

Position Statement

Access to Supports and Services for Children and Youth with Disabilities

Plain Language Version

Adopted September 2025

Introduction

Inclusion BC, the BC Association for Child Development and Intervention (BCACDI), the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCAFC), and the Federation of Community Social Services collaborated to write this position statement. These four organizations and their members have come together around a commitment to advance human rights and social inclusion for children and youth with disabilities and their families.

Our position statement aims to challenge racist,¹ ableist,² ageist,³ colonial,⁴ and other unfair ideas about people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Our goal is to promote the inclusion of everyone in the community, no matter how much money they have, where they come from (background or culture), what their religion is, if they are married or not, what their sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity and expression is, their age, or the type of disability they live with.

We recognize and support Indigenous rights and titles throughout the province of British Columbia, the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the 94 Calls to Action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the B.C. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act.

¹ Racist – discriminatory ideas against a person or group of people because they belong to a particular racial or ethnic group.

² Ableist – discriminatory ideas against people with disabilities.

³ Ageist – discriminatory ideas against people because of their age.

⁴ Colonial – ideas imposed from one group of people to another.

Position Statement

All children and youth must have access to the supports and services they need to reach their full potential and live well in their communities. Children, youth, and their families should be treated with respect. The supports and services they receive should be:

- available when needed,
- fair,
- easy to access,
- culturally safe,⁵
- focused on their individual needs, and
- include all aspects of their well-being.

Governments at all levels are responsible for taking the right steps to make sure children and youth with disabilities, and their families, can get the supports and services they need to live good lives. These steps should include working together across different areas to build a strong and lifelong system of support. These areas must include:

- education,
- social services,
- health,
- mental health,
- recreation,
- community organizations, and
- any other area that works with children and youth with disabilities.

⁵ Cultural safety means working in ways that are fair for people from a diversity of backgrounds, and free from discrimination. Cultural safety is an outcome based on respect where people feel safer receiving supports and services.

We believe in honouring disability as a part of human diversity. Supports and services must allow people to live well, participate in their communities, and feel a sense of belonging. Belonging is a basic human need, and it means feeling truly accepted, respected, safe, and comfortable. This helps people with their self-worth,⁶ identity, and well-being.

We define family as a wide range of relationships, including biological, adoptive, and chosen families. This definition recognizes the importance of honouring, respecting, and supporting cultural practices and the different ways families are formed and supported in different communities.

[To skip the background and rights-based section and move directly to the calls to action, click here.](#)

Background

The Rights of Children and Youth with Disabilities

Children and youth with disabilities have rights that make sure they can access disability supports and services.

In 2010, Canada agreed to follow the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#). [Article 26](#) says children with disabilities and their families have the right to get supports and services as early as they need them. [Article 28](#) says people with disabilities have the right to a good standard of living. This includes improving their living conditions and access to respite care, financial assistance, and services they can afford.

[Jordan's Principle](#) was developed in 2016. It helps First Nations children get the services they need when they need them. Jordan's Principle does not include Métis and Inuit children.

In 2021, Canada passed a law that requires everyone to follow the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#). This helps to make sure that

⁶ Self-worth – when a person believes they are valuable and that they deserve love and respect.

Indigenous Peoples' rights are respected when they access supports and services. It also recognizes that Indigenous communities should be the ones to design and provide these services.

What the UN says Canada Needs to Improve

In its 2025 [report](#), the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities said they are concerned about how Canada treats people with disabilities. For example:

- Canada doesn't include people with disabilities in mainstream services.
- Some government policies don't protect the rights of children with disabilities properly.
- Daycare and early childhood programs that don't meet the needs of children with disabilities.
- There is discrimination, including policies that don't meet the needs of Indigenous, Black, and other racialized children with disabilities and their families.
- Not enough services for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children with disabilities.
- Many public and private services don't know enough about the rights of people with disabilities.
- Canada has failed to meet the UN's requirements for accessibility.

The UN Committee says that Canada should make sure all levels of government follow the disability rights set out by the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.

For children and youth with disabilities and their families to enjoy their rights and do well, we need:

- **A definition of inclusion for government** that follows the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- **Fair access** to supports and services.
- **Accountability** to make sure the services work well.

- **To recognize all aspects of a child's life**, including their well-being and sense of belonging.

History of Disability Supports and Services in BC

Advocacy in the 1970s led to the development of community-based supports, instead of putting people in institutions. Since then, the need for services has grown, but funding hasn't increased in the last 10 years. This has caused challenges and tragedies that could have been prevented. The BC Representative for Children and Youth has written several [reports](#) about these issues.

In BC, disability supports are seen as an option, not a right. Access to supports and services depends on the budget, and most of the time depends on a diagnosis. Often, children and youth can only get help when there is an emergency. **In Canada, services for children and youth with disabilities are a right and should not depend on charity or fundraising.** The government should act on its responsibility to meet the needs of all children and youth by properly funding supports and services across BC.

"Transformation" of Child and Youth Services

Since 2018, the government has been trying to improve Children and Youth with Support Needs (CYSN) services. But for the past seven years, the government has mostly been focused on talking and gathering feedback instead of making real changes. This delay is harmful to children and youth who are still waiting for some, or all of the support they need.

To help improve supports and services for children and youth with disabilities, four organizations in BC worked together on the **Community-Led Collaboration Project**.

Here's what happened:

- From 2022 to 2024, over 2,000 people and 130+ community organizations in 22 communities participated in community conversations.
- This work led to a **vision** for children, youth, and their families.
- It also led to **11 calls to action**, which are ideas for improvement.

These ideas can be found in the final report called [Invest in Communities](#). We expect the province to follow through on their promise to use these ideas to make real improvements.

The “Realignment” of Services for Children and Youth

In January 2025, the Premier gave [instructions](#) to the Ministers of Children and Family Development and Health to “realign and improve services for children and youth with support and mental health needs.” However, as of September 2025, it is not clear what the plan forward is.

This 2025 [report](#) by the BC Representative for Children and Youth says that **between 55,000 and 83,000 children and youth with disabilities, and their families, are not receiving the supports they need** from Ministries like Children and Family Development, Health, Education and Child Care, Housing, and others.

For a long time, the BC Representative for Children and Youth has said that **more funding and changes are needed**. The Representative has been asking for:

- Supports and services that are based on the needs of children and youth, not just on a diagnosis.
- Services that meet all the different needs of children and youth.

Government Supports and Services

To help families with young children who may have a developmental delay or disability, the government has [Early Childhood Intervention Programs](#).

The government also provides some community-based services to some children, youth, and their families in BC, through:

- [Children and Youth with Support Needs \(CYSN\) Programs](#)- like Autism Funding, Family Support Services, the FASD Key Worker Program, and the At Home Program.
- Government-funded education, child care, health, and mental health services- this includes [Nursing Support Services](#) and [Developmental Disabilities Mental Health Services](#).

However, these services don't have enough funding, many require a specific diagnosis, and are provided by different government departments. This causes long wait times, poor coordination, and not enough support. This means some families can't get the help they need.

The province needs to invest more money and make sure different government departments work together to better support children, youth, and their families. This needs to happen now.

Our province needs a **Provincial Disability Strategy** to make sure the needs of children and youth with disabilities are met throughout their whole lives.

The Importance of Belonging

We met with hundreds of families for the Community-Led Collaboration Project. We heard many times that families want to feel that they belong in their communities.

[Research](#) has shown that the well-being of children, youth, and families is connected to their sense of belonging. Belonging means that relationships include respect, good communication, and building strong connections. When this happens, everyone can fully participate in their communities and feel safe and accepted.

To make sure everyone feels like they belong in their communities, good supports and services must be available. Across the province, advocates and communities are working hard to support belonging. They find new ways to support children and youth with disabilities and their families. However, it's important to invest in local supports and services to make sure they are available in all communities. Municipalities should also use the ideas of universal design⁷ to make recreational activities accessible.

⁷ Universal design is the practice of creating spaces and delivering services that are accessible and easy to understand and use, by all people, without the need for adaptations or special designs.

Challenges and Barriers to Community Participation

Fair Access and Culturally Safe Supports

To make sure everyone has fair access to support and services in the community, it's important to consider different parts of a person's identity. Some people experience additional barriers to inclusion because of:

- race,
- cultural background,
- Indigenous identity,
- gender identity and expression,
- sexual orientation, or
- social or financial status.

Families across BC have told us they need supports and services that are culturally safe for Indigenous families and for families of different cultural backgrounds.

Indigenous organizations want to provide quality services to the people they support. However, they need funds and flexibility to use the funds in ways that work for the people they support. All community organizations also need funds to improve their services to make them culturally safe.

Working Together: Coordination and Collaboration

81% of families surveyed by the BC Representative for Children and Youth reported problems using the system of disability services. The disability services they mentioned include:

- therapies,
- respite care,
- housing,
- medical equipment,
- mental health services, and

- other supports.

These supports and services don't always work well together, and the problem is even worse when children and youth have complex needs that require help from more than one system.

Community organizations in the province help people with disabilities by providing important services. But since the 1980s, the way the province buys services has changed. Instead of working closely with organizations, it is felt that the province focuses more on transactions. This makes it harder for organizations to work well together and help people. There are also not enough resources, so organizations struggle to support children, youth, and their families. To fix this, the province needs to invest in community services and work with organizations as long-term partners. This will help them stay strong, improve staff skills, and provide better support to people.

Important things to consider

The BC Representative for Children and Youth recommended developing a *Child Well-Being Strategy and Action Plan* to guide government departments to work better together to improve supports and services for all children and youth.

In July 2025, the [government announced](#) a cross-government Deputy Minister Project Board. This group includes members from six different ministries. They have been asked to work together to develop a *Child and Youth Well-Being Action Plan and Outcomes Framework*.

To make it fair, this Action Plan and Outcomes Framework must include the needs of children and youth with disabilities. It is also important for other support systems to work together, including:

- social services,
- education,
- health,
- mental health,
- recreational programs, and
- community organizations.

Access to Supports and Services

Children and youth with disabilities and their families face many barriers to accessing the supports and services they need in many areas of their lives. Children and youth must have access to:

- The supports and services they need.
- When they need them.
- Without having to prove a specific diagnosis.

Assessments and Long Wait Times

Some supports and services like Autism Funding, the FASD Key Worker Program, and the At Home Program are only available to people with certain diagnoses or who meet strict rules.

In BC, there are two diagnostic assessment programs funded by the government:

- **The Complex Developmental Behavioural Conditions Program**, which has a waitlist of up to 16 months.
- **The BC Autism Assessment Network (BCAAN)** has a waitlist of up to 27 months in some parts of BC.

As of March 31, 2024, there were **10,828 children under the age of 19** on the waitlist for these assessments.

Access to Early Intervention Therapies doesn't depend on having a diagnosis, but the waitlists can be long. Waiting for services means families miss out on supports, and children lose the chance to learn important skills. Wait times can be shorter if **people's needs are identified at the community level**, using clear assessment tools and guidelines that everyone agrees on.

Funding Models

The government doesn't support all children and youth fairly. Some families get individualized funding, others receive support through an organization, and many don't get anything.

Families with children and youth with an autism diagnosis can get money directly to pay for services. Funding amounts are based on age, not on individual needs. Other families receive funding for some therapies and medical equipment through the At Home Program.

It is not clear if funding models will stay the same or change. This decision will be made by the Ministry of Children and Family Development. We need good assessment tools that can better identify the needs of children and youth and make sure that services are available in all communities.

Virtual Services

The supports and services families can get also depend on what's available in their communities. This can be limited in rural and remote areas of BC. Virtual options can help reduce stress for parents who have to travel long distances for in-person support. Travelling is both time-consuming and expensive. To make sure virtual options are available to everyone, **families need access to technology and financial support.**

Respite

Respite care is an essential support that helps families stay together and do well, but not many families receive this help. During the COVID-19 pandemic, flexible respite options were created so families could choose what works best for them. These options are still available, but through Inclusion BC's Advocacy Line and the Community-Led Collaboration Project, families say:

- The rules for using respite are too rigid.
- There are not enough skilled workers.
- There isn't enough funding to pay for a person with the skills they need.
- Respite workers and families have trouble managing the hiring process.

The demand is higher than the supply for respite workers. The government needs to create a workforce strategy. This strategy should focus on standards of practice, fair wages, and professional development for respite workers.

The Need for Information

In our community conversations, **families said they don't know where to go for help or how to get it.** There needs to be people in communities to help families find information and services. Community supports and services should be culturally safe and accessible.

The government needs to invest in online information portals that are easy to use and regularly updated. Invest in information technology to coordinate files across services and to facilitate collaboration between service providers. This would make it easier for families to get the support they need and help service providers work better together.

Early Learning and Child Care

[BC's Inclusive Child Care Strategy](#) focuses on the government's commitment to inclusive, culturally safe, and affordable child care. This is a good step, but without inclusion as a main obligation, many children with disabilities and their families will still not have fair access. In BC, **the creation of inclusive child care spaces is not keeping up with the demand.** A 2024 [report](#) by Statistics Canada showed that almost 1 in 10 parents were denied a child care space because of their child's disability.

The [Position Statement on Access to Income Security for Families Raising Children and Youth with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities](#) talks more about how not having access to inclusive child care affects families.

Families want to feel a sense of belonging and trust that their children and youth are safe, respected, and well-supported in environments that can meet their needs.

Education

There are some supports in the school-aged years, like [Provincial Resource Programs](#), for students who qualify. Other programs are provided by the Ministry of Children and Family Development. This includes the [School-Aged Therapy Program](#) and the [School-Aged Extended Therapies Benefit \(SAET\)](#) from the At Home

Program. However, **families still face many challenges in the education system**, including:

- Being left out because health and support needs are not met.
- Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) are not being followed.
- Not enough training for staff.
- Not enough teachers and educational assistants.

There are also other challenges, like:

- Services from different government departments that don't work together or are disconnected.
- A lack of clarity about where resources are going and how they are being used to support students with disabilities.

The upcoming *Position Statement on Access to Lifelong Learning for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities* will talk more about access to inclusive education

Health Supports and Equipment

Health supports for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities are hard to get because they are spread out across different government departments. **Families need a system that is easy to use.**

Research shows that **children and youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities have more complex health needs**, including physical and mental health challenges, compared to children and youth without these disabilities. Many communities in BC lack healthcare professionals who understand these specialized needs. We mentioned in the section about Virtual Supports that families have to travel long distances, which is time-consuming and expensive. It also causes more visits and stays at the emergency room.

To improve access to health care, **health services should work together with disability services** provided by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). For example, requests from healthcare professionals for medical supplies and equipment should be approved quickly by MCFD. Making funding more flexible

would help families get the health-related supports and equipment they need. The [*Position Statement on Access to Health Care and Coordination of Care for Children and Youth with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*](#) talks more about health-related needs.

Mental Health

Some people with intellectual disabilities also have mental health challenges. This is called dual diagnosis. **Mainstream mental health services for children and youth should be inclusive**, but there aren't enough community mental health professionals with knowledge about dual diagnoses. Some services are available for children and youth with dual diagnosis, like:

- Child and Youth Mental Health (CYMH).
- Developmental Disabilities Mental Health (DDMH).
- Tertiary hospitals' services.
- Complex care programs.

However, these programs are limited in who they can help. The [*Position Statement on Access to Mental Health for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*](#) talks about these needs.

Transition to Adult Services

The lack of cooperation between different government ministries makes it hard for families to meet the needs of their youth. This is especially true when they transition to adult services. These services include Community Living BC, health care, employment, housing, and education.

We hear from families and youth who describe the experience as being like "falling off a cliff." This is because of a lack of proper planning and support. Without **supports that work together**, youth can experience mental health challenges and homelessness. This is even more concerning for Indigenous youth, who already face extra challenges. The [*Position Statement on Access to Disability Supports and Services for Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*](#) explains these issues.

To make sure **youth have their needs met as they transition** into the adult service systems, the transition planning should:

- start early,
- be individualized,
- be person-centred, and
- have strong supports.

Calls to Action

To make sure children and youth with disabilities have access to a full range of community-based supports and services needed to ensure their well-being, belonging, and quality of life, we call on the provincial government to:

Create a Provincial Disability Strategy in strong partnership with people with disabilities, their families and community organizations. The Strategy must align with the BC Representative for Children and Youth's recommendation to establish a Child Well-Being Strategy and Action Plan. A key component of that plan is to guide a coordinated whole-of-government approach. The Strategy must include the following actionable steps:

- Define and adopt a **shared understanding of inclusion across ministries** aligned with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and apply it to all funding agreements, policies, and practice guidelines designed for children and youth.
- Establish a **strong system of accountability and oversight** to ensure all areas of government deliver on their responsibilities to uphold and protect the rights of children and youth with disabilities.
- **Prioritize cultural safety** by fairly funding Indigenous organizations to improve their capacity to deliver supports and services within their communities, and by supporting community-based organizations to lead culturally safe initiatives, with ongoing evaluation for continuous improvement.

- **Ensure all government-funded supports and services have the capacity and resources to work collaboratively and in a coordinated manner** to meet the needs of children and youth with disabilities and their families, ensuring their full participation in all aspects of community life.
- Provide timely and fair **access to assessments and a wide range of therapies** for children and youth within their home communities through workforce recruitment, retention, and strategic access to resources, including fair access to therapies and technology in rural and remote communities.
- Enhance **access to respite** by allowing families flexibility to use respite funds, funding for local recruitment and training programs to have more respite workers, and offering competitive compensation.
- Provide **accessible, up-to-date, and consistent information** about supports and services by fully funding family support and navigation roles in all communities.
- Develop a **coordinated workforce strategy** to ensure staffing needs are met across all sectors that support children and youth with disabilities.
- Provide **responsive and flexible funding to strengthen the network of existing community-based organizations**. This will allow them to meet the unique needs of children and youth with disabilities at the local level and support the creation of meaningful opportunities to enhance connection and belonging.
- Improve **access to health-related supports and equipment**. This must include flexible access to nursing supports and enhance care coordination. All processes should ensure smooth transitions and the full participation of children and youth in early learning, child care, education, and community activities.
- Ensure access to **mental health supports** for children and youth with disabilities in their communities. Resources and supports must be offered across sectors, including child care and education. Mental health supports must be:

- confidential,
 - culturally safe,
 - accessible,
 - affordable,
 - inclusive, and
 - in a variety of options.
- Develop a strong, coordinated and well-supported **process for youth with disabilities to transition** to adult systems of supports and services.

For detailed examples of how these calls to action can translate into meaningful actions for communities across BC, see the community reports and the final report of the [Community-Led Collaboration Project](#).

Children and youth with disabilities, and their families, **must have fast access to supports and services that are:**

- fair,
- accessible,
- culturally safe,
- person-centred, and
- based on their needs.

Children and youth need and deserve these supports and services. **All levels of government have the responsibility** to make sure that children, youth, and their families can enjoy their right to a good standard of living, achieve their full potential, and live well in their communities with a sense of belonging.