

Position Statement

The Right of People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities to Parent

Plain Language Version

Introduction

Inclusion BC and the Aboriginal Housing Management Association wrote this position statement together. Both organizations support human rights and inclusion.

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities have often been treated unfairly. Government rules and poor treatment in society have caused harm for many years. Our position statement aims to challenge racist¹, ableist², ageist³, colonial⁴ and other unfair ideas about people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Our goal is to support the inclusion of everyone in the community, no matter a person's:

- finances,
- background,
- culture,
- religion,
- relationship status,
- sex, gender identity, or gender expression,
- sexual orientation,
- age, or
- disability.

We recognize and support:

- Indigenous rights and titles across British Columbia
- The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- The 94 Calls to Action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission
- 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, laws, and actions forced on one group of people by another.

Position Statement

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities have the right to be parents. They have the right to raise their children in safe, supportive environments. Governments must make sure that parents with disabilities can get the support they need to parent well.

Parents with intellectual and developmental disabilities should not face unfair treatment. They must have fair access to support for all the ways people can become parents (biological, adoptive, or other).

Supports in the community should be:

- person-centred,
- culturally safe,⁵ and
- focused on keeping families together.

Families should never be separated because there are not enough supports available. Indigenous parents with intellectual and developmental disabilities need extra consideration. They often face more barriers because of colonialism⁶ in support systems.

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

⁵ Culturally Safe means working in ways that are fair and free of discrimination for people from different backgrounds. The goal is respect, so people feel safer asking for and receiving supports and services. (Informed by the First Nation Health Authority and San'yas Cultural Safety Training)

⁶ Colonialism means when one country takes control of another's land and its people, often using power unfairly.

Background

In the past, people with disabilities were treated very unfairly. During the eugenics movement,⁷ some people believed that people with disabilities should not have children.

In 1933, the British Columbia government created the Sexual Sterilization Act. This law allowed doctors to sterilize people with intellectual disabilities without their permission. This meant that people with intellectual disabilities could not have children.

This law ended in 1973. However, sterilizations still happened until the Supreme Court of Canada made the [Eve decision](#) in 1986. This decision says:

- People with intellectual disabilities have the same rights as everyone else to make decisions about their own bodies.
- Having a disability is not a reason to stop someone from making choices about having children or being a parent.

In 1996, BC created parenting support programs for parents with disabilities. All these programs, except for one, have closed.

In the past, government ministries and community groups worked together to provide supports. This formal planning process included:

- the Ministry of Children and Family Development,
- the Ministry of Health,
- Community Living BC, and
- community organizations.

This does not happen anymore. As a result, there are gaps in policies⁸ and services. This means many parents cannot get the supports they need.

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities say they **need parenting supports earlier**. They also say it is important to have culturally safe services.

⁷ The eugenics movement was a harmful set of beliefs and practices to control who could have children. It often targeted people with disabilities and other marginalized groups.

⁸ Policies are rules or guidelines that explain how things should be done in a group, organization, or government.

There are **not enough parenting programs that are inclusive and culturally safe**. Indigenous parents are especially affected. This is because of the ongoing impacts of colonialism and intergenerational trauma.⁹ To support parents better, the different parts of people's lives should be considered.

Indigenous cultures have their own beliefs and ways of raising children. Parenting services should include and honour cultural practices. This can support Indigenous people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to parent in a way that respects their culture and beliefs.

Rights of People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

International human rights laws protect the rights of parents with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

In 2010, Canada agreed to follow the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#). This agreement says that governments should provide support to help people with disabilities and their children. It says people with disabilities have the right to:

- Decide if they want children.
- Get information about family planning.
- Get support to raise their children.

It also says **children should not be taken away from their parents because of disability** alone.

In 2021, Canada passed a law to support the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#). This law says **Indigenous peoples have the right to keep their families together**. Solutions for Indigenous parents with disabilities must be led by Indigenous communities.

In a 2025 [review of Canada](#), the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities said Canada was not doing enough to support parents with disabilities.

⁹ Intergenerational trauma is when the effects of trauma are passed down through families, communities, and systems. This causes deep and lasting harm.

This was an even bigger issue in First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities. The Committee said that Canada should:

- Recognize the rights of people with disabilities to make decisions and raise children.
- Improve policies to support parents with disabilities.
- Prevent children from being separated from their families because of disability.

Today, there is still **no law in BC that clearly protects the right of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to parent.**

The [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) says that most often, it is best to keep families together. However, there are major barriers for parents with intellectual and developmental disabilities. For example:

- negative attitudes,
- services that don't meet people's needs,
- unfair access to health care, and
- not enough accessible housing.

Barriers Families Face

The next subsections talk about key barriers that Inclusion BC and the Aboriginal Housing Management Association have identified in supporting parents with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Ableism and Discrimination

A 2025 [report](#) shows that **ableism¹⁰ is a major barrier.** We hear the same thing from the parents we support. Many parents say:

- Their needs were not listened to.
- They were not told about their legal rights.
- Child welfare workers and legal professionals often did not understand intellectual disabilities.

¹⁰ Ableism means treating people with disabilities unfairly or thinking they are less important than others.

The report says parents with intellectual disabilities may be more likely to have their children taken away. This is because of:

- Negative beliefs about disabilities in child welfare systems.
- Not enough early parenting supports.

Better training is needed for workers to support parents with disabilities.

The legal barriers are explained in the [Position Statement on Access to Justice for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities](#).

Poverty

People with disabilities are more likely to live in poverty. The 2024 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Canada shows that poverty leads to children being taken from their families. This is especially true for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities who face racism and discrimination. For these communities, poverty is often seen as neglect instead of a lack of support issue.

Families receiving Persons with Disabilities (PWD) benefits and the Canada Disability Benefit still live below the poverty line. **Parents need enough money** to live a good quality of life. Governments must increase benefits to at least the poverty line. The Government also needs to make sure people can get inclusive child care and housing.

Poverty is a key parenting barrier. There is more information about this issue in the [Position Statement on Income Security for Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities](#).

Health Challenges

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities have **poorer health outcomes** than others.

People with disabilities, including parents, face:

- Negative experiences in hospitals.
- Unfair barriers in the healthcare system.
- Difficulties getting reproductive health care.
- Harmful attitudes.
- Limited training for doctors and healthcare providers.

Access to healthcare and early parenting is important. Support should **include a systems navigator** to help people find supports, follow processes, and ask questions in a safe space.

The [*Position Statement on Access to Health and Coordinated Care for Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*](#) explains more about health challenges.

Housing

Accessible and affordable housing is a major barrier in BC. Many parents with disabilities need housing that is designed to meet their needs. This creates a safety risk for parents and children.

This [report](#) shows that 65% of parents with disabilities in BC have faced **discrimination** when looking for housing. This is because some landlords will not rent to people who get Persons with Disabilities (PWD) benefits.

The report also says that parents fear losing their children when they cannot get housing. Because of this fear, some parents avoid asking for support.

Indigenous people with disabilities face extra barriers when trying to parent and find safe housing. This is caused by:

- colonialism,
- being forced from their homes and land,
- intergenerational trauma, and
- children being taken from their families.

Solutions must consider how the combination of these barriers impacts a person's life. Solutions must also address the unique challenges Indigenous parents and communities face.

The government must make accessible and affordable housing a priority.

There is more information about housing barriers in the [*Position Statement on Access to Housing for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*](#).

Supports and Services

Parents with disabilities need supports and services in all parts of BC, including rural and remote communities.

Parenting programs need to be created with people who have intellectual and developmental disabilities. They are the experts in their own lives and can make parenting programs better. For example, good supports should:

- be accessible, respectful, and practical,
- build trust, and
- help parents succeed.

The types of supports and services needed across the province are explained in the [*Position Statement on Access to Disability Supports and Services for Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.*](#)

Calls to Action

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities have the right to be parents. Children should stay with their parents whenever it is safe. To make sure this happens, we call on the provincial government to take the following actions:

Clear Rules and Funding

- Create **provincial laws and policies** that say people with intellectual and developmental disabilities have the right to be parents with the support and housing they need.
- Provide **ongoing funding for parenting support programs** that meet the needs of parents with intellectual and developmental disabilities. These programs should be culturally safe. They should be developed using the real-life experiences of parents. This includes Indigenous parents with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- To create and run parenting support programs, **make sure governments work together with:**
 - ministries,
 - community organizations,
 - Indigenous-led services, and
 - people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

- **Professionals who have experience supporting parents with intellectual and developmental disabilities** must be included in decisions about removing children from their families.

Information and Accountability

- Create a **province-wide system to collect information** about the experiences and needs of parents with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- **Include parents with intellectual and developmental disabilities** in deciding what information is collected and how it is used. This helps make sure the information is fair and respectful.
- **Use this information to improve policies and services.** For example, it should help parents with intellectual and developmental disabilities get the support they need to raise their children.

Training

- Make **disability awareness training** mandatory for people working in:
 - healthcare,
 - social services,
 - housing,
 - community services,
 - first responder roles, and
 - the justice system.
- **Create training with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.** Training should teach respect, human rights, and culturally safe ways to support parents with intellectual and developmental disabilities, including Indigenous parents.

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities have the right to be parents. This right is not only about laws. It is also about making sure people are treated fairly with dignity and respect.

British Columbia can be a leader by taking action to fix these problems. This would support the right of people with disabilities to be parents. It would also set an example for other provinces and countries.

We can build a future where everyone can enjoy their right to be a parent with dignity and support. This requires working together, having clear policies, funding, and strong commitment.