



Shine On

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Young Canadians Report Low Levels of Social Connection, YMCA Report Finds

First annual YMCA Connections Snapshot reveals the critical role of accessible spaces like the YMCA in building a sense of community



St. Catharines – September 15, 2025 – Three-in-four (74%) Canadians ages 18–34 say they lack a sense of community, according to new YMCA research. Yet the same amount believe that “third places” like the YMCA are the key to feeling more connected. These findings, revealed in the first annual YMCA Connections Snapshot, highlight both the barriers Canadians face and the opportunities to strengthen belonging through accessible community spaces.

The YMCA Connections Snapshot, commissioned by YMCA Canada and the YMCA of Greater Toronto, conducted among Angus Reid Forum members, launched today alongside the YMCA’s latest brand awareness campaign “[Greater Together](#).” It’s the first of an annual series, offering a recurring snapshot to help the Y monitor how Canadians are feeling over time.

Sense of connection and belonging remains low

The survey revealed only four-in-ten (38%) of Canadians feel a sense of connection and belonging in their community. Many believe the biggest barriers that are preventing people from connecting with others in the community are social anxiety or discomfort (52%), followed by lack of time (47%), and not knowing where to start (47%).

“It’s alarming to see the sense of disconnection felt by people, especially younger generations, across Canada,” reflects Peter Dinsdale, President & CEO, YMCA Canada. “Community needs to be nurtured, and this snapshot shows that, as a country, we are falling short. This is why places like the YMCA are more important than ever. We create spaces in communities where people

can not only find connection for themselves but also help build it for others.”

When looking at younger Canadians, there is a greater disconnect within the community, with Canadians ages 26-34 feeling the least sense of connection (77%). In contrast, older adults (65+) have the highest sense of belonging and connection in the community (56%).

“Nothing fosters genuine connection quite like being together in person, and the data clearly shows how important it is, especially for Gen Z and Millennials,” says Lesley Davidson, President & CEO, YMCA of Greater Toronto and YMCA Ontario. “At the Y, we see this first-hand, every day. People of all ages come together in person for a fitness class or for one of our many other Y programs and leave smiling, with new friends and confidence.”

Financial accessibility and why it matters more than ever today

The survey revealed almost half of Canadians (49%) surveyed have received some form of financial assistance or program fee reduction including child care subsidy or food assistance. For lower income families, that number increased by 14% to six in 10 Canadians (63%).

Of those surveyed, one in four say financial barriers have prevented them or someone in their family from accessing community programs specifically in fitness and wellness and mental health and well-being services.

The YMCA’s financial assistance program serves as a vital gateway, enabling individuals facing financial challenges to access spaces and a wide range of programs that would otherwise be out of reach.

The Power of Third Places

The survey revealed “third places” – community places outside of home or work to gather, connect and build community – are especially important to 26 to 34 year olds, with three-in-four stating that having access to third places can help them feel more connected to their community. Third places can become that community builder to incorporate into their everyday, especially as 77% don’t feel a sense of belonging to the community where they live.

Spaces like community centres, libraries, cafés, and parks continue to play a vital role in the lives of Canadians and remain important touchpoints in people’s lives to gather and learn. The survey highlights its importance, with:

- 65% stating they wished there were more third places available in their community;
- 58% of Canadians believe they would visit third places more often if they were more affordable or free.

“Places like the Y create opportunities for connection and belonging to your local community,” says Christian Wulff, CEO at the YMCA of Niagara. “The snapshot highlights the need for inclusive spaces like the Y, one that welcomes people of all ages and backgrounds.”

The YMCA Connection Snapshot reveals the importance of third places like the YMCA in driving connection and belonging in the community, at a time when it's more important than ever to come together. The "Greater Together" campaign embodies what it means to be part of a community, celebrating moments of connection, big and small. To learn more about the YMCA campaign displayed in English markets, visit ymca.ca/greatertogethercampaign.

YMCA Canada

The YMCA is a charity that ignites the potential in over two million people annually, helping them grow, lead, and give back to their communities. Across Canada, the YMCA delivers a wide variety of programs and services that empower people of all ages and life stages to overcome barriers and rise to their full potential. Programs include child care, health and wellness, aquatics, employment services, immigrant settlement, camps, mental wellness, and many other community initiatives that respond to local needs. Foundational to all this is the YMCA's commitment to creating spaces and experiences where everyone feels safe, welcome, and a sense of belonging. The YMCA in Canada is comprised of 37 YMCA Member Associations, supported by YMCA Canada, working together so all Canadians can shine on. For more information, please visit ymca.ca.

About the Survey

These findings are from a survey conducted by YMCA from August 22 to 26, 2025, among a representative sample of 1,501 online Canadians who are members of the Angus Reid Forum. The survey was conducted in English and French. For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/-2.53 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

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For Media Inquiries:

[Jen Schmaltz](#)

General Manager of Marketing and Communications
YMCA of Niagara
905-246-7478

About the YMCA of Niagara

The YMCA of Niagara is a charity that ignites the potential in people, helping them grow, lead, and give back to their communities. We believe everyone has the innate potential to thrive and are dedicated to empowering individuals to tap into their full abilities. Through diverse programs and services, we foster connection, cultivate belonging, and support well-being to elevate the potential of every person and build a stronger, more connected Niagara Region. To learn more, visit www.ymcaofniagara.org