Canadian Brain Economy Initiative

Unlocking Canada's Brain Capital

Towards human flourishing, economic prosperity and national resilience.

September 2026

This is a working document that has been inspired by conversations with people from across sectors and Canada. We welcome comments as we build the Canadian Brain Economy Initiative for and with partners in Canada.

Powered by the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction and the Ontario Brain Institute

Canadian Brain Economy Initiative

Executive Summary

Canada is at a pivotal moment. Whether Canadians will truly benefit from ambitious investments into economic security and prosperity depends on the capacity of people to learn, adapt, think, connect and contribute – or people's **brain capital**.

Canada gave the concept to the world when Hon. Michael Wilson, former federal Minister of Finance and Canadian Ambassador to the United States, and Bill Wilkerson, a Canadian business executive and mental health advocate, coined the term "brain capital" to describe the value associated with brain health and brain skills.

Today, *Canada's brain capital is under pressure*. Employment shifts, technological change, affordability pressures and public systems strain are creating uncertainty and elevating stress. The conditions that are needed to support strong brains across the lifespan are changing and, as a result, many Canadians of all ages are struggling to flourish.

> Canadians, despite living long, are living less in good health today than they were 20 years ago.
>
> Happiness in Canada over the past 15 years has dropped to an extent that is nearly unmatched globally.
>
> Performance by Canadian youth on international educational measures is weakening year-after-year.

Challenges to brain health and brain skills have an immense human impact. They also produce consequences that manifest in communities and workplaces and carry a significant economic cost.

However, Canada is well positioned to respond and lead. *We are not starting from zero*.

Brain capital aligns with Canadian values rooted in shared prosperity and supportive communities. It depends on Canada's strong structural foundations such as the highly educated population, strong research institutes, public health and education systems, diverse communities, and trusted institutions. Canada's policy frameworks and strategies highlight a history of solving complex problems collaboratively through whole-of-society action. Through our policies, business practices and communities we are already building brain capital. Now is the time to showcase what we are doing well, be curious about what more can be done and be ambitious about the transformative power of the brain economy. Investments in high-leverage places – early in life, in communities and at work – illustrate what can be done and show how benefits can ripple across people, communities and the economy.

Canadian Brain Economy Initiative

When people flourish, organizations and communities thrive.

When organizations and communities thrive, Canada prospers.

And when Canada prospers, more people can flourish.

Canada has the opportunity to build on its strengths. To date, fragmentation including unequal individual outcomes, duplicative processes, siloed interventions and distributed responsibility has constrained progress. This does not have to be the case. A distinctly Canadian approach to build and mobilize brain capital will bring our assets together around a common direction to accelerate their collective impact. The Canadian Brain Economy Initiative (CBEI) was conceived in recognition of the need to build mechanisms for diverse people, places, sectors and ideas to work together toward shared outcomes. This can transform Canada's diversity into a defining national advantage to build brain capital.

CBEI will serve as connective tissue. It will bring together evidence and experience, sectors and regions, policy and practice, and capital and opportunity. By building on the strengths already present across Canada and connecting them around a common direction, CBEI can help turn a growing body of knowledge, innovation and action into measurable outcomes and greater collective impact.

Ultimately, CBEI's vision is to support three interconnected and reinforcing outcomes: **human flourishing, socioeconomic prosperity and national resilience.**

We invite you to join us – there is a role for everyone.

Let's get started.

Canadian Brain Economy Initiative

I. Canada Coined Brain Capital. Now We Need It More Than Ever.

Canada has no shortage of ambition.

We are investing billions to build the infrastructure of a more productive, secure and prosperous future – from housing and transportation to energy, technology and AI. But there is another form of infrastructure that will determine whether Canadians can fully benefit from those investments: the foundational elements required for people to learn, adapt, think, connect and contribute.

This is brain capital.

Canada helped give the world this idea. In 2011, the Hon. Michael Wilson, former federal Minister of Finance and Canadian Ambassador to the United States, and Bill Wilkerson, a Canadian business executive and mental health advocate, coined the term “brain capital” to describe the value associated with brain health and brain skills[1]. Over the past 15 years, the idea has gained international momentum. The question for Canada is whether we will be at the forefront of the movement we helped start – or stand by while others seize the momentum and capture the opportunity.

Brain Capital

Brain capital (brain health + brain skills) combines two components: foundational cognitive, interpersonal, self-leadership and technological literacy abilities that enable people to adapt, connect and contribute meaningfully, and the health (neurological, neurodevelopmental, mental and substance use) that sustains those capabilities over a lifetime.

Brain Economy

The brain economy is an economic transition that prioritizes investment in brain capital across the lifespan to support economic prosperity, inclusive growth and societal resilience.

Canada is a nation of builders – not only of infrastructure, industries and natural resources, but of the institutions, capabilities and human potential that enable people and communities to thrive. Our democratic traditions, respect for the rule of law and commitment to the common good have helped us navigate complex challenges.

In a country as vast and diverse as Canada, the natural and engineered infrastructure that unite us is our greatest strength. Diverse is an apt description, not only of the people and

communities across the country, but also of the geography, governance, economy, institutions, knowledge systems and approaches to innovation. This diversity provides a defining advantage but also creates a defining challenge – fragmentation. Unequal individual outcomes, duplicative processes, siloed interventions and distributed responsibility have all constrained our progress. This does not have to be the outcome. Building the mechanisms for diverse people, places, sectors and ideas to work together toward shared outcomes can leverage our defining advantage to strengthen brain capital.

Brain capital creates value at every level.

An individual's brain health and brain skills, as well as the environment they live and work in, shape their own ability to learn, work, earn, adapt and participate. Neuroplasticity – the brain's ability to change – influences our brain health and brain skills both positively and negatively depending on the environment in our communities and our nation. In turn, our brain health and skills affect quality of life, social cohesion and resilience. In other words, these levels are connected and reinforcing:

> When people flourish, organizations and communities thrive.
>
> When organizations and communities thrive, Canada prospers.
>
> And when Canada prospers, more people can flourish.

Canada's Foundation for Brain Capital

Canada is not starting from zero. **Brain capital aligns naturally with Canadian values.** Canada has long invested in the idea that prosperity is strongest when people have the opportunity to learn, participate and contribute; when people can feel safe and seek trusted help when feeling unsafe; when communities support one another; and when public institutions and civil society work across boundaries to solve complex problems. Canada has always responded to moments of profound challenge by building institutions that expand opportunity, strengthen communities and invest in human potential. Universal health care reflected the belief that access to care should be based on need, not ability to pay. Public education created pathways for generations of Canadians to learn, contribute and prosper.

Canadian Brain Economy Initiative

WHAT CANADA ALREADY HAS:	
Research	World-class neuroscience, AI and neurotechnology researchers and institutions.
Innovation	Investment pipelines that support the translation of discoveries to impact.
Public Infrastructure	Health, education, data and research systems.
Community Capacity	Organizations translating evidence into action.
Policy Foundation	Quality of Life Framework, pan-Canadian strategies (dementia, substance use, artificial intelligence, energy).
Canadian Values	Inclusion, opportunity, collaboration, human wellbeing.

Canada's foundation is strong. We have a highly educated population, strong research institutes, public health and education systems, diverse communities, trusted institutions and a history of solving complex problems collaboratively. Canada's opportunity is to connect these assets and mobilize them more deliberately. Brain health and brain skills already sit at the intersection of current priorities – from healthy development and learning to workforce productivity, innovation, social cohesion and resilience. Many organizations, including Brain Canada, Centre for Brain Health and Aging Innovation, Kids Brain Health+ and Ontario Brain Institute, amongst others, lay a strong foundation for an investment infrastructure. They are bringing together government funding, philanthropy and impact investing to make an impact on the brain health and brain skills of people living in Canada.

Canadian policy frameworks reinforce this foundation. The Chief Public Health Officer's 2025 report[2], Statistics Canada's Quality of Life Framework[3] and Canada's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development[4] emphasize wellbeing, collaboration and whole-of-society action. Federal and provincial strategies spanning dementia, substance use, housing and artificial intelligence similarly point to the need to address complex challenges across policy domains.

We have exported our concept of Brain Capital, where international organizations are increasingly converging around similar ideas. For example, the World Economic Forum's Brain Economy Action Forum identifies five complementary levers: safeguarding brain

health, fostering brain skills, measuring and investing in brain capital and mobilizing coordinated action. Together, these provide building blocks for a distinctly Canadian approach.

Canada does not need to import a model. We can build on what already exists here – and more intentionally connect it.

Canada Is Under Pressure – and Canadians Are Feeling It

Canada's brain capital is under strain. We see this on an individual level in our own lives and communities, and through the countless stories from across the country that show the pressures Canadians are feeling and their impact. We all know someone, whether a loved one, a friend, or a neighbour, who has been negatively affected.

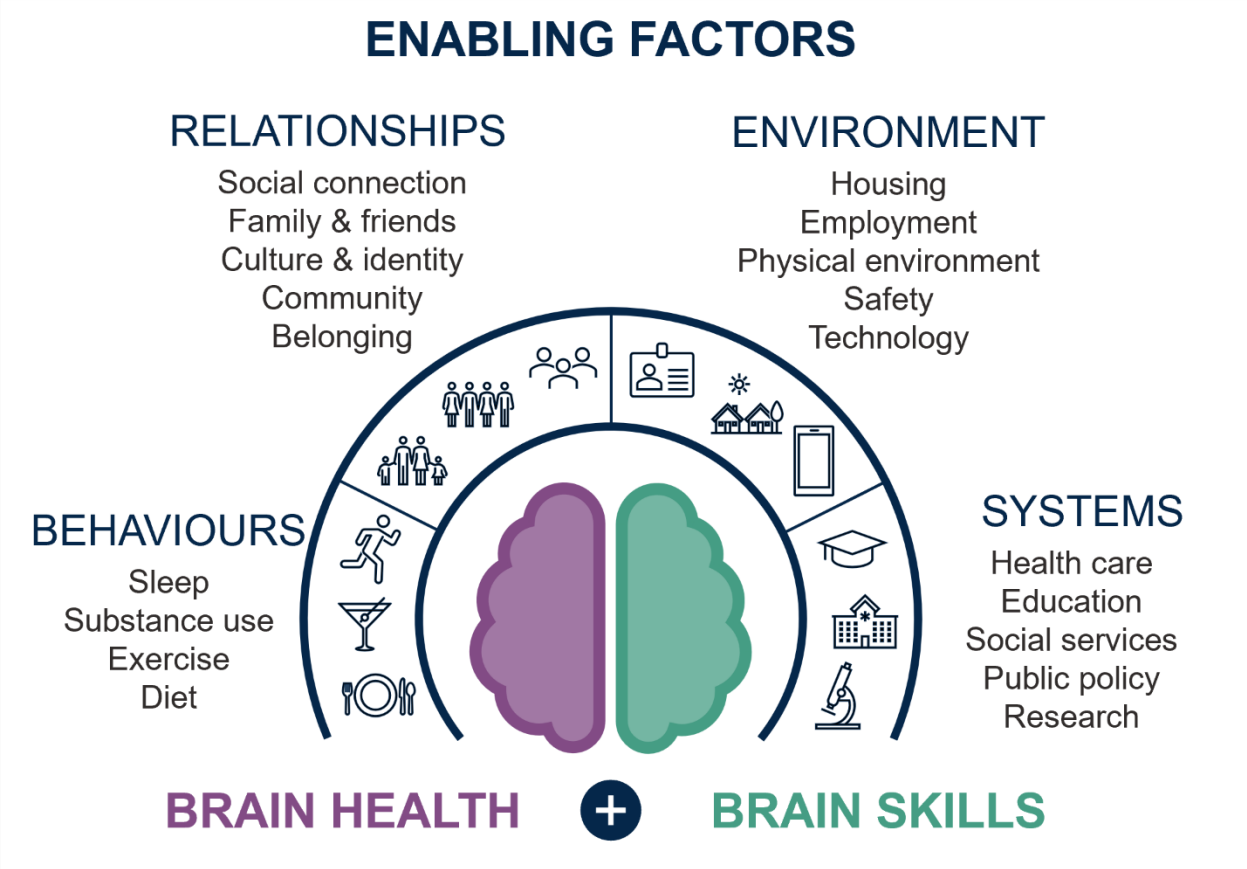
> *For example, a woman from Yellowknife lost faith in the medical community in the Northwest Territories and felt compelled to spend thousands of dollars to travel for an ALS diagnosis, one which may force her to move to continue receiving the necessary care[5]. Her experience shows how barriers to neurological care can compound the effects of disease, threatening a person's health, independence and ability to participate in their community.*
>
> *A former manufacturing worker from Brampton taking new courses to, hopefully, facilitate a shift into a new, but lower-paying, line of work following a lay-off from their long-held job at an automotive assembly plant[6]. This illustrates another pressure on Canada's brain capital: valuable knowledge and experience can be displaced during economic transitions, while workers bear the burden of retraining and adapting their skills.*

These are just two public stories of a narrative that is all too common. The stories are personal, diverse, and everyone has one to tell. They change across the country – different individuals, different stresses, different communities, and different impacts. Underlying each one, however, is the fact that Canada is under pressure and Canadians are feeling it.

A More Uncertain Canada: Security, Stability and Stress

Canada is in the midst of a period of heightened uncertainty. From economic restructuring due to geopolitical tensions and technological change, to socio-economic pressures like affordability and the strain on public systems, the landscape is rapidly changing. For many Canadians, this feels less like a series of separate disruptions and more like a permacrisis: a sustained state in which one challenge overlaps with the next, leaving little time to recover or adapt. The stability and predictability that many Canadians have historically taken for granted can no longer be assumed and the resulting uncertainties and pressures are

weakening the enabling conditions that support strong brains across the lifespan – conditions that extend well beyond healthcare and education. They also add to our cognitive load, making it harder to think clearly, process information and make sense of a rapidly changing world.



a. Employment Shifts

Canada's economy is undergoing significant and disruptive changes. The federal government estimates that to build and operate Canada's new infrastructure and housing projects, more than 1.4 million new trades workers will be required by 2033[7]. Responses to changing global trade and security relationships are putting pressure on export-oriented sectors such as automotive manufacturing and are forcing businesses and workers to adapt. The Bank of Canada has identified the movement of workers and capital from tariff-affected industries into other sectors as an important part of the economic adjustment, and notes that workers may require time and new skills to make that transition[8]. The automotive sector illustrates the complexity of this transition. Canada's government has announced workforce supports and reskilling assistance for up to 66,000 workers, alongside measures intended to retain automotive production and attract new investment[9]. These shifts affect

more than employment numbers. For workers, a changing job market can bring uncertainty about their livelihoods while requiring them to learn and adapt. Effective reskilling therefore depends on giving people the time, ability and support to learn, as well as access to training. Those conditions matter for brain health and for Canada's ability to make the most of economic change, learn new tools, adapt to changing roles and navigate increasingly complex work environments.

b. Technological Change

Rapid advancements in technology, most notably AI, are creating both opportunity and uncertainty. In Canada, AI adoption has been relatively slow, shaped in part by mistrust and low levels of AI literacy. A KPMG survey of 48,000 people across 47 countries ranked Canada in the bottom five for AI training, literacy and trust, and found significant concern about AI's effects on society and employment[10]. Forty-seven percent of Canadians worry that AI automation could cause them to lose their job or change careers, a concern particularly prominent among younger people[11]. At the same time, emerging evidence suggests that overreliance on AI can erode skills such as critical thinking, a concept called cognitive offloading, with half of Canadian students reporting that they have experienced this effect[12]. As AI changes how people work and learn, we must also consider whether it strengthens human connection or displaces opportunities for conversation, collaboration and belonging. Uncertainty is prevalent around the opportunities for AI as well. It promises increased productivity, the potential to augment human capability and accelerate innovation. However, the extent of the potential is unknown.

c. Affordability Pressures

Uncertainty and stress from socio-economic pressures are also contributing to the challenge. Consumer prices in Canada have risen about 20% in the past five years, with an especially high surge following the COVID-19 pandemic[13]. Concerns about affordability, particularity of groceries and nutritious food, and the cost of living are now major sources of stress: 42% of Canadians say their personal finances are their top source of stress, and half report losing sleep because of financial worries[14]. As financial strain can leave people with less mental bandwidth to plan, learn and adapt, affordability is more than economic issue – it is also a brain health issue.

d. Public System Strain

Cutting across these sources of uncertainty is an increasing strain on Canada's public systems. The share of Canadians over the age of 65 is on the rise due to Canada's ageing population and ultra-low fertility status, creating a dual challenge: demand for age-related services is increasing while the share of the population available to contribute to families, workforces and communities is shrinking. People are facing delays in accessing services

they need; for example, 10% of Canadians report unmet healthcare needs[15], while people with symptoms of dementia can wait 21 to 28 months for a formal diagnosis[16]. The extent of these impacts is uneven across the country, with rural and remote areas as well as equity-seeking groups, being particularly strained by the demand. Labour shortages also affect the delivery of essential services such as early learning and child care[17], reinforcing that the issues are not constrained to health systems.

Many Canadians are not thriving…

People do not experience uncertainty only as an economic, social or political condition. We experience it through our brains and bodies. Prolonged uncertainty and stress increase cognitive and emotional demands, contribute to neurobiological changes, and impair functions such as attention, learning and decision-making[18,19]. The effects compound and they ripple across where we live and work. With mounting pressures, many Canadians of all ages are struggling to flourish as multiple measures of mental health, wellbeing and cognitive performance reveal deterioration.

Brain health encompasses neurological, neurodevelopmental and mental health conditions, as well as the ways substance use can affect health and wellbeing. Overall, about one in three Canadians will experience a neurological condition at some point in their life[20] and one in five Canadians live with a mental health or substance use disorder[21]. While some components of brain health, like the incidence of dementia, are improving[22], others are declining. Between 2015 and 2024, the proportion of Canadian adults with a mood disorder rose from 8.1% to 13.1% and anxiety disorders more than doubled from 7.8% to 16.1%[23]. These changes are even more drastic for younger Canadians. In 2022, 18.4% of girls and women aged 15 to 24 met the criteria for a major depressive episode and 11.9% for generalized anxiety disorder versus 9% and 3.8%, respectively, in 2012[24]. Finally, Canada's rate of opioid toxicity death is the second highest in the world (20 deaths annually per 100,000, doubling between 2016 and 2023)[25]. All told, while Canadians still tend to live long lives, life expectancy has stagnated since 2010 (at about 82 years[26]). Additionally, the health-adjusted life expectancy, or the number of years people live in optimal health, dropped by almost 4 years in this period to just 67 years[27].

Even though the rise in mental health disorders is not unique to Canada – the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports that youth mental health has been deteriorating across most OECD countries for more than a decade[28] – the reductions in wellbeing have been especially drastic. In a recent World Happiness Report[29], Canada ranked 25th in happiness. Despite placing in the top 20% among all countries, it was a significant drop from 6th place in 2013. In fact, it was the 9th worst score drop across all 136 countries. As described, there are many unique stressors and disruptions that are affecting

Canadians today that contribute to declining wellbeing. Burnout, experienced by 39% of working Canadians, is 4% higher today than it was in 2023[30]. Social connection and the feeling of belonging have never been worse, with only 33% of youth saying that their personal relationships are “always good”[31]. Overall, only 54% of Canadians rated their mental health as very good or excellent in 2024, compared with 72% in 2015[32].

At the same time, Canada's brain skills are being threatened, and this is visible across the lifespan. Youth performance on international literacy measures has weakened, with the share of students below baseline literacy proficiency increasing from 14% in 2012 to 22% in 2025[33]. Meanwhile, employers report that they are finding it difficult to identify candidates with the skills that they require[34]. The importance of brain skills, however, is not limited to success in the workplace. These skills, especially critical thinking and decision-making, also help people to discriminate between mis- or dis-information and evidence-based factual content generated online. In 2019, more than half of Canadians had fallen for “fake news”, slightly higher than the international average[35]. More recently, with the spread of AI, 80% reported seeing mis- or dis-information online, and 47% reported finding it harder to identify[36]. Without training in how to identify manipulation, along with strong brain skills like critical thinking, individuals can fall victim to financial scams and fraudulent health advice.

The burden does not affect everyone equally. Indigenous Peoples, racialized, 2SLGBTQI+, newcomers, and women all experience inequality in the conditions necessary to enable positive brain capital. The impacts of colonization, racism, poverty, disability and barriers to services lead to disproportionate consequences for these populations.

Women	7% more provide intense, unpaid care to someone	3% more are burnt out from work
2SLGBTQI+	31 - 55% experience stigma in their daily life	11% more feel a low sense of belonging to a community
Newcomers	6% more have a skills mismatch in their job	8% more are vulnerable to AI-displacement
Racialized	5% less have a primary health care provider	2x more likely to have dementia
Indigenous People	2 - 20% more live in a low-income situation	12% more have fair or poor mental health

The challenge goes beyond the numbers, as the effects ripple outwards and impact families, caregivers, employers and communities. Taken together, these trends provide the evidence that the brain health and brain skills on which Canada's prosperity and resilience depend are under pressure. This is particularly consequential given that Canada needs to build and sustain brain capital as our world becomes more uncertain and as our brains - the underlying asset for social and economic success - show signs of strain.

...manifesting in our communities...

Across the country, communities are dealing with these intersecting pressures. Inflation, rising housing and food costs, the impacts of the opioid epidemic, economic disruption and declining community wellbeing are playing out within communities across the country. These challenges can be particularly acute outside major urban centres where access to healthcare, education, employment and other supports may be limited. The result is that many communities are struggling to provide the conditions people need to thrive.

The effect of this can further compound the pressures people in the community are facing due to reductions in the perception of community safety[37]. Although today's social and economic stressors do not cause criminal involvement, the vulnerabilities that arise from financial insecurity, unstable housing, social isolation and limited opportunities can leave

people, including youth, more susceptible to the attraction of criminal activity and to recruitment or exploitation by criminal actors[38].

The consequences extend to families and manifest in the broader community, where increased fear and weakened community safety and wellbeing[39] further reinforce the strain Canadians feel. All told, by undermining brain health and limiting opportunities to develop and use skills, these pressures reduce community-level brain capital and resilience.

...and workplaces.

For employers, challenges to brain capital are directly relevant to employee wellness, performance and productivity. Ten percent of employed Canadians missed a day of work in the prior week because of mental health challenges, with 64% of those people missing multiple days, while 33% report reduced productivity at work[40]. Among working caregivers, 36% report a negative impact on their work, including reduced productivity, lost earnings or difficulty balancing competing demands[41]. These effects translate directly into costs for employers and the broader economy. They can also reinforce brain health challenges. Factors like workload, job insecurity, limited control, poor support and a lack of meaningful connection can add to stress and cognitive strain. This can have further impacts including alcohol consumption that can reduce employee wellness, productivity and impair workplace safety[42]. Conversely, well-designed work, supportive leadership and flexibility for caregivers can help protect brain health. Workload, role clarity, autonomy, relationships and support during change are psychosocial conditions that employers can assess and improve. Preventing these risks is part of protecting people's capacity to think, learn and perform sustainably and maintain positive brain health.

II. Building Brain Capital: The Opportunity Canada Cannot Afford to Miss

Challenges to brain health and brain skills have an immense human cost. Together, they also carry a significant economic cost. While no single figure captures the full burden of neurological, mental health, neurodevelopmental and substance use disorders, dementia alone cost the Canadian economy more than $40 billion in 2020[43]and a 2026 estimate placed the economic burden of mental health conditions at $180 billion[44]. These individual estimates capture healthcare spending, household costs, employer expenses, and lost productivity for people with the disorder and their caregivers, the latter of which is the largest driver of costs in all case examples. The economic costs are not tied to a single sector and can present at different timeframes. Together, however, they underscore the significant impact of brain disorders.

Conversely, there is also a large opportunity to lay a foundation for economic gain. Investments in brain health and brain skills can return immense benefits, not only to individuals but to sectors across society. For example, support for the healthy development of children yields a significant lifelong benefit, with short-term benefits for families and long-term benefits for the child.

500k	Canadians miss work every week due to mental illness	**9x ROI**	on help for children in first 1,000 days of life
472M	hours of informal caregiving by Canadians for people with dementia	**45%**	of dementia risk is modifiable
3M	disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) lost due to brain-related conditions for Canadians	**6/10**	desired job skills of the future are brain skills
All cases	point to lost productivity as the highest economic cost	**$10.7B**	reduction in Canadian economic burden if dementia onset is delayed by just 1 year
28B : 23B	ratio of reactive spending on responses to mental illness versus mental healthcare itself	**$10**	saved for every dollar invested in community-based youth mental health services in Canada

The opportunity is to reduce these costs and to generate more impact by taking deliberate action to build an asset that supports three interconnected outcomes:

Human flourishing — where people have the health, connection, agency and capabilities to learn, participate in their workplaces and communities, thrive and fulfill their potential.

Socioeconomic prosperity — where organizations and communities enable people to develop and use the skills, creativity, adaptability and wellbeing to produce, innovate and contribute.

National resilience — where Canada has the human capacity to absorb shocks, adapt to disruption, maintain social cohesion and protect its ability to determine its own future.

These outcomes are inter-related and reinforce one another. Brain capital is both an input to prosperity and an outcome of the conditions that enable people to flourish.

Demographic changes make this a life-course investment. Canada needs to build strong foundations early, sustain brain health and capability through childhood, adolescent brain development and working life, all of which feed into healthy aging so that more people can remain healthy, independent and engaged for longer.

What Brain Capital Looks Like in Practice

Canada already has examples of investments that build brain capital and demonstrate how benefits can ripple across people, communities and the economy. The examples below are not exhaustive. They illustrate three high-leverage places to act – early in life, in communities and at work – and show how investments in each can advance human flourishing while generating economic and resilience benefits.

Invest early: build the foundations of brain capital

More than 400,000 Canadian children aged 4 to 14 live with a neurodevelopmental disability, with some estimates as high as 700,000. The Kids Brain Health Network (KBHN) has invested more than $31 million in initiatives for children, including in a program called Social ABCs. This program, developed by researchers from the University of Toronto and Dalhousie University, helps toddlers with early social-communication delays to strengthen their life-long social skills, leveraging the most critical brain developmental stage. Research showed that this intervention works as children in the program made gains in the functional communication and social skills that will be critical throughout their life[45]. The Social ABCs program is now being scaled across Ontario, Alberta, Nova Scotia and internationally, expanded to older children and is expected to reach 130 new families. It shows how investments in children's brain health support developmental gains like communication, learning and participation which build a foundation for longer-term capabilities and economic benefits. The Social ABCs program is an example of how researchers can identify important gaps, generate promising ideas to fill the need and then work with organizations like KBHN to get it to the people who need it. It's also a concrete example of public investment attracting additional resources to build brain capital in individuals.

The strategy of building a strong early foundation of brain capital also applies to the population level. The Breakfast Club of Canada[46] recognized that, despite being associated with better health and learning outcomes, 1 in 3 children were not eating breakfast regularly. To improve this, they worked with partners to implement and expand breakfast programs in schools across the country and provide complete, balanced, and nutritious breakfasts to school-aged children. The program now serves almost 1 million children in 5,600 schools.

This simple investment has made a difference for children's academic achievement, nutrition goals and overall wellbeing.

The lesson is larger than any one program: early investments in brain development and timely support can improve outcomes for children and families. This encompasses children's mental health and wellbeing, social and cognitive development and access to nutritious food, supportive relationships and timely supports and services. All told, investing in brain development from early childhood builds Canada's economic capacity, with benefits beginning in families today and extending across the lifespan.

Build brain-healthy communities

Brain capital is also built in the places where people live and connect. The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction's Small Cities Initiative illustrates how evidence can be translated into locally relevant action. Over 30 mayors and community leaders contributed to develop a "Playbook for Action" offering more than 50 evidence-based interventions to help with substance use challenges, spanning prevention, treatment, harm reduction, recovery, community support, housing, employment and public safety, that communities can use. This approach has garnered multisectoral buy-in and focuses on whole-of-health and community wellbeing. It has been very well received and has seen strong uptake, having engaged more than 30 regions and counting.

Working closely in communities is also at the heart of the goal of dementia-friendly communities. This initiative defines community broadly, as it can apply to a town or city, but also an organization, business, or a group. They are localized efforts to ensure that people in the community are more knowledgeable about the experiences of people with dementia. The objective is for people to use their knowledge to increase support, inclusion, and accessibility for people with dementia and their caregivers. These programs have been implemented across Canada through a partnership between regional Alzheimer's Societies[47] and meaningfully increase social interactions, decrease experiences of social isolation and increase quality of life for people with dementia and their caregivers[48]

In these examples, there is an important broader lesson. Namely, strengthening brain health is not done solely through treatments delivered by clinical systems. Community is a critical part of the infrastructure for supporting mental health and wellbeing, facilitating social and human connection and providing the conditions needed for healthy development. In doing so, communities build and protect brain capital while enhancing human flourishing and national resilience.

Strengthen human capability at work

Workplaces are another major setting in which brain capital can be protected and strengthened. Canadian evidence demonstrates that employer investments in mental health – an important component of brain capital – can generate measurable business returns[49]. Deloitte Canada's analysis of seven large Canadian companies found a median annual return of $1.62 for every dollar invested in workplace mental health programs, rising to $2.18 for programs in place for three or more years. At the individual level, the improvement of brain health allows for better retention rates and attracts more quality applicants.

Strengthening brain skills is also an avenue for employers to build brain capital in their people, business and community. A project from Eeyou Istchee College of Science and Technology, a Cree-governed, community-led postsecondary institution in Northern Quebec with financial support from Future Skills Centre[50] serves as a meaningful example. The College partnered with regional employers to design and deliver a certificate program to working adults in the region that focused on developing essential workplace skills. Employees reported having better work skills and employers reported improvements in job performance[51].

The significance of these examples extends beyond the importance of mental health and upskilling programming. They show that when employers pay attention to how work is designed and invest in the conditions that enable people to think, adapt, participate and perform well, they can create value for both their people and their business, driving human flourishing and socioeconomic prosperity.

The examples across these three high-leverage places underscore that Canada does not need to build brain capital from scratch as the building blocks already exist in research, communities and workplaces. The opportunity is to learn from what works, connect these efforts, strengthen the evidence, mobilize investment and create the conditions for innovation and promising approaches to scale.

We can build on our own strengths – strong public institutions, world-class research, diverse communities, universal health and education systems, and experience working across jurisdictions – to develop a distinctly Canadian approach to building and mobilizing brain capital.

III. From Conversation to Common Agenda

Brain capital is not simply a health issue. It's an economic and workforce challenge. The case for a more integrated approach to brain capital is emerging from conversations taking place across sectors. Convened by a partnership that included major Canadian brain,

research and innovation organizations and held in Calgary during Canada's 2025 G7 Presidency, the G7 Canada Brain Economy Summit brought together more than 100 senior leaders from Canada and around the world across business, labour, science, academia, civil society and lived experience. The insights that were discussed at this meeting continue to be discussed and reinforced in ongoing discussions for the brain economy.

Specifically, we have heard consensus on the importance of brain health for productivity, retention, safety, adaptability and organizational performance, in addition to competitiveness and demographic resilience. Further, prevention and promotion have emerged as central to the opportunity because health is shaped across the lifespan, long before a diagnosis occurs. Schools, workplaces and public spaces are seen as important environments for promoting brain health – not simply places where problems are addressed after they emerge. Finally, AI is seen as both an opportunity for productivity and innovation and a risk to cognitive capacity, misinformation, changing patterns of learning and recall and widening gaps between those equipped to use these technologies critically and those who are not.

Coordination is key. There is a persistent gap between knowledge and impact, as highlighted by participants at a G7 Brain Economy Summit, among other forums. Scientific advances in neuroscience, prevention and data science are not consistently translated into policy, services or practice. Short-term funding, siloed evaluation and a lack of reliable tools to compare interventions and assess returns can make it difficult to sustain, scale and invest in what works.

Measurement, investment and coordination are seen as critical enablers. Participants called for shared indicators, stronger evidence of return on investment, cost-of-inaction analysis, better data infrastructure and practical mechanisms to identify and scale what works. They also emphasized that no single sector should assume the sole responsibility of advancing brain capital.

Since this event, the conversations have continued and accelerated. New partners from government, civil society and business have been engaged. The key themes shared by these leaders and experts reinforce the perspectives of the G7 participants. The shared ideas further reinforce the barriers, needs and opportunities available.

We have the evidence to show that organizations, governments, researchers, clinicians and businesses are keen to connect what already exists and build the partnerships, investment mechanisms and practical tools needed to move from evidence to knowledge mobilization, from prevention to healthier and more capable people, and from promising action to measurable impact.

Investing in brain capital is ultimately an investment in the people who power our economy and strengthen our communities. Healthier, better skilled and more adaptable Canadians are better positioned to participate fully in society, contribute to productivity and innovation, and navigate a rapidly changing economy. Brain capital is an investment in Canada.

IV. The Canadian Brain Economy Initiative

The Canadian Brain Economy Initiative (CBEI) was conceived in recognition of the extensive work already underway across Canada to build brain capital – and the opportunity to connect these efforts to effect systems change and achieve greater collective impact.

CBEI's **vision** is to help create the conditions for three mutually reinforcing outcomes: human flourishing, socioeconomic prosperity and national resilience.

Its **mission** is to lead a Canadian, multi-sectoral initiative that brings brain capital into the priorities of governments, investors, civil society, communities and industries. CBEI connects sectors – including health, education, skills, workplaces, research, innovation and public policy – to strengthen brain health and brain skills across the lifespan.

CBEI will serve as a nationwide connecting and mobilizing hub: bringing together evidence, policy, practice, investment and measurement; connecting promising work across sectors and regions; and helping create the conditions for action, evaluation, investment and scale.

Canada already has significant strengths in brain health, brain skills, research, innovation, policy and practice. The opportunity is to bring these assets together around a common direction and accelerate their collective impact.

From Vision to Action

Over the past year, CBEI has built momentum following the 2025 G7 Canada Brain Economy Summit in Calgary. A growing national network has been established, stakeholders from across sectors and regions have been brought together around our shared vision, and development of a Canadian Brain Capital Index has advanced.

The Index will provide an important enabling tool for the ecosystem – establishing a common evidence base to identify strengths and gaps, track progress and support more informed policy, planning and investment decisions.

Over the coming year, CBEI will build the practical infrastructure needed to move from a shared vision to coordinated action and will serve as a practical, cross-sector platform to:

- Identify and connect high-potential opportunities across sectors and jurisdictions;

- Mobilize capital – public, private and philanthropic – toward opportunities with the potential to generate meaningful outcomes;
- Bring diverse sectors and perspectives together around shared opportunities rather than creating another silo;
- Build evidence and showcase proof points that demonstrate what works and strengthen the case for investment;
- Move innovation into implementation and scale, helping successful approaches travel across jurisdictions and sectors; and
- Establish governance to guide and support the first-year plan.

A Practical Agenda for Action

This work will be advanced through six priority areas:

- **Health promotion and prevention** – strengthen population brain health across the lifespan.
- **Skills, productivity and workplace wellbeing** – build a future-ready workforce by developing brain skills, preventing psychosocial risks and designing accessible work as AI and other changes are introduced.
- **Research, technology and innovation** – advance solutions, including AI-enabled approaches, that strengthen Canada's innovation pathway from neuroscience discovery and clinical research through to translation, implementation and impact.
- **Investment and funding** – develop a common investment thesis and mobilize capital toward brain capital opportunities.
- **Place-based initiatives** – support communities to translate brain capital into action and demonstrate local economic and social impact.
- **Social cohesion and human flourishing** – strengthen the conditions for connected, inclusive and flourishing communities.

An Ambitious Canadian Opportunity

Canada has an opportunity to move from leadership in the brain capital conversation to leadership in putting brain capital into practice.

CBEI will help make that possible – linking evidence and experience, sectors and regions, policy and practice, and capital and opportunity. By building on the strengths already

present across Canada and connecting them around a common direction, CBEI can help turn a growing body of knowledge, innovation and action into measurable outcomes and greater collective impact.

Ultimately, the goal is to create the conditions for safe, secure and skilled Canadians that help to realize three mutually reinforcing outcomes: **human flourishing, economic prosperity and national resilience.**

Join the Movement

CBEI is being built with and for partners across Canada. Our impact is only as strong as the people and voices who shape CBEI's work. There is a role for governments, investors, businesses, researchers, health and social organizations, educators, communities, people with lived and living experience and others in advancing this work.

Share your perspective, contribute your expertise and ideas, and connect with the Canadian Brain Economy Initiative.

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