teachers and students. Students hand in assignments and will get a passing grade, but did we even learn anything?

High school students in Ontario will grow up and struggle to face the world because they were rushed through the academic curriculum and given the opportunity for in-depth learning.

As the workload on high school students increases, the youth's mental health and social skills decrease, all while the government fiddles with handling the pandemic. Quality of mental health is being looked down upon as high school students are believed to be "growing up". Adults blame teenage depression and other mental health concerns on they blame it on outside factors that increase the rate of dropouts and suicides for teens and lack to find blame in academic stress. Teens have resulted in unsafe ways to cope and those who have not been able to control their mental health are devastatingly lost.

There is much that must be done to reduce the number of students that fail to earn their high school diplomas. Teens who were struggling both mentally and educationally before the pandemic are at an even greater disadvantage now that the government has no concrete plan. Students who have learning disabilities also suffer tremendously, as it is now ever harder to keep up with their classes. Graduating high school students will not have a traditional graduation ceremony because of the recent

provincial lockdowns in 2021, having no official ceremonial passing rite to the post-secondary world.

High school life is indeed a one-of-a-kind experience. Students treasure their best memories throughout the rest of their lives. Just as there is no single cause behind the high rates of school dropouts, there is no single remedy for the current problems that high schoolers are currently facing. It requires a multifaceted approach that incorporates both students, and the government also. Will the future of these high schoolers be bright, or will this be a failed generation?

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## **Ontario's DUI Mess- Drinking and Driving Needs to Stop!**

Author: Allen, Grade 10

Drinking and Driving. Regardless of how much alcohol you intake, it is wrong!

You may already be aware that drinking and driving is dangerous, but do you understand why? Alcohol consumption affects those skills needed for safe driving, such as concentration, making sound decisions, and quickly reacting to circumstances.

On May 1st, 2021, an Ontario driver almost caused two accidents. This was reported by a caller who was at the area when this happened. He pulled up next to the car to see that there was a boy who revealed he was 12, driving the car and his dad who looked visibly drunk to the caller's eyes was in the passenger seat. However, after two cars honked, the father took over the wheel and started swerving and breaking recklessly. After this was reported by the caller, York regional police arrived at the scene and tested the father to see if he was intoxicated. As a result, the father was under arrest for impairment as well as child endangerment.

This is just a recent sighting in Toronto, however that caller was just one of almost 3500 people who call yearly to report an impaired driving. Something positive to be taken from this is that callers like the one who reported the 12-year-old boy who was driving may have prevented serious crashes.

There are plenty more amusing situations about drinking and driving within Ontario. In October of 2018, a 27-year-old Ontario woman who previously killed a cyclist in a drunk-driving accident in 2015 was given complete parole with the additional requirements of avoiding drinking establishments and not consuming alcohol. However, the car was seen “failing to control steady pace, and nearly striking other vehicles” according to authorities, on June 21st, 2019. The board then suspended her full parole in December.

This is simply put, unacceptable. In Canada, the most recent report on impaired driving in 2015 said that one in six people are repeat offenders which means they are breaking the law not once, but multiple times even after being punished. I can only imagine that number has increased since. Being selfish and careless through intoxicated driving can lead to the loss of yours and others lives. Drinking and driving is not done by accident.

On the weekend of December 5, 2020, there were 22 arrests and 10 three-day suspensions for people under the influence. It's incredible because, for one, 22 arrests? That's not just 22 arrests on any given day. It's during the provincial lockdown, so people shouldn't be out to begin with, let alone out drinking and driving. While it was assumed that with some GTA bars closing and gatherings cancelled due to COVID-19, the number of people drinking and driving will decrease, figures suggest that alcohol sales skyrocketed during the lockdown.

It's hard for me to even process and comprehend this crisis. Drinking is dangerous to your own life, which is already concerning, but drinking and driving is

dangerous to your life as well as others. Please, just think twice before you drink and drive. Do you want to put others' lives at risk? Would you be okay if someone was drinking and driving and someone you know was affected by it? My answer to that is no. What is yours?

If you witness someone drinking and driving, please report to the police as when it comes to this, they need all our help. They truly are doing the best they can, but are we? If you want change in your community, then take charge and be the change in your community!

You might live under the impression that drinking and driving is harmful, but you can't control other people and their opinion towards it. However, that doesn't mean you should just let those who drink and drive continue to do it.

What we can do to make change when it is first and foremost safe and you are allowed to have gatherings, is to plan alcohol-free gatherings, or if you're the host of a gathering, offer non-alcoholic beverages and make sure every one of your guests has a safe ride home and make sure to not drink yourself. When you are under the influence, you fail to make wise decisions, so if you're going out with your friends or by yourself, make sure to have a designated driver ready beforehand who will not drink so you will arrive home safe and sound. We can even make change by just taking the keys away from someone who is under the influence and booking them a cab or even offering them a room to stay at your home, for the night.

I have experienced an accident myself that happened because of someone who chose to drink and drive. My family was driving home after grabbing groceries and

as we made a turn on our street, a man who was under the influence of alcohol was driving over the speed limit. Fortunately, nothing happened to me and my family physically, but we were all more scared than we have ever been that day. You could even say it's traumatizing not only because of the speed or the driver's reckless driving, but because of his careless attitude. He acted as if he didn't just do what he did, which was crash into my car at an unimaginable speed causing damage to the car and to us, emotionally.

I was always anti-drinking, let alone drinking and driving and that experience made me hate it more than I ever have before. However, I take my past as a learning experience and am inspired by it. From that day on, I do anything that I can to make changes so that no one must experience something even remotely like that and here I am now, hopefully making a difference.

If you see someone who is drinking and driving, do your part! Call 9-1-1 immediately. It's quite simple. Don't be a part of the problem, but rather the solution!

If you know someone who has an alcohol addiction and you want to help them, contact the Addiction, Mental Health, and Problem Gambling services (Connexontario) helpline at, 1-866-531-2600.

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## Can Canada Become a Global Superpower?

Author: Lee, Grade 9

When we think of a global superpower we think of a country with a huge army. That is partially part of the topic. There are other ways a country can be a global superpower. These other factors are through exerting of influence economically, politically, technologically, culturally, diplomatically and soft power. To be a superpower a country needs to be very prominent in at least of these categories. And right now, a country surprisingly that could become a global superpower in the future is Canada.

I know what you're thinking. Canada is a weak military country with a lot of Arctic terrain and a small population. Besides this, Canada could not only become a global superpower, but could become the number one economic global superpower, surpassing China and the United States of America. Though for this to happen a factor mentioned needs to be present. The factor is the increase in global warming aid, something which will help Canada in three ways.

The first way is with the Northwest Passage. The Northwest Passage is a 900km route that weaves through Canada's northern islands that goes from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. The problem is that there is too much ice, which makes this route too treacherous for a commercial trading route. Global warming can melt the ice so that this passage may be used for commercial trading by ships. With the Northwest Passage opening China will be inclined to trade with Canada more. This is because the Panama Canal Route takes 41 days from Bayuquan, China to

Deception Bay, Quebec. The Northwest Passage makes this same trip only take 26 days. Also, another reason China will start trading with us more is because we don't put tariffs on China's goods coming in. Unlike the U.S., The Northwest Passage can also make some commercial trading routes to Canada faster. Since Canada has good relations with many countries, more countries will be inclined to use the Northwest Passage. For this to happen, Canada must improve its Northern ports to accommodate big freighters.

The second way is the untapped oil reserves in the Arctic Region. The Arctic Region is hard to extract oil from because due to the extremely high cost of operation, roads cannot be accessed, resources for accommodation in the area are meager and winter makes commerce in the area nearly impossible. Though in the same way global warming will melt the ice and increase temperatures so accommodations are easier to make, roads are accessible and the cost for exploration and drilling are cheaper. This will let Canada be able to tap into the untapped oil reserves. Canada's economy will skyrocket since 30 percent of the world's oil reserves are in the Arctic Regions of Canada.

The final way is the need for freshwater. Canada has 20 percent of the world's freshwater reserves and seven percent of the world's renewable freshwater reserves. These renewable freshwater reserves are in the Great Lakes. This water is easily accessible for water distributors. Canada has more than enough fresh water that it can even export fresh water. As global warming increases, the temperature increases. The increase in temperature increases evaporation. Some less fortunate areas can have droughts that will make the country's water stressed. Eventually these

countries will need to buy fresh water internationally in which Canada can sell lots of fresh water at a high price to skyrocket its economy.

Canada will become an economic superpower from the opening of Northwest Passage, tapping into the Canada's Arctic Region oil reserves and selling fresh water to water stressed countries. These possibilities can become a reality if global warming keeps on increasing. As far as I can see, global warming isn't going to totally stop anytime soon which opens the bright future for Canada and its rise to becoming a superpower.

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## Inside the Pandemic Mind of Teens

Author: Cadence, Grade 10

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has been a stressful time for everyone. Especially for the teens and younger kids. The pandemic causes isolation, grief, and change, and this way of life has caused Canadian youth mental health issues to increase.

Statistics taken by CBC news states that there has been a 30 percent increase in the need for youth counselling and addiction services for youth groups. McMaster Children's Hospital says in an interview with CBC news that it has seen a steady increase of youth in crisis since the COVID-19 pandemic began. According to the hospital, youth admitted for medical support after a suicide attempt has tripled over a four-month period, compared to last year.

Many these youth have reported pandemic-related stresses and concerns including limited social interaction, increased conflict at home, and the inability to rely on friends as main supports. A similar increase in young people is showing up at the emergency department, suffering from anxiety, self-harm, and depression as well as some with a 60 percent increase in eating disorders amongst youth.

According to a survey taken by StatsCan in July 2020; Canadian youth have experienced the greatest mental health decline of all the other age groups. Before the pandemic, 60 percent of youth aged 15-24 reported that they had good mental health. As of July 2020, only 40 percent of youth report that they have good mental health. That is a 20 percent reduction. Although it may not seem that large, it is.

“We found that overall, children were faring mostly worse, and occasionally better, compared to their pre-pandemic selves,” says Dr. Daphne Korczak, Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist at SickKids. Children and youth who are struggling with their mental health may display signs that caregivers can notice, such as abnormal sleeping and eating patterns and expressions of distress.

The extreme shift in schedule and way of life is going to have some sort of effect on people. The pandemic has forced teens to be removed from normal everyday interactions. Personally, it was very difficult at the beginning being unable to see friends every day and it felt very isolating. The change to virtual school caused my grades to plummet without the in-person teacher there to help.

School routines have forced teens to change their schedule and way of life. Traditionally, schooling was in person with different classes and classrooms full of other people. Seeing your friends and teachers every day and hanging out after school was normal. Now, everything from social interaction to exams are online.

It is very isolating. COVID-19 restrictions, staying in and isolating becomes the only way to stay physically safe and stop the spread of the virus. This is important because it is the only way for things to get better and to keep yourself and others safe.

Canada has had over twenty-five-thousand lives lost due to this virus. Isolation isn't the only thing causing youth mental health issues this pandemic. It is grief. Whether it be for a friend, family member or just the overall deaths.

Make sure that in these tough times you are keeping in contact with your friends and family. Whether it be over the phone, online games, or more. Remember you are not alone.

Another big issue is that some teens feel that they are in unsafe homes and environments. Several teens may not have that great of a home life and for them, school and going out was their only outlet and escape from their home life. This escape can make a huge impact on one's overall mental health, and sometimes physical health.

The hope of us all getting vaccinated and things getting better, such as going back to school is something to look forward to. Although it may feel so far away, it is closer than it seems.

If you or someone you know is struggling with mental health issues, reach out to them or seek immediate assistance if you think that you or a loved one is in danger of harming themselves.

You can call a crisis line or the National Suicide Prevention Line at 1-800-273-TALK (8255). If you think your friend or family member needs community mental health services, you can find help in your area.

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## Toronto's Housing Hardship for Young Adults

Author: Vivian, Grade 10

As of May 2021, the Multiple Listing Service report indicated that the average housing price in Toronto is \$1.32 million for a 1383 ft<sup>2</sup> home. This is up by 38.73 per cent from 2020. Buying a property is becoming increasingly difficult as prices skyrocket and people are left with no choice but to rent, which is not always affordable either. As housing prices continue to increase, it will be impossible for younger generations to keep up if mortgages are becoming more difficult to get for first time home buyers, money laundering isn't controlled, and the government doesn't intervene.

Currently, the average entry level salary for someone that has just completed a post-secondary education in Ontario is \$42 910. To purchase a home in Toronto, the home buyer must put down a 20 percent down payment. According to the average housing price in Toronto, this figure would be approximately \$264 000. Considering the average annual entry level pay in Ontario, it would take years for someone to just afford a down payment. This is not considering the other expenses such as the price of food, rent, taxes, etc.

The average price to rent a one-bedroom apartment in Toronto is \$1816. This would mean that a majority of someone's pay is going towards their rent. At this current rate, it is nearly impossible for someone to accumulate savings just to put a down payment on a home. If prices continue to rise at this rate, no one that is earning an entry level salary or minimum wage will be able to afford rent unless they have a

roommate. Housing is a necessity, and the federal and provincial governments need to do something about the insane prices.

There are new mortgage stress test rules from the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions which are going to make it harder for first time home buyers to purchase a home. The new rules that come into effect as of June 1, 2021, will raise the qualifying rates, which can determine whether a borrower can handle payments if rates were to increase. The buyer must show that they can afford the interest rate at two percentage points higher than what the bank is offering them, or the five-year benchmark rate published by the bank of Canada, whichever is higher.

This change in rules would make it especially difficult for first time home buyers to qualify for a mortgage in the short term. The new rules are also going to inherently favour someone that has owned a home over someone that hasn't since they have more equity.

One of Toronto's largest contributors to the housing bubble is money laundering. The Ontario Real Estate Association stated that "money laundering is a multibillion-dollar problem in Ontario's housing market". Average workers of Toronto should not have to compete with dirty money just to be able to find a place that they can live in. Many launderers can out bid people when it comes down to a bidding war since they have so much disposable cash. People are often left feeling hopeless as the possibility of owning a home is becoming increasingly difficult.

It is unfair that someone who is pursuing a legitimate career must compete with bids that are artificially inflated by money laundering. It is important that this is taken care of because if it isn't, then people will be stretched beyond their means when this problem may be avoided.

The worst part of it all is that there are an estimated 9000 to 27 000 vacant homes in Toronto, according to a report from Toronto's executive committee. The reason for this is because properties are used as a place to launder their money rather than a place to live.

There is already a supply shortage of homes in Toronto as the population increases, and these vacant homes can go to people that really need them, not to criminals. Although the government has imposed a vacant home tax, this still hasn't stopped people from money laundering. Canada has become a hotspot for money launderers, and this problem cannot be taken lightly or ignored.

The federal government needs to stop disregarding the housing bubble in Toronto. They need to cool down the market so that people have the chance to buy. The government has continued to neglect the issue of buying since they have only worried about the decrease in property value if the bubble were to burst.

Furthermore, Canada has some of the weakest money laundering laws compared to other liberal democracies such as Finland, France, Denmark and the U.S. We need stricter and more protective laws that ensure that foreign money launderers do not dump their money into houses, apartments, mansions and sometimes even whole floors of condominiums. It is unfair to the people that are hard workers and have dreamed of owning a property.

As a sixteen-year-old living in Toronto, I am scared for what my future will look like. If things do not change, it will be nearly impossible for me, as well as other younger people to afford a home. If the government doesn't prioritize bursting the housing bubble and cracking down on money launderers, then people will have no choice but to leave Toronto, a city that they love.

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# **The Concerning Impact of COVID-19 on Toronto's Unhoused Population**

Author: Morgan, Grade 11

We all need somewhere to sleep, keep our belongings, and hide from extreme weather conditions. Shelter is a necessity, especially in a big city like Toronto. Most of us, including everyone from the government to myself, have forgotten to acknowledge the toll that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on some of the most vulnerable people in our communities. The pandemic has brought on a new set of issues to take into consideration, one of them being the increase of unhoused individuals.

Since the rates of homelessness in the city are so high, it is possible to find shelters, though they may not be incredibly accessible for everyone. It's great to have places to offer support that is necessary for survival such as food and shelter, however, along with many other busy or crowded areas, these shelters have become hotspots for outbreaks of COVID-19. Due to this, many who cannot afford to live in the city have chosen to opt out of going to shelters and are instead setting up encampments.

This seems like a fair, rational decision that would help keep many people safe, but then why is it that the Toronto Police have cleared five of these encampments within the last couple of weeks? The current mayor of Toronto, John Tory, has publicly pointed out the dangers of people living in public parks, and the city council has stated that the encampments are being cleared to keep parks a safe place for everyone. But forcing homeless people out without any other, safer options

is just putting them in more danger. Perhaps it is a good idea to look at the issue of homelessness and poverty and try to figure out how to help people who are struggling if they are seen as such a burden to the government.

What is meant by safe anyways? Is someone automatically a threat to others because they don't have a home? Clearing these encampments is likely more dangerous and is irresponsible since people will be forced to find somewhere else to go, deal with extreme heat on their own, or even go back to these shelters that are struggling enough as it is.

This leads you to wonder; is it the safety of the citizens of Toronto that is the main priority or is it the feelings of those who can pay bills and donate money to politicians during campaigns?

I encourage anyone reading this to think about what you can personally do to make a difference. This can include anything from educating yourself further on the topic, starting conversations with others, signing petitions, writing about your own opinions, or even protesting.

Kindness is contagious and has the power to make a difference. It's important to understand that we are all the same on the inside. Made of flesh and blood and just trying to survive. In the end, we're all in this together and should be supporting each other as much as possible. Next time you see an encampment or someone on the street, try to challenge yourself to change your mindset and see things from a different point of view.

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## The Missing Piece in Canadian Medicare

Author: Jack, Grade 9

It's time for national pharma care to be brought to Canada.

Medications that require a medical prescription are classified as prescription drugs. For instance, opioids used to treat pain or relieve cough or diarrhea are prescription drugs. In Canada, most prescriptions are paid for through employer-sponsored drug plans, while other coverage is provided by government programs for elderly people who earn low incomes. Canada is the only country whose universal health care system doesn't cover prescription medications for all.

The high cost of drugs is one of the main problems of our health care system. Health insurance may cover some, but not all the drugs. Many Canadians are struggling with insurance coverage, which leads them to cut pills, or not fill prescriptions at all because of high costs.

A 2011 poll shows nearly one in four have cut pills in half to get by or refused to fill a prescription due to high costs. Most Canadians have insufficient insurance coverage or even worse, no coverage at all. A recent survey found that 93 percent of Canadians favor a national pharmaceutical plan. One in six Canadians has opted not to take medication since they could not afford it due to cost. These examples show the importance of a universal public drug coverage plan. It will improve health outcomes, decrease hospital visits, and decrease the costs for health care if patients have access to medications they need.

We can prevent, treat and manage circumstances such as heart disease and strokes more effectively, and efficiently if we have access to medications through a

national health care system. The diseases of the cardiovascular system, such as heart disease, stroke, and vascular cognitive impairment, claim the lives of approximately one Canadian every five minutes. Canadian pharmacies dispense approximately 101 million prescriptions for the diagnosis and treatment of cardiovascular disease each year. It is important for people who are at risk of or who have experienced heart disease or stroke to have access to prescription medication.

Prescription drugs are an important part of treating and managing a lot of heart and brain conditions. Some diseases, such as blood pressure medication, can prevent heart attacks and strokes later. With a national pharma care program, most heart diseases, suffering, and death would be prevented. A national, universal pharma care program can help improve access to medication and thus prevent, treat, and manage heart disease and stroke.

Several gaps in the Canadian health care system exist. Most of these gaps display themselves as equity issues. Recent immigrants, women, and persons of color living in Canada have a higher unemployment rate and a lower chance of getting extended health benefits, such as drug coverage. The federal government's Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) Program also presents barriers to indigenous people when it comes to accessing prescription medications, as many faces long delays and may even be denied.

Canada has suffered more losses in prescription drug coverage over the past year than it has gained due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It is twice as likely that people have lost coverage than gained in the last year. A universal coverage of prescription drugs would fix the equity problems.

Due to the high cost of prescription drugs, its benefits to heart diseases and strokes, and the fact that a universal health insurance program can fill in the gaps of Canadian health system, we need a universal pharma care that is designed to improve the access to prescription drugs and is open to everyone.

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## **Comment l'école en ligne a affecté les élèves du secondaire en Ontario**

Author: Arushi, Grade 10

Cela fait plus d'un an que la pandémie a commencé et que les écoles ont changé de ligne. Les étudiants dans toute l'Ontario ont eu assez des changements constants que le gouvernement impose sur la réouverture de les écoles. L'Ontario a pris en considération l'option d'obliger d'offrir l'école en ligne comme une option permanente. Cela donnerait aux enfants et à leurs parents l'option de continuer leur éducation dans la sécurité de leurs propres maisons.

De nombreuses difficultés rencontrées par les élèves sont liées au passage constant de l'école en personne à l'école en ligne. Il y a déjà diverses conséquences liées à la santé mentale pour les élèves à cause des changements radicale.

Les écoles de l'Ontario ont été ouvertes et fermées plusieurs fois au cours des quinze derniers mois. A la fin de cette année scolaire, les parents et les élèves ne peuvent pas savoir à quoi pourrait ressembler l'avenir de la scolarité. Depuis le "Congé d'Avril" la, les étudiants font l'école en ligne et ça n'a pas été facile. Oui, le gouvernement a donné divers avantages aux familles l'année passée mais à quel prix? A mon avis, pendant le début de la pandémie, l'Ontario a annoncé que l'année scolaire sera divisée en quatre quadrimestres avec les étudiants ayant deux cours chaque quadrimestre. Cela semblait être un plan juste, cependant, les élèves seraient enseignés par des enseignants d'écoles aléatoires de leur région. Ce plan a laissé les élèves dans une classe où ils ne connaissaient personne. Mais, maintenant les élèves sont dans des classes avec des enseignants et des élèves de leur propre école.

La pandémie de COVID-19 présente de nouveaux défis, mais l'aspect de la santé mentale des étudiants les affecte au quotidien. Selon un sondage mené par Statistique Canada, près de deux tiers (64 pour cent) des personnes âgées de 15 à 24 ans ont signalé un impact négatif sur leur santé mentale. S'adapter à la nouvelle réalité d'être confiné à nos maisons de manière assez anxieuse pour les étudiants, d'autant plus qu'ils ne peuvent pas voir leurs amis en personne et que cela pose un risque pour leurs compétences sociales. En tant qu'humains, nous avons naturellement envie d'interactions sociales, et une fois que nous en sommes dépouillés, cela présente ses propres défis. Une fois que les choses reviendront à la norme, les élèves manqueront de certaines compétences sociales qu'ils avaient auparavant. Ils peuvent avoir peur de sortir et d'interagir avec les autres parce qu'ils sont habitués à rester à la maison, ce qui a des effets psychologiques extrêmes.

Depuis la déclaration de la pandémie ici au Canada, on n'aurait pas pu penser que nous serions confinés chez nous pendant plus d'un an. En entrant dans ces quatre confinements, les gens se sentent très isolés, d'autant plus que le seul contact humain qu'ils ont se fait à travers un petit écran et ceux de leur cercle social. Selon un article de Global News, 54 pour cent des Canadiens sur 1 006 sondés se sentent seuls ou isolés. Les étudiants sont extrêmement inquiets pour une certaine normalité, cependant, à mesure que la pandémie s'aggrave, le cas de la santé mentale chez les élèves du secondaire s'aggravera également.

Après quatre confinement et des commandes à la maison, il y a encore beaucoup d'incertitude sur l'avenir mais ce que nous savons avec certitude, c'est que les étudiants sont confrontés à des cas extrêmes d'anxiété, de solitude et de stress et



c'est un problème que le gouvernement doit résoudre une fois qu'ils commencent  
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## **Mental Illness is Not a Crime**

Author: Abhishek, Grade 9

Imagine the following situation. One of your family members has schizophrenia and is experiencing a crisis. You panic and call 911 for help. When they arrive, rather than helping your loved one, they react violently and your loved one dies as a result.

On June 20th, 2020, a 62-year-old Malton man, Ejaz Choudry was experiencing a mental health crisis. He had schizophrenia and his family was concerned he didn't take his medicine. One of his family members called Peel Region's non-emergency mental health line for help. Unfortunately, there weren't enough mental health teams available that evening, so Peel Regional Police were dispatched instead.

After very little communication or effort to help, the police officers shot and killed him. I remember being completely mortified the night this happened. The proper response would have been the region's Mobile Crisis Rapid Response Team. This type of team consists of a nurse or social worker with a specially trained police officer. When the Mobile Crisis Rapid Response Team was launched in Peel Region in May 2019, it received \$1.5 million. This was clearly not adequate, as there are only 2 of these teams in the entire Region of Peel, a region of 1.4 million people. This is an example of how the mental illness perspective is often overlooked.

This is an outrage. Firstly, police should not have been the responders because they are not trained properly. It should have been mental health professionals who knew how to deal with the situation. Secondly, the police should not have used such

excessive force. People with mental illness deserve compassion and help not judgment and violence!

Mental health cases can often escalate to a level where law enforcement is required, which is why I support the Mobile Crisis Rapid Response Team. It includes a social worker and *specialty trained* police officer; therefore, the program ensures mental health cases are treated properly and in a safe condition. I emphasize being *specialty trained* because it's evident that regular police officers are not trained in a way that qualifies them to deal with mental illness cases.

A similar situation occurred earlier in the year. On April 6th, 2020, a 26-year-old Brampton man, D'Andre Campbell was experiencing a mental health crisis. He also suffered from schizophrenia. He called Peel Regional Police for help. Rather than try to assist him and deescalate the situation, two officers used energy weapons, then one officer shot him. Mental illness is not a crime! That should be obvious.

This is a situation where I believe mental health professionals are required, not police. If a form of law enforcement is required, then a *specialty trained* police officer should be used, as in the Mobile Crisis Rapid Response Team. Between 2000 and 2017, 42 percent of people killed by police in Canada were experiencing a mental health crisis according to CBC News. Again, police should not respond to mental health calls. It can be extremely frightening for those in need of help and often ends in death or injury. This is echoed by the Canadian Mental Health Association and Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto.

I am grateful for the work that Peel Regional Police and other police services do to keep communities safe. However, that does not mean the system is flawless. The

cases mentioned are *only a handful of* examples of police forces using excessive force on people with mental illness. The bottom line is this needs to stop.

There are alternatives to police for responding to mental health situations, and this change needs to happen soon. One of the solutions already exists, and that is the Mobile Crisis Rapid Response Team. However, this raises the question of how more change can happen. People should sign petitions, donate to organizations leading this movement; educate themselves, and most important VOTE! While youth cannot vote, the adults of society must meet their responsibility to vote for someone that will help ensure cases such as the ones mentioned above do not happen again! These are the actions that build community desire for change resulting in pressure on elected officials to make the change happen.

The message is simple. Mental illness is not a crime.

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## **Saddi Kisaans**

Author: Mishthi, Grade 9

Kisaans. The beautiful country where my roots originate, and my culture is bestowed from is India. Where our culture is shown through simple festivities, in the joy we find in the beauty of nature, family and most importantly, the love shared between every Indian. Where we celebrate the growth of crops and the outcome of a great harvest. Kisaans share this culture with the rest of the world. Kisaan is the punjabi word for farmers. Unfortunately, the Indian government has prevented this culture from expanding.

In September of 2020, the Indian government decided to pass three agricultural reform bills. Bills that were created to “lead change” in agricultural laws and practices. During the process of legalization, unfortunately Kisaans were never consulted during the formation and passing of these bills. Had they been consulted, they would not have agreed to these laws as it completely crushes their source of income. Kisaans are claiming that the bills that have been passed threaten their source of income, how much they make and their practices in general.

Something that easily gets overlooked is that Kisaans are small-time and the source of income they sometimes do receive is very minimal compared to the big chains they work with. The Indian government continues to claim that the bills are supposed to help farmers increase their income. I think it's the complete opposite as the laws seemingly do indeed give more benefits to the big chains (those who already receive a hefty income).

Prior to the formation of these bills, Kisaans would conduct their trade in places called Mandis. A Mandi is a farmer's marketplace where Kisaans can sell their goods to consumers. If someone bought something out of these mandis, the state government would then receive taxes. The new laws prohibit this, meaning traders will not have to pay taxes outside of the mandis, which then would lead people into buying from larger industries, those who already benefit from the new laws. This is wrong. Favouring big agricultural companies who already make big profits in this industry is terrible because Kisaans are already categorized in a very small margin. Kisaans are forced into a very secluded category from where they can trade, sell, and buy. Because of favoritism, these farmers will face more losses and will have to endure more debt. The second bill allows farmers to sell to larger buyers. The downside of this bill is that it has not been stated what the MSP, minimum support price, would be (MSP= a price guaranteed by the Indian Government) and would allow larger corporations to take advantage of this. Guaranteed prices were beneficial for Kisaans because if there was ever a drought or crop failure, the guaranteed prices would help support them during those difficult times. Millions of people's livelihoods are working in mandis, and after these bills pass, those jobs will be gone. This is really upsetting to see. Not only does this affect Kisaans in general but millions of people whose livelihoods are in the same regard of this profession such as people who are workers in mandis or people who are hired to help Kisaans in their farm work.

One of India's most popular industries is agriculture as agriculture is the primary source of livelihood for about 58 percent of India's population. I do not want to see my country face so many problems because of these bills. I believe that

these bills might destroy the country. The practices that Kisaans do are very sacred and deeply rooted in my culture. I am afraid that some of the teachings Kisaans have passed on may get wiped out.

Some of the big lessons and morals we learn as children come from the very examples that Kisaans have shown. For example, feeding the poor. Kisaans, despite being involved in massive protests and struggling to feed themselves, continue to feed those who are less fortunate.

Another important moral Kisaans continue to show the world is how we were taught to respect our mother earth by doing our duty by keeping it clean. It has been reported from multiple news outlets that the Streets of Delhi have never been so clean before; the streets that Kisaans are protesting on.

The Kisaans must be treated better by the Indian Government. They bring so much pride, culture, and tradition to the country. I hope that with the protests, the Indian government will listen to the Kisaans and see their point of view and how these bills do affect them.

The Kisaans' voices must be heard.



## The Inconvenient Truth of Vapes and Teens

Author: Jun, Grade 9

At a bricks-and-mortar middle school in the peaceful region of East York, kids from all grades play basketball on the school court. One kid, star player Derek, sighs as he takes a well-deserved break on a bench. While he takes in the view of the sun hovering over the field, something enters his mouth. Mango-flavoured clouds fill up his lungs, causing him to cough rapidly. Confused, he frantically looks around him when his eyes meet a classmate's. "Feels good, right?"

Something like that happened to my friend, and it's unacceptable. I've only heard stories of vape use in high school. But, in middle school?

Why? The answer lies in leniency from vape stores, and we need to stop it.

In the years 2017 to 2019, PhD professor David Hammond discovered that the number of teens who vaped more than doubled. He cites that Juuls, a type of vape, caused the spike. Speaking from my experience in middle school, this is true. The teens and pre-teens that vaped at my school used Juuls, which happened to be the most advertised at vape stores in our neighbourhood. The usage of Juuls is so heavy that every day after class ends, I see empty Juul containers scattered on the outskirts of the school. The correlation between vape stores and the usage of Juuls at my school isn't just a coincidence; some of these stores are purposefully selling vapes to teens.

Have you ever noticed the glaring ads for flavoured vapes while going to a convenience store? So do health professionals studying tobacco and vaping.

An interview with MD Ben Hoffman and PhD David Hammond revealed their thoughts on the topic. Both Hoffman and Hammond believe that advertising techniques targeting adolescents used in the 1950s for cigarettes are now being used by vaping companies. These techniques included using attractive models and celebrities, colourful ads, and advertising kid-friendlier substances. However, a factor that wasn't present in the 1950s and 1960s is pushing more and more teens to buy vapes, social media. Numerous influencers are being paid to promote vapes using vibrant colours and appealing looks in their posts. These advertisement schemes have one goal, getting teens to buy vapes. Sadly, laws to ban these advertisements may require years to process despite vapes being unsafe for teens. But what we can do is stay aware of stores that sell vapes to teens and report them.

But are vape shops where teens get their vapes? Aren't vape shops rejecting minors? Legally, yes. According to a study conducted by David Braak, Michael Cummings, Georges J Nanhas, Jessica L Reid, and David Hammond, 68.7 percent of vape stores refused adolescents, and the primary source where adolescents received vaping products were from vape stores. While that 68.7 percent seems high, it doesn't fully convey the truth.

An experiment conducted by CBC in Calgary involved adolescents purchasing vapes from vape shops. These teens were able to buy vapes from five out of the total 16 shops they went to, four of which had a reputation for being lenient. One of my friends, who doesn't even vape, told me exactly where to buy them, which I later found out that the store was where every kid got their vapes, not just from my school. That's the power of having a reputation; teens in the neighbourhood will

know exactly where to go. So, if there are a couple of stores that sell vapes to adolescents, adolescents will have the ability to purchase them.

Vape stores are too lenient. The advertisements that they display target adolescents through colourful ads, kid-friendly flavours, and hip models. Moreover, some stores are outright allowing adolescents to purchase vapes, gaining a reputation doing so. Allowing these stores to continue doing this is irresponsible and a blemish, smearing the image of Canada, Toronto, and your neighbourhood.

We cannot allow this; we need to act. Parents, watch your kids, prevent them from vaping. If they are vaping, find out which store is selling them to adolescents, and report them. Childrenless adults, this may not directly pertain to you, but as a member of your community, don't you want to help the next generation? If you do, be on the lookout for stores and adolescents. Report any suspicious stores you find and try to inform the parents of vaping adolescents. We need to stop this vaping epidemic, and the only way is through you.

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