

Inclusion BC
% Karla Verschoor, Executive Director
Sent via email to info@inclusionbc.org

October 11, 2024

Re: BC NDP Response to Inclusion BC Questionnaire

Dear Karla Verschoor and the Team at Inclusion BC,

Thanks for submitting these important questions to us. We highly respect the work that Inclusion BC does across the province to support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and their families. Note that in our response, you will see us use “people with disabilities” and “disabled people” interchangeably, recognizing that we don’t have the opportunity to ask readers what they prefer, and our disabled BC NDP membership uses both.

David Eby and the BC NDP are working hard to ensure that equity-deserving groups, including people with disabilities and people who are marginalized in multiple ways, have a government that respects our rights, cares about our needs, and prioritizes our interests. This is a critical moment for us all.

We have more work to do. When our BC NDP government passed the Accessible BC Act, we knew this was an important step, and part of work that has been underway for decades – led by people with lived experience and disability-serving organizations.

The work underway through our Accessibility Directorate and Advisory Committee is laying the foundation for further action in the upcoming years. Some of the BC NDP’s plans are detailed explicitly in our platform. Others, if we are elected, would come out of continued work to implement the Accessible BC Act.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE FOR ADULTS

Since becoming leader of the BC NDP, David Eby has been taking action to train and hire more doctors, nurses, and other healthcare workers that provide quality care to all, including people living with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families.

Through the Action Plan for You, we've committed to hiring 45,000 health-care workers over the next 5 years, including at least 8,000 nurses. The Action Plan includes our Allied Health Strategic Plan, which addresses professionals like occupational therapists, physiotherapists, speech and language pathologists, and others who are specialized in care for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Some of the immediate actions we're taking in the Allied Health Strategic Plan include:

- Attracting and training more students to priority nursing and allied-health programs;
- Improving clinical practice oversight through education and increased capacity;
- Making it easier for internationally trained medical professionals to gain credentials and work in BC;
- Creating more seats in local allied health educational programs.
- Appointing a new Provincial Chief Allied Health Officer – a best practice recognized internationally.

We cannot afford the risk John Rustad and the BC Conservatives pose to our health-care system, from \$4.1 Billion in cuts to American-style privatization, this would take us backwards.

As you know, discrimination in healthcare was already illegal before the Accessible BC Act was passed, but we'll have more opportunities to make service delivery more accessible through its implementation. The BC NDP government's decision to restore the BC Human Rights Commission, gutted by Rustad's previous government, is another tool to help combat discrimination in all its forms.

We can't risk losing the progress we've made. Healthcare should always be there when you need it. And David Eby won't stop until the job is done.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

David Eby and the BC NDP are taking action to ensure children and their families have access to the quality health care they need. Child Health BC will help us use existing guidelines to equitably respond to the health needs of children and youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

We'll continue working hard for the children and families that Inclusion BC so passionately advocates for. We agree that our efforts to hire more health care workers, build more hospitals and health-care centers, and deliver the best possible health-care system should include a specific focus on high-quality care for people with disabilities.

SUPPORTING TRANSITIONS

For people with intellectual or developmental disabilities, the transition to adulthood can be a challenging one. Some struggle to find services that were once offered through the education system or a pediatrician. If elected, our move to efficient and effective government will take place while the Accessible BC Act is being implemented, which we see as an opportunity. These two initiatives can inform each other, allowing us to address pain points in the system.

By retaining, attracting, and training more healthcare providers, some of these challenges can be reduced. Children and youth who aged out of the pediatric system into a shortage of family doctors were especially vulnerable. As we see more health professionals in the field, and as we work to reduce complexity, GPs can spend more time supporting families with information and connections.

If elected, we would be open to hearing more about how the transition between childhood and adulthood can be improved.

MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY

David Eby and the BC NDP are supportive of inclusive, equitable, intersectional, robust, and culturally safe mental health services. We understand that many mental health care supports in the community are designed for otherwise neurotypical adults, so we need to make it easier to get help from people who understand dual-diagnoses and the unique way mental illness can show up for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities.

For children and youth, we plan to give all children – including children with disabilities – access to more mental health support by ensuring that each school has a mental health counselor. We're also increasing support staff in the education system, with an EA planned for every K-3 class – to help students adjust, and add capacity in the classroom so that more kids can get identified and supported early.

As with other forms of health care, bringing more professionals online can help improve access to mental health care information, connections, and delivery.

POVERTY REDUCTION

Rising costs and global inflation have been especially hard on people who are already struggling with affordability, like people living with disabilities. We're determined to see all British Columbians enjoy full inclusion in their communities. The Province's obligations are now enshrined in law.

That is why we are taking new action to support those on income or disability assistance. We will adjust spousal clawbacks and ensure British Columbians continue to receive the full level of benefits provided by the Government of Canada while giving \$500 of immediate support for each British Columbian through the tax affordability measure described in our platform. There are further measures identified in the 2024 Poverty Reduction Strategy that we intend to work towards, if elected.

We plan to continue to work with people with disabilities, community organizations like Inclusion BC, and our Accessibility Directorate to ensure that our plans to modernize government also address accessibility issues.

A Conservative government under John Rustad is a risk we can't afford. For nine years under the BC Liberals – where John Rustad was a cabinet minister for many years – disability rates remained stagnant and many disability-related services and supports were cut completely. When bus passes for disabled people were revoked, many people, families, and supporters protested at the legislature. Their voices were ignored. This would be the type of government that we would expect under John Rustad.

If elected, we hope to continue working with you to prevent poverty for people with disabilities and support those who are already experiencing it.

HOUSING

The delivery of suitable and secure housing for people with disabilities is a priority area for us. When our NDP government passed the Accessible BC Act, BC Housing was selected as a pilot organization to respond to the Act and report back on

progress. Early measures were completed with the understanding that engagement work would continue.

The BC NDP platform includes further funding for non-market housing, and we're in the process of determining how this funding will be used. We've forwarded your idea about streamlining provincial and federal approvals around the Disability Tax Credit and Canada Disability Benefit to our policy team and are open to hearing more about this, if elected.

Finally, we're working to improve housing for people with disabilities that live with a caregiver. The BC NDP will improve homeshare rates through Community Living BC. This also opens up opportunities for more people with disabilities to stay with a trusted person or loved ones.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH SUPPORT NEEDS

Children with support needs must be able to access the services that help them live a full and healthy life. When these children thrive, it improves quality of life for the whole family.

We inherited a patchwork of insufficient and unequal programs that left too many kids behind. Families and advocates have been clear that we need comprehensive services that support diverse families and children. Families need services that are inclusive, accessible, and culturally safe. Even children who have the same diagnoses may have dramatically different needs, requiring some flexibility within the system.

We are committed to getting this right – and the experience and expertise of parents, families, First Nations, Indigenous Peoples, and advocates is crucial. Our BC NDP government launched an engagement to inform this renewed approach to Child and Youth with Support Needs. It concludes in December 2024.

Early intervention is key and that is why we have expanded services so that more kids have access to the supports they need now, including: occupational health and physiotherapy for school-aged kids; support workers for kids with FASD; early intervention support for kids showing signs of needing extra developmental supports; and respite care in areas where there was none before.

We are also bringing more care into schools by launching School Outreach Teams for Children and Youth with Support Needs, providing rural and remote school districts access to specialist staff to support families. We are implementing early literacy screening for all students kindergarten to grade 3, to catch those who need extra help earlier. We are also expanding our Early Intervention Enhancement services to include Infant Mental Health Clinicians to provide early intervention services for children up to age 6, and their families.

We also increased the equipment fund that supports children and youth with complex care needs to live at home, saving families thousands of dollars. This was the first significant funding increase to the At Home Program medical equipment benefits in over 20 years – John Rustad’s government neglected these families and left them to struggle on their own. They cut funding to services for children with support needs by \$15 million – almost 25%. We can’t afford to go back to that approach.

WORKFORCE

We need to work across ministries, organizations, and partners like Inclusion BC to have an all-hands-on-deck approach to attracting the people we need to support our children and their families.

The Allied Health Strategic Plan referenced above lays out how David Eby is taking action to ensure we have much-needed professionals within the healthcare sector. At the same time, we’ve committed to changing our approach to regulatory colleges, who are key to ensuring internationally-trained or even out-of-province canadian-trained professionals can begin working right away.

When someone raises their hand to serve children and families in our province, our answer should be a resounding yes! This will involve further work within and across ministries to strengthen our pool of talent.

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Thank you again for your continued advocacy and support for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. If elected, we’ll be excited to continue working with Inclusion BC, and hearing directly from your clients, in the years ahead.