



# CanWaCH

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Canadian Partnership for  
Women and Children's Health

Conference  
Youth Council (CYC)

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# Retrospective Report 2017

## Executive Summary

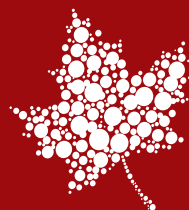
This report serves as a reflection on the key accomplishments, success factors, and lessons learned from the process of including a group of 10 youth from across the world in the planning and execution of the Global Adolescent Health Conference. For organizations looking to engage a similar group, the critical factors leading to its success were:

- Strong partnerships
- Adequate funding and resources
- Incorporation of technology
- Dedicated staff
- Committed and responsible CYC members
- Mainstreaming of youth speakers and youth participation throughout the conference planning and agenda

These factors contributed to several key accomplishments. The incorporation of the Youth Council was successful in that it:

- prioritized the meaningful engagement and inclusion of youth participants in all stages of the conference planning and execution;
- provided a platform for developing strong connections and fostering collaboration among a group of youths from different parts of the world;
- provided a leadership development and networking opportunity for CYC members; and,
- positioned the GAHC as a youth-friendly event.

Additionally, this report outlines lessons learned for future engagement of youth, including commencing the planning process earlier and prioritizing a greater diversity of voices.



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## Overview

In May 2017, the Canadian Partnership for Women and Children's Health (CanWaCH) hosted *Unleashing the Power of a Generation: Global Adolescent Health Conference* (GAHC) in Ottawa, Canada. In recognition of the overarching goal of the conference – to present a clear portrait of the current barriers and solutions to realizing health-related rights and implications for advancing adolescent health and well-being – CanWaCH gathered a group of 10 youth between the ages of 18 and 29 to build a platform for meaningful youth participation throughout the conference. The Conference Youth Council (CYC) was engaged in each step of the planning process; members took the lead on numerous conference-related projects in the weeks preceding the conference and were heavily involved in presentations throughout the event. As per the Terms of Reference of the CYC<sup>1</sup>, the responsibilities of the group included:

- supporting meaningful youth representation, participation and attendance throughout the conference;
- defining key points of discussion within the four conference thematic areas (nutrition, SRHR, mental health, and data);
- providing input into the conference program by supporting the selection of speakers and helping to identify youth speakers; and
- planning and delivering a presentation to conference attendees and high-level guests.

***Being a member on the conference Youth Council was one of the best experiences I've had in my life. I left the conference with a feeling of great accomplishment and couldn't wait to do more.***

*- CYC Member*

CanWaCH also drew upon the experience of [Women Deliver](#), an organization that has a robust and recognized youth leadership program and recently organized a global youth summit in conjunction with their 2016 conference. Staff from Women Deliver participated actively in the Youth Council, and provided advice to CanWaCH staff at various junctures.

The purpose of this report is to outline the CanWaCH process for engaging youth, touching on key successes and areas for improvement to provide a guide for the meaningful engagement of youth throughout an event or initiative.

<sup>1</sup> [CanWaCH Conference Youth Council: Terms of Reference](#)

## Selection Process

CanWaCH put out a call for nominations to our member organizations, seeking youth, between the ages of 15 and 30 to lend their unique perspectives and insights on the development of the conference. Ideally, nominees would have experience with advocacy, and knowledge of how health issues directly affect adolescents. We also invited our international conference partners, PMNCH and Women Deliver to reach out to members of their youth leadership programs to see if there was interest in participating. To facilitate nominations, a [survey](#) was created to collect information about nominees. CanWaCH staff selected Youth Council members based on the strength of the information provided in the survey and also aiming to balance representation from CanWaCH member organizations. A number of the nominees were associated with Women Deliver, and so Women Deliver was asked to recommend two individuals. Additionally, PMNCH was asked to recommend two individuals from their Adolescent and Youth Constituency.



## Membership

The CYC was composed of 10 members from various countries. Their names, home countries, and affiliated organization are listed below.

1. Amy Bing, [Plan International Canada](#), Canada
2. Anthony Lopez, [Women Deliver Young Leaders](#), Philippines
3. Bethel Aklilu, Canada
4. Cassandra Morris, [HealthBridge Foundation of Canada](#), Canada
5. Irem Tumer, [United Nations Population Fund](#), Turkey
6. Joannes Paulus Yimbessalu, [Women Deliver Young Leaders](#); [Aga Khan Foundation Canada](#), Cameroon; Canada
7. Patrick Mwesigye, [Partnership for Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health Adolescent and Youth Constituency](#), Uganda
8. Tali Filler, [World Vision Canada](#), Canada
9. Reina Foster, [Plan International Canada](#), Canada; Lac Seul First Nation
10. Zanele Mabaso, [Partnership for Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health Adolescent and Youth Constituency](#), South Africa

Detailed profiles for these members can be found in *Conference Youth Council – Member Profiles* <sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Conference Youth Council – Member Profiles



# Coordination

## Pre-Conference

In the period leading up to the GAHC, CanWaCH staff was frequently in touch with CYC members to gauge interest in various subject areas and aspects of the conference. To facilitate dialogue and planning, the CYC met for weekly 1-hour conference calls (held at 8:00 am EST to accommodate CYC members across multiple time zones) coordinated by CanWaCH staff and attended by Women Deliver staff. A pre-circulated agenda outlined items for each call with space for questions and discussion. The calls took place via Glip, a collaboration software that allowed CYC members to interact with each other and with CanWaCH staff through video chat and conference call options. Through the group messaging feature on Glip, CYC members shared daily updates and questions and coordinated their work on various projects.

Initially, based on their areas of interest and experience, CYC members were divided into groups corresponding with the four key conference pillars: Mental Health, Nutrition, Data, and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). A series of deep-dive content calls on each of the conference themes took place with Youth Council members and members of the conference's program advisory committee; these calls allowed participants, including youth, to discuss and contribute more extensively in their subject area of choice.



***The CYC demonstrated the powerful contribution that youth will make in achieving the SDGs through their energy, insights and collaborative approaches to working together. This generation has grown up in a time of novel connectivity, so they are able to capitalize on opportunities for partnership and coordination that are often overlooked.***

*- CanWaCH staff member*

CYC members were also actively involved in various conference-planning activities, including:

- preparations for a youth-only reception and networking event;
- developing a presentation for the parliamentary reception held on the first night of the conference;
- collaborating on a video project;
- and developing a social media strategy incorporating live interviews and active engagement on social networking platforms.

Other CYC initiatives included planning an in-person meeting prior to the conference, and research and discussion around conference commitments and take-aways. The combination of writing, planning, and presenting activities allowed CYC members to work in areas corresponding with their own goals for the conference and with their personality type.

In addition to these activities, CYC members were strongly encouraged by CanWaCH staff to provide input on all aspects of the conference. For example, staff requested feedback from members following the development of the first draft of the conference program to ensure that it reflected the spirit of inclusion and diversity fostered by the CYC. One CYC member reflected that “there was regular contact through the weekly Glip calls, and then ongoing communication throughout the week. CYC members were encouraged to participate and share ideas in a way that was not at all condescending.”

While the required time commitment for the CYC in the pre-conference period was initially projected at an hour long call every two week, the time spent on conference preparations exceeded that amount in the weeks leading up to the conference. As one CYC member reflected, “The amount of time was reasonable at first but more time was required depending on the projects.” On average, members spent about 5 hours per week on work related to the CYC.

Prior to the conference, a timetable was circulated among the CYC and they were encouraged to sign up for various conference activities.

CanWaCH staff devoted a significant amount of time to supporting the CYC in the lead up to the conference, including not just planning for and facilitating the video calls, but also in shepherding forwards the various initiatives proposed by the CYC. Two CanWaCH staff members were responsible for coordinating and supporting the CYC’s efforts, with various other CanWaCH members assisting with specific aspects such as communications and logistics. Given that meaningful youth engagement was a core objective of the conference, it was reasonable to have invested this time.

## **Conference**

The GAHC was held from May 16-17, 2017 at the Chateau Laurier in Ottawa, Canada. In terms of financial and travel support for the CYC, CanWaCH waived conference fees for CYC members and assisted with travel costs. Between support from CanWaCH, CanWaCH members, PMNCH, and Women Deliver none of the CYC members was required to shoulder any financial cost to attend the conference.

Upon members’ arrival in Ottawa, CanWaCH staff were available to welcome members and coordinate accompaniment from the airport to their accommodations. On the evening of May 15, members were invited to the Chateau Laurier for a first in-person meeting. The agenda for this meeting included ice-breakers, mingling, and high-level planning for the overall and individual aims of the CYC during the conference. The meeting facilitated connections and the sharing of stories and laughter, and built a foundation of togetherness and friendship that would be further developed throughout the conference. It also set the stage for mindful engagement by the CYC members, both collectively and individually, so that they could attend the conference with purpose.

Throughout the two days of the GAHC members were engaged in a variety of activities, including operating the social media live booth <sup>3</sup>, encouraging youth delegates to sign a commitment banner, and speaking during various sessions. On day one, seven CYC members were featured as panelists, and on day two, one CYC member was a keynote speaker and the full CYC spoke as part of a closing session on what they heard throughout the conference. <sup>4</sup> Check-in huddles were scheduled at the end of each day with CanWaCH staff.

<sup>3</sup> Social media live interviews conducted by CYC members can be viewed under “Videos” on the [CanWaCH Facebook page](#).

<sup>4</sup> Videos of the GAHC sessions, including those featuring CYC members, can be accessed on the [CanWaCH Youtube channel](#).

On the evening of May 16, three CYC members were featured at the Parliamentary Reception. They presented in French and English on harnessing the energy and momentum of groups such as the CYC and the importance of institutional support of youth. Following the Reception, CYC members hosted a Youth Networking event organized by the CYC and CanWaCH. The event was held at a local Ottawa pub and attendees were encouraged to engage in ice-breakers, networking, and a pub-quiz with trivia. The event was meant to provide a fun, informal and casual venue (replete with pub-style snacks) for fostering friendships between youth attendees.

## Post-Conference

The CYC was consulted regarding their expectations for post-conference engagement via a post-conference Glip call. In reflecting on their experience in Ottawa, they agreed that continued contact with other members and monthly or bi-monthly correspondence from CanWaCH would be ideal. The CYC expressed a desire to be notified about similar events and suggested that CanWaCH solicit feedback from members in the future. Members were encouraged

to keep the energy and the momentum of the conference moving via social media. A video highlighting CYC participation along with key conference moments is currently in development and will be released in Summer 2017.

## Feedback

CanWaCH circulated an evaluation survey to members to collect anonymous feedback about their experience on the CYC. The feedback was widely positive with some key constructive suggestions for improvement. In terms of the time commitment required, 75% strongly agreed that the time commitment required was reasonable, while 25% somewhat agreed. Key feedback around **pre-conference planning and timing** can be seen below:

- I appreciate that we had enough time to prepare and the organizing team was supportive.
- If the youth council was made earlier then it would have been more possible to have more input on the conference content.
- Going forward, it might be good to have it in place a lot earlier and develop the projects and scope even more.
- More time would have been helpful. For example, if we started one month earlier. The weekly calls were great and rather than 2 calls a week, I think starting a month earlier would have allowed us to plan certain aspects of the conference better.
- I enjoyed the conference calls immensely and the exchange of ideas was very exciting.
- The amount of time was reasonable at first but more time was required depending on the projects.





Below are some reflections from the CYC around the **conference content and program planning**:

- Most of our views as young people were captured and embedded into the program to shape both the conference agenda and discussions/dialogue.
- I was incredibly disappointed that the conference shied away from using the word abortion in the panel title. If a conference such as this (in Ottawa) cannot use the word itself, then how can we expect international partners and stakeholders to be motivated to challenge stigma and advocate for the SRHR of women and girls (especially in environments hostile to SRHR).
- We were able to incorporate youth voices but the bulk of the content was led by adults.

In terms of **the success** of the CYC related to leadership and members' future work in the sector, members provided the following feedback:

- I was so inspired by the discussions at the conference and the energy to continue my work in adolescent health advocacy. I also made great contacts that will be helpful in my work.
- Great leadership experience.

***There was a strong sense that we were valued and that we were not just token representation.***

*- CYC Member*

CYC members were asked **what went well** regarding their participation. They answered:

- Engaging with other members and supporting one another on our tasks and responsibility.
- Regular weekly call was a good practice and help to bring us together as family and keep us informed of all plans.
- Glip as a major communication as a brilliant idea as it helped us keep in touch and easily follow up on discussions.
- Speaking opportunities for all youth council members on panel.
- Accommodation and feeding as well as team building activities before the conference and during the conference.
- Recognition of the youth council as a major player to the conference planning and running.
- The support received from all CanWaCH organizers was tremendous and very kind.
- It was a great experience with some particular highlights.
  - o CanWaCH staff were great leaders and coordinators and effortlessly kept things moving forward. CanWaCH team members were also very welcoming and supportive.
  - o The Youth Council was able to actually produce outputs, which again goes back to the great coordination.
  - o There was a clear intention from CanWaCH to make young people visible and central and this really made us have the right spaces to contribute to the overall conference.

- There was regular contact through the weekly Glip calls, and then ongoing communication throughout the week. CYC members were encouraged to be participate and share ideas in a way that was not at all condescending. There was a strong sense that we were valued and that we were not just token representation.
- The cooperation amongst all the members and the great exchange of experience and expertise from each and everyone. I really appreciated how the CANWACH team was so hands on and was very interactive. Meaningful youth participation was always taken into consideration.
- CanWaCH staff were great at pulling us together and having our ideas acknowledged. We made most of our ideas a reality which was also great. It was also great to see all of us engage with delegates in a meaningful way.

Members were also asked **what could have made the CYC better**. They responded:

- Strategic side event meetings with dignitaries like ministers to have young people directly engage and seek commitments from these policy makers.
- Grassroots adolescents voices.
- I think it was one of the best examples of this kind. Going forward, it might be good to have it in place a lot earlier and develop the projects and scope even more. A wider geographical representation would also be very nice.
- From the beginning, it would have been nice to have a clear idea of what the role of the CYC would look like, in terms of expectations and tasks. Although, there were certainly benefits to having flexibility to determine what the CYC involvement would look like.
- More representation from Asia.
- If the youth council was made earlier then it would have been more possible to have more input on the conference content.
- More time.

When asked if they plan to keep in touch with fellow youth council members and whether formed lasting relationships, 87% responded “Definitely” and 13% responded “Maybe.” 87% also strongly agreed that they would be equipped to be better leaders and stronger advocates for the causes they care about as a result of participating in the youth council.

In the overall conference evaluation completed by attendees, youth engagement was frequently noted as an area of success. Critical feedback included the suggestion that adolescents aged 10-19 should have been better included, and that even though there was some youth participation the event was still perceived to be led and dominated by adults.

## Lessons Learned

Feedback from the CYC around areas of improvement was widely centered on allocating more time leading up to the conference for planning. Rather than starting in March, planning could have begun in January, for example. This is valid feedback, as CanWaCH staff also felt that more time for advance preparation and coordination of CYC activities would have been useful. While including voices from diverse geographic settings was a consideration in CYC member selection, prioritizing an even greater diversity of voices (e.g. those affiliated with grassroots groups) will be important to promote the participation and visibility of those who often do not have a platform.

# Key Accomplishments

In light of the feedback from the CYC, conference evaluations, and CanWaCH impressions of the team's accomplishments, the formation of the CYC was a success in that it:

- prioritized the meaningful engagement and inclusion of youth participants in all stages of the conference planning and execution;
- provided a platform for developing strong connections and fostering collaboration among a group of youths from different parts of the world;
- provided a leadership development and networking opportunity for CYC members; and,
- positioned the GAHC as a youth-friendly event.

As one CanWaCH staff member reflected, “The CYC demonstrated the powerful contribution that youth will make in achieving the SDGs through their energy, insights and collaborative approaches to working together. This generation has grown up in a time of novel connectivity, so they are able to capitalize on opportunities for partnership and coordination that are often overlooked.”

The key factors that contributed to the success of the CYC were:

- Strong partnerships
- Adequate funding and resources
- Incorporation of technology
- Dedicated staff
- Committed and responsible CYC members
- Mainstreaming of youth speakers and youth participation throughout the conference planning and agenda



## **The Conference Youth Council, 2017**

*(From left to right: Amy, Zanele, Anthony, Bethel, Reina, Cassandra, Patrick, Irem, Joannes. Not pictured: Tali)*



# CanWaCH

Canadian Partnership for  
Women and Children's Health

*Thank you to all the supporters  
who made this event possible:*



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# GLOBAL ADOLESCENT HEALTH CONFERENCE

**MAY 16-17, 2017  
OTTAWA, CANADA**

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