



BC Budget 2018 Consultation Brief

Written Submission to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services

From:

Inclusion BC

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About Us: We are a provincial federation whose members include people with intellectual disabilities, families and 70 community agencies that deliver child, family and adult services around the province. Together we have led the movement away from institutions since 1955. We are dedicated to advancing rights, promoting abilities and building awareness to support full citizenship for all. Our work includes advocacy, education and training, network support, systems change and public awareness.

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3. Housing

- Inclusive solutions in affordable housing

4. Social Development & Poverty Reduction

- Community Living BC services for adults with intellectual disabilities
- Persons with Disabilities (PWD) Benefit
- Poverty Reduction Strategy/Basic Income

1. *Children & Family Development (MCFD)*

BC Election 2017 Commitments:

- BC NDP committed to a \$28 million targeted budget boost for children with special needs.
- BC Greens committed to prioritize early intervention, with \$80 million to fund a range of strategies, all aimed at early intervention in youth.
- BC Liberals committed new funding to support families and children most in need, strengthen MCFD programs and services and reduce wait lists.
- BC Greens and NDP committed to work collaboratively with families and service providers to make our province a better place for children with special needs.

Remove childcare access barriers for children and youth with special needs

Under British Columbia's childcare delivery model, childcare providers rely on supplemental funding through the SCD/ASCD programs to cover extra staffing supports to accommodate children and youth with special needs.

As such, inadequate SCD/ASCD funding presents a significant added barrier that denies thousands of BC children with special needs from accessing available childcare capacity. Inclusive childcare providers struggle with extensive waitlists and/or limit the hours available to children with special needs in an effort to stretch limited SCD/ASCD allocations.

This was one of the key challenges described by BC families who need Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) services for children with special needs in a [November 2016 report](#). In January 2017, our follow-up report, [Kids Can't Wait: The Case for Investing in Early Childhood Intervention Programs in BC](#), again highlighted SCD/ASCD gaps as one of the major service delivery challenges, based on advice from ECI professionals working throughout the province. In July 2017, the [Provincial ASCD Advisor issued a detailed report and data analysis](#) documenting the extent of SCD/ASCD waitlists, along with program strengths and examples of best practices from BC's frontline community service providers. The results were troubling. Some 5,000 BC preschoolers with special needs are currently waiting for critical ECI services.

We welcomed an initial response to these challenges via a modest funding lift for MCFD's Children and Youth with Special Needs (CYSN) budget in February 2017. However, the provincial response to date has not reduced severe waitlists, wait times and service dilution for vulnerable children who cannot access childcare without SCD/ASCD supports.

Updated reports from partner agencies showed 399 children currently waiting for SCD to access childcare in the City of Vancouver alone. Another 77 were waiting in Burnaby, 127 in Richmond and 116 in Langley. Other communities face similar waitlists. These figures don't include children waiting for SCD/ACSD consultations or those receiving

limited hours as providers try to offer at least minimal access to the greatest possible number of children.

Underfunding of SCD/ASCD has also virtually eliminated access to inclusive after-school care programs for older children and youth with special needs in many communities, depriving them of valuable opportunities for community integration and placing undue hardship on parents.

Inclusion BC, our member agencies, families and community partners are key partners in supporting children and youth with special needs. We have invested in building a strong, community-based foundation for collaborative, evidence-based solutions. We want to work in partnership with the provincial government to address systemic access challenges in BC's system of supports for children and youth with special needs. That includes more effective approaches to identifying needs, making it easier for families to access supports, clarifying policy mandates and effectively targeting available budgets to ensure the best outcomes for vulnerable children and youth.

Youth with special needs in foster care

A disproportionate amount of children and youth within the foster care system have special needs. Over the years, significant funding shortfalls and budget cuts have left the Ministry of Children and Family Development incapable of providing safe and individualized care and support for vulnerable children and youth with complex needs. Too often it resulted in tragic and preventable cases of abuse and neglect.

Inclusion BC was pleased when in February 2016, the BC Government announced a long-overdue budget increase to the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

It is crucial now to ensure that those most vulnerable receive the individualized care they need. The support, protection and care of our province's most vulnerable children and youth must be held to the highest level of accountability.

Recommendations:

1. An immediate allocation from MCFD's current budget to address waitlists and barriers to access due to underfunding of the Aboriginal Supported Childcare Development/ Supported Childcare Development (ASCD/SCD) programs.
2. Additional investment in 2018/19 to ensure that BC's promised response to the childcare crisis removes current barriers to childcare access posed by underfunding of the SCD/ASCD programs and supports full inclusion for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children and youth with special needs.
3. Establishment of a joint working committee of ministry staff and representatives of families and community agencies that serve children and youth with special needs to provide advice on Ministry budgets, data needs and policy to strengthen access to supports for children and youth with special needs.
4. Establishment of a task force to develop and implement practice standards, training requirements and systemic protocols for children and youth with special needs in care.

2. K-12 Education

BC Election 2017 commitments:

- BC NDP committed to being a champion for inclusion in our public schools and bringing people together to make it happen, noting that the best way to build a strong economy is to invest in the success of our kids.
- BC Greens identified public education as their number one priority and the best investment a society can make, with a commitment to increase public education funding so schools can meet the needs of every child. Specific commitments included investing in training, student supports and building strong, inclusive public schools.
- BC Liberals committed to a well-funded system that supports and helps students achieve their full potential, noting that a critical consideration in meeting diverse needs is supporting students with special needs and taking a more inclusive approach to education.

Implement Inclusion in BC's Public Schools

BC's public education system is at an important crossroads today. All major stakeholders and political parties have now acknowledged the very serious gaps in our K-12 public education system for students with special needs. All parties represented in the BC Legislature have also committed to investing in public schools, strengthening learning supports and training, and building strong, respectful relationships with stakeholders. We applaud these commitments! Together with BC's new curriculum, with its new pathways for teaching to diversity, this presents an exciting new opportunity to make classrooms more inclusive and better support all diverse learners.

Inclusive education is the foundation of an inclusive society and has long been a cornerstone of our advocacy. Research consistently and conclusively shows that inclusive education benefits all students. Our vision is one of an inclusive, publicly-funded education system that celebrates and embraces diversity, has the right supports and resources, and provides fair access to lifelong learning.

The reality in recent years has fallen far short of this. Many BC families have been forced to leave neighbourhood public schools that were not equipped to assess diverse learning needs or support teachers to accommodate them.

In 2016, BC reached the low point when the Education Ministry accelerated this trend by establishing more private Special Education Schools, instead of investing in restoring badly-eroded supports for diverse learners and inclusion in our public schools. This move threatened to return BC to discredited and outdated segregated models and dismissed the right of all students to a quality inclusive education under Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The 2016 Supreme Court of Canada decision marked a turning point, as promises to fund thousands of new teaching positions brought a new sense of optimism. But as schools re-opened this September, the challenges facing students with special needs remain largely unchanged.

Positions and resources outside restored contract language

Without additional new funding for positions and resources outside the restored contract language, critical supports for inclusion are still missing. There is an urgent need for more classroom aides, more professionals like speech and language therapists, more specialists who assess student learning styles and who advise teachers on accommodating special learning needs.

Inclusion BC recently hosted a provincial summit on Inclusive Education attended by teachers, parents and professionals, with presentations from leading Canadian experts on implementing best practices for diverse and inclusive classrooms. Our Summit report highlighted the promising potential of BC's new curriculum to support diverse learners. However, it also stressed the need to invest in continuing education and resources to help teachers successfully implement inclusive practice.

We have consensus that now is an opportune time for BC to invest in strengthening supports for inclusive education. Events like our recent Summit reflect our ongoing commitment to advancing and showcasing best practices in this field. We are also committed to working collaboratively with educators, government and parents to support adoption of best practices so that all BC students are welcomed and encouraged to achieve their potential in strong, inclusive public schools.

Recommendations:

1. New investments to help public schools hire more trained educational assistants and specialists so that teachers are well supported to implement inclusion, equity and quality learning opportunities for all students, including diverse learners.
2. Additional investments for teacher training and collaboration to help BC's public school teachers successfully implement BC's new curriculum and unlock its potential to better serve diverse learners and students with complex learning needs.
3. Establishment of a provincial working group to advise on further investments, funding formulas and policy reforms to strengthen inclusive education in BC's public schools and better support the diverse needs of all K-12 students.

3. Housing

BC Election 2017 commitments:

- BC NDP promised 11,400 new rental, non-profit, co-op and owner-purchase units per year for the next decade, ranging from supported social housing to market rental.
- BC Greens committed to investing in building 4,000 new units per year, at a cost of \$750 million.
- BC Liberals committed to support building of 4,900 new units of affordable housing over several years.

Inclusive affordable housing solutions

Inclusion BC applauds the consensus commitment to investing in affordable housing to ensure that all British Columbians can afford a home. The September 2017 budget update confirmed that BC will have more than 10,000 new affordable units rolling out over the next several years.

We want to work with the province and other partners to help deliver on that promise. We can leverage our significant community capacity and expertise in housing for people with intellectual disabilities to ensure that we build strong, inclusive communities where all British Columbians are welcomed.

Since 1955, our members have helped to make British Columbia a leader in the global [movement to close institutions](#) for people with disabilities and to advance community living and community inclusion rights now enshrined in [Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#). Our members across the province have also been at the forefront of advancing affordable, innovative, sustainable and inclusive community housing and support models. However, we have also had to guard against regressive initiatives that occasionally threaten to take us back to the days of institutional ghettos.

The large and complex issues underlying housing affordability require an “all hands on deck” approach to solutions. We propose a **new provincial task force** to guide affordable housing investments through BC Housing. This would support broad engagement and collaboration, ensuring strong partnership in developing effective, inclusive and innovative housing solutions.

To support the significant proposed investments in affordable housing, we also propose that the province establish a **targeted housing innovation fund** to stimulate development of innovative, inclusive housing for people with intellectual disabilities. We have committed to advancing and showcasing examples of inclusive, affordable and innovative housing within our sector, both within the province and with our national partners. Such a fund could leverage this work to ensure that the benefits and knowledge are widely shared.

Portable Rental Supplements

Solving housing affordability in a market economy is a particular challenge for people living on a fixed income, such as those who rely on Persons with Disabilities (PWD) benefits. The \$375/month maximum housing allowance in PWD benefits poses an almost insurmountable barrier to addressing affordability in markets like Greater Vancouver. We believe a Portable Rental Supplement, such as that currently offered under BC Housing's SAFER (Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters) program, offers a useful model for a solution that adapts to local and changing market conditions.

Recommendations:

1. New funding for a Portable Rental Supplement geared to regional housing market costs that would augment the basic housing allowance provided under the Persons with Disabilities (PWD) benefit where necessary.
2. Establishment of a new provincial Task Force to guide affordable housing investments through BC Housing, ensure strong partnerships and effective, inclusive and affordable housing solutions.
3. Establishment of a Housing Innovation Fund to stimulate development of innovative, inclusive housing for people with intellectual disabilities.

1. Social Development & Poverty Reduction

Community Living BC Budget

BC Election 2017 Commitments:

- BC NDP promised that the first NDP budget would include a boost of more than \$58 million for community living and to work with stakeholders to plan future investments.
- BC Greens committed to working with organizations like Inclusion B.C. to ensure adequate provincial funding for Community Living BC to meet the needs of BC residents.
- BC Liberals committed to a \$135 million increase for community living services over three years, to consult with families about addressing the needs of aging parents who support CLBC clients and to introduce a Respite Tax credit.

We applaud the commitment in the September Budget Update to a balanced approach and to putting people first by improving the services they need. Too many adults with intellectual disabilities are being denied residential, life skills, employment and other supports needed to live safe, healthy and productive lives. Essentially, these gaps deny adults with intellectual disabilities from the basic right to live and participate in our province as full citizens. Young people fall into a “black hole” when they leave school at 19. Families, who support most adults with intellectual disabilities in BC, struggle to access programs that are supposed to assist them.

Most of these services are provided through Community Living BC (CLBC), whose budget has for many years lagged far behind population increases, inflation and the added costs of serving an aging population. The number of adults requiring CLBC supports has grown and is expected to continue growing by 5 - 6% annually. If we truly recognize the rights of all British Columbians to belong in our province as full citizens, we must commit to budgets that reflect the actual costs of supports to overcome barriers to community inclusion.

CLBC Transparency, Comprehensive Review

BC Election 2017 Commitments:

- BC NDP committed to working with clients, families and advocacy organizations like Inclusion BC to address concerns about CLBC’s governance, and to strengthen and improve accountability at CLBC by requiring yearly reporting on service benchmarks.
- BC Greens committed to seeking greater transparency and a better understanding of the challenges that CLBC faces, with a review of CLBC as one initiative to consider.
- BC Liberals committed to discussing our perspectives on CLBC’s governance.

A legacy of chronic underfunding has created severe pressures on support providers, as manifested through waitlists and support gaps. Inadequate transparency and reporting make it difficult to enumerate the extent and impact of those gaps, but it's clear the result in many cases is costly, acute crisis management. This is short-sighted because we know that investing in proactive, person-centered planning ultimately saves money and provides better outcomes for individuals, families, communities and our province.

Inclusion BC has called for CLBC to improve its public reporting, accountability and transparency. A commitment to inclusion and full citizenship for people with intellectual disabilities requires a system of supports that is predictable, accountable and sustainable. We are therefore seeking, as an immediate priority, a **comprehensive review of CLBC** to ensure it has the governance, resources and capacity to seize opportunities and address future challenges.

Persons with Disabilities (PWD) benefit

BC Election 2017 Commitments:

- BC NDP committed to raising PWD rates by \$150 a month, increasing earnings exemptions by \$2,400 a year and offering a \$400 yearly renter's rebate.
- BC Greens committed to immediate steps to transition to liveable incomes with a 10% increase in PWD rates effective October 1, 2017, and rising to \$1,549/month on April 1, 2020, with additional programming to support those on assistance programs.

Inclusion BC welcomed the new government's prompt commitments to increase PWD rates by \$100 and to restore the transit pass for PWD recipients with "no clawback" in January 2018.

As noted in the September Budget Update, this is a good start, and we look forward to supporting the Minister to develop a longer-term plan that will increase monthly rates to \$1,500, with a legislated commitment to annual cost-of-living indexing in future.

Together with the proposed Portable Rental Supplements for costly housing markets, these steps will provide a sound foundation for a more comprehensive poverty reduction strategy.

Poverty Reduction Strategy/Basic Income

We welcomed the September BC Budget Update commitment to start work on a Poverty Reduction Strategy, including a basic income pilot. We look forward to working with the Ministry to address the complex roots and consequences of poverty so that all British Columbians have the income security they need to enjoy full citizenship and contribute to stronger and more resilient communities.

Recommendations:

1. Annual CLBC budget increases for 2018 and beyond of at least 6% based on projected caseload growth, pending a full review of CLBC's mandate and budget needs.
2. Comprehensive review of Community Living BC that encompasses governance, mandate, data needs and reporting/transparency and operations.
3. Further increasing PWD rates to \$1,500/month, with future indexing to inflation, pending development of a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy that includes basic income for people with disabilities.