



Strengthening our Social Sector

Investing in inclusion and equity to build resilience for all of BC

Submission to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services

Inclusion BC appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission to the *Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services*.

We are a non-profit federation working with our partners to build community and enhance the lives of children, youth and adults with intellectual disabilities, and their families. We do this by supporting people's abilities, promoting positive action, and advocating for rights, respon-

sibilities and social justice. We are supported by a membership of individuals, families and 60 member agencies who are working together to build inclusive communities across our province.

Our vision is a world where we all belong. This submission identifies the most critical funding gaps currently preventing the full inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities and their families in B.C.



Invest in Equity & Inclusion

COVID19 has exposed our vulnerabilities but also highlighted our strengths as a society, offering valuable insight on how to prioritize public investments to build strong, resilient communities.

Vulnerabilities

When we find ways to balance disability and inclusion rights with broader public policy goals, all British Columbians end up benefitting. For example, ALL patients will benefit from BC's leadership in adapting hospital visitor policy to support public safety AND disability support needs. Investing in inclusive employment supports helps employers meet workforce needs while building workplaces that work better for all. Inclusive classrooms mean better outcomes for all diverse learners and fewer vulnerable kids left behind.

The COVID-19 pandemic reminded us that the most vulnerable often get left behind unless we apply an intentional equity and inclusion lens to all decisions. The United Nations warned that people with disabilities face exceptional risks from COVID-19. [UNESCO has rallied a global coalition*](https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-rallies-international-organizations-civil-society-and-private-sector-partners-broad) to counter the disproportionate impact of school closures on students with vulnerabilities, including disability, by prioritizing equity and inclusion as schools plan how to reopen safely.

The pandemic also showed the value of investing in inclusion because no one is safe unless we're all safe. We build stronger communities for all when we work together to leave no one behind.

Strengths

COVID-19 also highlighted the strength we draw from our strong social bonds: a tradition of helping each other and coming together to problem-solve collaboratively in times of need is a feature of more equitable societies, rich or poor. Canadians and British Columbians look around the world today with a new appreciation for our social sector and safety nets. It is more evident now that in times of need they play a vital role.

When BC had to write a new COVID-19 response playbook from scratch, the social sector with its deep networks of formal and informal helpers was there to support design, leverage and deliver timely, targeted government responses. Some responses, like enhanced Persons with Disability (PWD) benefits, illustrated how robust program design supports adjustment to meet changing needs. Others struggled within rigid frameworks that left citizens frustrated and abandoned when they most needed help. These failures revealed BC's hidden strengths, as the informal helpers — family caregivers, community nonprofits, front-line social service workers — stepped up despite extreme hardship to fill the void.

These targeted investments can leverage our strengths, using inclusion, equity and partnerships with the formal/informal social sector to build resilience in BC.

* See: <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-rallies-international-organizations-civil-society-and-private-sector-partners-broad>

Adults with Intellectual Disabilities

Targeted Investments

We're proud of BC's response to COVID-19. While the pandemic exposed critical vulnerabilities, it also evidenced the need for targeted investments that strengthen both formal and informal community inclusion supports for adults with intellectual disabilities.

BC Budget 2021 Priorities

- **CLBC Budget:** Increase CLBC's annual budget to at least match costs (e.g. equitable sector wages/benefits) and to cover the expected 6% annual increase of adults needing support. **(Increase Estimate: \$94 Million)**
- **Innovation Fund:** Establish an Innovation Fund to help CLBC-funded agencies strengthen inclusion and resilience to address program vulnerabilities exposed by COVID-19. **(Increase Estimate: \$1.5 Million)**
- **Inclusive Employment:** More funding for inclusive employment supports to help employers safely re-hire people with disabilities who were disproportionately affected by layoffs due to COVID-19. **(Increase Estimate: 2021: \$5 Million)**
- **PWD Supplement:** Extend the temporary \$300 Persons with Disabilities (PWD) supplement through 2020/21 and make it permanent. An increase is long overdue and only fair, given the \$2,000/month CERB benchmark to support others facing employment barriers. **(Increase Estimate: \$380 Million)**
- **Rental Supplements:** Each year for the next 3 years, double the number of portable rental supplements available through community agencies and programs for people receiving PWD benefits who can't find affordable market or social housing. **(Increase Estimate: \$8.5 Million)**
- **Medical Health Director:** Re-establish the office of the Medical Health Director and Constituency to provide specialized guidance on the complex interplay of medical and disability needs. **(Increase Estimate: \$500,000)**
- **Mental Health Supports:** An inclusive Mental Health strategy to boost inclusion and provide equitable access to mental health supports for people with disabilities. **(Increase Estimate: \$1 Million)**
- **Technology Fund:** Support public/ private partnerships to ensure all BC adults who receive PWD benefits have affordable access to devices for virtual connectedness. **(One-time investment of \$750,000)**

Families who support adults, youth and children with disabilities

Provide Robust, Flexible Support

Informal family caregivers are playing a critical role during COVID-19, stepping up to support vulnerable family members when formal programs had to step back. Many parents of individuals with complex needs were already exhausted. On top of coping with the same COVID-19 stresses we all face, they've also had to fill in for closed schools and community supports.

Too many parents of children with complex needs who reached out for help faced the added stress of trying to navigate complex MCFD gate-keeping barriers, only to be turned away. Some contracted agencies pivoted to meet shifting needs, but rigid provincial Autism or *At Home Program* rules, for example, posed new barriers. The pandemic intensified the well-documented flaws of an opaque, complex and often inequitable system that too often fails families instead of meeting them where they're at.

We can't continue taking the critical role of families for granted. We need them to be there when all else fails, and that requires robust, flexible support, where and when they need it. Stronger supports are also needed to help parents return to work and support BC's recovery.

BC Budget 2021 Priorities

- **Children & Youth with Special Needs (CYSN) Framework:** Increase funding over the next 3 years for MCFD's proposed new Children & Youth with Special Needs (CYSN) Framework to strengthen inclusion and equity while reducing barriers to access. Strong, resilient families need timely, universal access everywhere in BC to a core suite of early intervention therapies, family respite and other child and youth inclusion supports, such as more funding to allow youths with disabilities to have equitable access and be included in after-school programs. **(Increase Estimate: \$95 Million)**



Inclusive Education

Build Resilience with Inclusion

BC's enviable academic outcomes speak to the strength of our K-12 schools. At the same time, too many vulnerable students are also denied access or left behind and COVID-19 intensified this unfairness. We urge BC to build on two important outcomes of the Education Funding Model Review to enhance equity and inclusion while building K-12 resilience:

1. Implement the [Independent Funding Model Review Panel's](#)* advice to prioritize budget allocations that support inclusion of vulnerable students, with remaining dollars going to general education services. Inclusive schools benefit all students and strengthen resilience because they're designed to respond to diversity as the norm and to readily adapt to changing needs.
2. By initiating new partnerships with family advocacy groups during the funding review, BC created a strong base for collaborative planning of a rapid provincial policy response to COVID-19 that addressed safety AND inclusion of students with disabilities. Formalize and build on this as an ongoing partnership.

*See: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/resource-management/k12funding/funding-model-review/independent_review_panel-final_report_2018

Unfortunately, much of the strong provincial COVID-19 policy response got lost in translation within our complex K-12 delivery structures. By investing to strengthen local partnerships, capacity and accountability, we can ensure provincial equity and inclusion policies are better reflected in front-line K-12 classroom practices.

BC Budget 2021 Priorities

- **Provincial Inclusion Outreach Program:** Expand the funding and mandate of the Provincial Inclusion Outreach Program to allow all parents and educators to initiate support requests. **(Increase Estimate: \$1.5 Million)**
- **Provincial Advocacy for Vulnerable Students:** Fund expansion of the mandate of the Representative for Children & Youth to include public education or create a similar legislated office. Vulnerable K-12 students have no voice at decision-making tables, and, like other vulnerable groups, they too need a formal provincial advocacy voice on their side. **(Increase Estimate: \$500,000)**

There are an estimated 75,000 children, youth and adults with intellectual disabilities in BC. We are asking the BC government to invest through the 2021 budget in each of their futures.

The needs are clear, the time for action is now

*Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission.
Inclusion BC offers our support to implement all the recommendations
as an ally to government and strong community partner.*



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