

End Immigration Detention in Canada: An Open Letter

By [Health Providers Against Poverty](#)

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On June 27, 2018, a coalition of over 2000 Canadian healthcare organizations and healthcare providers, including doctors, nurses, social workers, psychologists and midwives have signed on to an open letter, calling on the Canadian government to take the following four actions immediately:

- 1. End child detention and family separation in Canada.*
- 2. End immigration detention in Canada.*
- 3. End the Safe Third Country Agreement.*
- 4. Call on the United States to end its practice of child and family detention.*

We reproduce their important initiative here.

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The Honourable Ginette Petitpas Taylor

Minister of Health

The Honourable Ralph Goodale

Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness

The Honourable Ahmed D. Hussen

Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship

CC: The Right Honourable Prime Minister
Justin Trudeau

Dear Ministers,

Over the past 6 years, Canada has held approximately 45,000 people in immigration detention. For the first time in over a decade, Canada is projected to see a sharp rise in the total number of detainees.

Children continue to be detained in Canada in large numbers, with current projections exceeding last year's total of 162 children held in immigration detention.

We are a group of healthcare providers working in Canada who – like many around the world – have been watching with horror the news of the separation of over 2000 child migrants from their parents in the United States. This cruelty is apparently the newest front of the Trump administration's war against asylum seekers. We've heard audio recordings of young children begging for their parents, and read first person accounts of migrants being told they will never see their children again.

As healthcare providers, we regularly see the results of childhood trauma in patients of all

ages. Harm done at a young age can reverberate throughout one's life, causing intense distress and health consequences. It's no surprise to us that the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), the [Canadian Pediatric Society](#), the [American Medical Association](#), and the [Canadian Medical Association](#) have all come out with strong statements condemning the separation of migrant children from their families.

In Canada, immigration detention of both adults and children, and family separation, have been a long-standing and grave concern. [Canadian research and reports](#) have repeatedly shown the severe mental health impacts of even short-term detention on both [adults](#) and [children](#), including elevated rates of depression, anxiety and PTSD symptoms in adults. Children also suffer severe symptoms such as regression of developmental milestones, sleep disruption, anxiety and depression.

As healthcare providers we urge our federal leaders to take action on this issue and consider how history will look back on what we as a country choose to do right now. While Canada's practice of detaining migrant children is not new, the general public is now rapidly becoming more aware of it. It is hypocrisy to criticize the United States when children are being detained and separated from their families here in Canada, causing similar severe psychological trauma that physicians and other mental health experts are now speaking out about.

For the past few years, healthcare providers in Canada have been calling for an end to the indefinite detention of migrants, the separation of families, and the [detention of children](#). In 2017, the Canadian Medical Association [passed a resolution](#) calling for "legislative changes to protect migrants and refugees from arbitrary and indefinite detention in jails and jail-like facilities."

We call on the Canadian government to take the following actions immediately:

1. End child detention and family separation in Canada

Imprisoning children, or forcibly separating them from their parents, is simply not acceptable, no matter what the migratory status of the children or their parents.

2. End immigration detention in Canada

Currently, in Canada, migrants are detained in both immigration holding centres and maximum security jails. We join a [group of Canada's leading physicians, academics, lawyers, community organizers, and policy makers](#) in calling for the government to stop holding immigration detainees in maximum-security correctional facilities and to end the practice of indefinite immigration detention. We join these experts in stating that: As a matter of principle, individuals should not be placed in immigration detention or separated from their families. If a person poses a danger to him or herself or to others, other legal measures outside the scope of immigration policy should be used to address such situations.

3. End the Safe Third Country Agreement

We join [Canadian Doctors for Refugee Care](#) in calling for an end to the Safe Third Country Agreement. The recent actions of President Trump and Attorney General Sessions have made it clear that the United States is not a safe country for migrants, refugees and asylum

seekers.

4. Call on the United States to end its practise of child and family detention

Following President Trump's executive order, there is fear within the medical community that while the end of child separation is a positive step forward, more children and families will end up in immigration detention.

Sincerely

The organizations supporting the statement include:

- Canadian Pediatric Society
- Ontario Association of Social Workers
- University of Toronto Department of Psychiatry
- Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
- Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario
- Canadian Association of Community Health Centres
- Ontario Psychiatric Association
- Federation of Medical Women of Canada
- Canadian Federation of Medical Students
- Department of Pediatrics at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario
- Children's Mental Health Ontario
- and many more.

The letter, along with the full list of signatories, can be found at endmigrantdetention.wordpress.com.

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Health Providers Against Poverty works to eliminate poverty and reduce inequity. Their website is healthprovidersagainstpoverity.ca.

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