If Canada was a CABIN

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In April 2025, I attended the Children's Healthcare Canada Conference in Ottawa, Canada. This conference brings leaders in Children's healthcare across Canada together - from nurses, to managers, to CEOs, to government officials. Our Keynote was Dr. Tina L. Cheng, the chair of Pediatrics and director of Research at Cincinnati Children's Hospital. Dr. Cheng reviewed the state of health for children and youth across Canada and the US and many of us were humbled at the statistics and numbers. In official recommendations between national bodies in Canada and the United States, school and community engagement to create "health systems" beyond the hospitals were highlighted. As Dr. Cheng said "it takes a village".

During my time in both the camping and healthcare industry, I've learned an extraordinary amount about leadership and courage. I've seen it in the faces of campers before they try something for the first time, and the eyes of staff on their first day greeting parents. We coach our kids and youth to go beyond their comfort zones: be brave and have courage. So I did something we ask of our campers.

In front of 200 pediatric healthcare leaders across the country, including the leadership and my colleagues at the IWK, I asked a question:

"I appreciate your reference to "it takes a village", especially as I am joining today from IWK in Nova Scotia, and Brigadoon Village where we provide camp experiences for children and youth with medical conditions and other life challenges. Camps in both Canada and the USA serve millions of children annually. Although we don't have Canadian data, the USA camping industry contributes $70 Billion USD annually to the economy. We serve the same children and youth that our healthcare centres do. Schools are always being asked to expand their capacity yet are struggling to meet the needs of students. My question is: how can camps serve to support health systems and the determinants of health of our children?"

I did it scared, because our campers and our patients matter. Dr. Cheng answered in a very excited way, curious how to engage into the camping world, how to harness the energy of our industry and collaborate for these important initiatives. After the address, I spoke with her and shared about the industries in both countries, my role with the Camping Association of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island (CANSPEI) and in research. I was proud to continue these conversations with others through the day, many of which are camping alumni themselves.

I wanted to reflect on some of the statistics that Dr. Cheng shared, to acknowledge the state of children and youth in our Healthcare Systems and community. I've adjusted these to better reflect data mainly in our Canadian population.

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CABIN

Asthma is the most common chronic condition amongst children

2 of 10 children have at least one chronic condition

1 in 14 children will experience a significant loss before the age of 12

2 of 10 Canadians have Arthritis

Child poverty in Canada increased from 15.2% to 17.8% between 2020 and 2021

½ of all mental illness begins before 14 years old, ⅔ before 24 years old.

20% of Canadian children and youth will experience mental illness

US data notes that 40% of children have a chronic health issue, special need or functional difficulty

Only 39% of children get the recommended 60 minutes of daily activity

1 in 10 children with a disability will be denied childcare due to their condition

25% of four - 11 year olds have obesity or are overweight

33% of 12 - 17 year olds have obesity or are overweight
This increased by 57% between 2018 and 2022, and has TRIPLED since 1979

28.4% of children in Canada experience food insecurity

60% of Canadians report experiencing maltreatment before the age of 15

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