

October 19th, 2020

Thank you for your inquiry into how the B.C. Greens will support greater inclusion of those with disabilities in our province. Please find our response detailed below.

Sincerely,
Sonia Furstenau
Leader, B.C. Green Party
B.C. Green Candidate, Cowichan Valley

1.1: Within your first year of being elected, will you ensure the ministry is funded and supported to implement needed reforms under the new Children and Youth with Special Needs (CYSN) Framework?

The B.C. Greens support timely implementation and financing to support improvements to the Children and Youth with Special Needs (CYSN) Framework, and will ensure that government is held accountable for their commitments to bettering the resources available through CYSN.

1.2: If elected, will you increase program funding and support for more equitable distribution of available resources to ensure families have timely, universal access everywhere in BC to:

- a core suite of early intervention therapies;
- timely assessments;
- family respite; health, medical and in-home supports;
- access to before/after-school programs, including for older children and youth with disabilities.

The B.C. Greens are committed to ensuring that families are supported and properly resourced with a comprehensive suite of programs that support raising children in our province. We recognize that this is especially needed for families of children and youth with special needs, who are under significant stress and face a number of barriers, exacerbated in the time of COVID. One important step is increasing accessibility to mental health services. We commit to supporting the mental health of our children with \$24 million in new funding to enhance the number of counsellors in our schools, starting with the current school year. We would strengthen early intervention youth mental health initiatives, integrated into primary care specific to youth and mental health and thereby enabling families to easily navigate resources in a supportive environment. We will work with Inclusion BC and those with diverse abilities to ensure that these services are inclusive. We also understand the need for adequate respite as well as medical and in-home supports, and we will work with Inclusion BC to review where improvements are needed.

It's more important than ever that British Columbians can get access to the care they need in their community. We have committed to a comprehensive suite of spending services and programs to strengthen our healthcare system, with a focus on addressing the family doctor shortage. By enabling access to family doctors, more British Columbians are able to get the continued care they need on a reasonable timeline. One of our core focuses with the healthcare system is on prevention; by improving accessibility and efficiency to family doctors and shifting away from acute care to preventative care, we will strengthen early intervention and timely treatment for families and their children. We also commit to incorporating mental healthcare as part of our public healthcare system, with a \$1.0 billion investment over 4 years to create accessible and affordable mental healthcare for all who need it. We believe this could provide significant help to families of children with special needs.

1.3: If elected, will you work with the federal government to ensure universal access to inclusive childcare supports to help parents of children and youth with diverse needs to return to work to support BC's recovery?

We are committed to enhancing the accessibility and inclusivity of childcare, and giving families options to return to work or stay home as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Parents who choose to return to work will be supported by enhanced access to quality childcare, and more flexible work arrangements, those who choose to stay home with their children will have an income supplement of up to \$500 per month, and we will encourage flexible working options to support people to find a balance. We will provide \$300 million in new funding to begin the phase in of up to 25 hours free early childhood education (ECE) programs per week for 3 and 4 year olds, rising to \$550 million as capacity expands. This will be facilitated through \$100 million in new funding to create a new capital program in the Ministry of Education to fund renovation and additions to existing schools to support early childhood education spaces. Funding would cover the phase-in of the various elements of this plan for a comprehensive program that would include the expansion of available physical spaces, prioritizing partnerships with public schools, community non-profits, and First Nations. In addition to widening ECE programs, we will move the Ministry of State for Childcare into the Ministry of Education in recognition of the importance of ECE in the educational outcomes for our children. For parents who wish to stay home, we will further commit to providing up to \$500 per month for families with children under 3 and a stay at home parent.

As we commit to strengthening childcare in our province, we commit to ensuring that these spaces are available to all who need them and that our early childhood professionals are supported in their careers and continued learning. We commit to expanding professional development opportunities to increase qualifications of existing child care workers, and the training of more early childhood educators in certified programs that offer a safe and inclusive space for children with diverse needs.

2.1: If elected, will you ensure that the Ministerial Policy on Inclusive Education is updated to bring it up to the standards set by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which establishes inclusive education as a fundamental right of children?’

The B.C. Greens believe that inclusive education is a right of children, and commit to working with Inclusion BC and industry professionals to review the Ministerial Policy on Inclusive Education and identify an actionable plan for updating it to reflect the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

We strongly agree with what was stated in your letter: “if we seize the opportunity to build it right, we can create a post- COVID reality that actually works better for everyone, that offers more built-in resilience to weather future challenges and that better accommodate diversity and vulnerability.” We believe this is true across our entire economy and the range of programs that the government provides. COVID has exacerbated many existing inequities in our society, and as we rebuild, we have a chance to keep the best elements of our COVID response and make sure that nobody is left behind.

2.2: If elected, will you support the implementation of 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?’

The B.C. Greens will work to ensure that vulnerable students are properly supported through financing and resourcing. We have promised significant investments into Education, and we are committed to ending the scarcity model in our public education, where school districts have had to make unacceptable tradeoffs, in some places leaving students with special needs without their needs being met. We commit to reviewing the Independent Funding Model Review Panel’s recommendations and working with government and Inclusion BC to ensure that this work is prioritized.

2.3: If elected, will you support the continuation of the collaborative tables that were established for the Funding Model review and the COVID-19 response which have shown to effectively inform policy response and reforms?’

Yes, the B.C. Greens are fully supportive of diverse and collaborative decision-making. We believe that a strong province comes from diverse opinions, and we will work to ensure that all policies are grounded in this model of governance.

2.4: If elected, will you engage stakeholders to establish accountability measures to ensure that school districts are implementing inclusive education policies and guidelines?’

Yes, we will work with stakeholders to ensure that school districts are given the appropriate tools and guidance to inform their decisions based on principles of inclusivity, in addition to providing more resources to our public education system.

We commit to working with our education partners on a long term plan for how BC can improve its per student funding and reducing disparities between districts to ensure all children have a healthy and positive learning environment and that our teachers are fully supported. This would include: addressing the continued disparities in wages, class size and composition between districts; improved access to speech-language pathologists and school psychologists, and developing new resources for students with special needs.

3.1: If elected, will you continue the \$300 monthly PWD supplement which has made a huge difference in people's lives and make it permanent, with future benefit rates adjusted annually to match inflation in the 2021 BC Budget?

Yes, the B.C. Greens are committed to significant improvements to our social safety net, including the initial step of making the \$300 crisis supplement permanent and indexing assistance to inflation going forward. Our priority is to ensure that all British Columbians enjoy income security and eliminate the fear of being unable to afford the necessities of life. We believe can begin this task by integrating the principles of basic income - simplicity, economic security, and reduced stigma - into our social safety net. We entrench people in poverty with programs we have right now, but it doesn't have to be this way. We believe that everyone has the right to a healthy, dignified life. We would therefore begin a transition towards basic income with the following initial steps:

- Increase income assistance and PWD levels, beginning with making the \$300 crisis supplement permanent and indexing assistance to inflation;
- Eliminate the asset test; and
- Reduce clawbacks on earned income to reduce the disincentive to work.

As we rebuild, we can't afford to go back to our old patchwork of social supports that weren't meeting the needs of people. We need to build a more resilient social safety net, that lifts people up and doesn't leave anyone behind.

3.2: To support an effective Covid-19 response in the community inclusion sector, BC established collaborative tables and partnerships. This approach was highly effective and has provided a strong foundation for shaping ongoing reforms. If elected, will you continue these collaborative tables and partnerships?

Yes, the B.C. Greens are fully supportive of diverse and collaborative decision-making. We believe that a strong province comes from diverse opinions and lived experience, and we will work to ensure that all policies are grounded in this model of governance.

3.3: If elected, will you engage with federal authorities to help shape a new national disability benefit that assures income security and allows all persons with disabilities to live safely, independently and with dignity?

We believe in partnering with the Federal government wherever possible to maximize our investments and leverage Federal funding on areas of joint priority. In addition to our initial steps outlined above to improve income security for people with disabilities and all British Columbians, we will collaborate with the federal government on a national disability benefit.

3.4: Disability supports funded through Community Living BC are critical to the security of adults with intellectual disabilities, yet underfunding leads to extreme rationing and long waitlists. If elected, will you ensure adequate budget increases to allow these programs to meet their intended objectives without undue delays or barriers to access?

Yes, the B.C. Greens believe that we can't afford to go back to our old patchwork of social supports that weren't meeting the needs of people. In addition to our platform commitment to bolster a transition towards basic income, we will examine the underfunding of Community Living BC in partnership and determine how to ensure the people they support receive adequate support.

4.1: If elected, will you fund more portable rental supplements for people with disabilities to access private and non-profit/government housing?

Yes. the B.C. Greens are committed to a fair housing strategy that has a clear goal of ensuring everybody has an affordable home that meets their needs. We have committed to establishing a housing office specifically charged with assisting people with disabilities and youth aging-out to find suitable accommodation and supporting the transition.

We will introduce a rental supplement that will close the gap between affordable rent and what renters are actually paying. We commit to introducing a means-tested grant that applies to low and moderate income earners who are paying more than 30% of their income in rent. We would work with stakeholders to review the portable rent supplements that BC Housing currently provides and ensure that new rental supplements are meeting the needs of people with disabilities and helping them find suitable and affordable accommodation.

4.2: If elected, will you commit to working collaboratively with municipal and federal governments, BC Housing and community groups to launch new and innovative housing initiatives that are accessible, inclusive and affordable?

We agree that we must take further steps to expand diverse forms of housing in our communities and ensure that our housing is affordable for people who live and work in our cities. We have proposed some initial steps, including taking a housing first approach and accelerating investments to affordable, supportive and social housing on a priority basis. We will expand supports for co-op housing through extending leases for existing co-ops about to expire, create a land bank for new co-ops, and provide security of tenure for co-ops on leased land. We have committed to working with local governments to expand the “missing middle”, such as townhouses and triplexes. Finally, we will establish a capital fund to support the acquisition and maintenance of rental housing by nonprofits to maintain affordable rental units and address the financialization of the rental market. We know that people with intellectual disabilities need inclusive housing that meets their needs, and we would work with the many experts who have been working in this area to identify needs and build solutions collaboratively.

4.3: If elected, will you fund CLBC to provide people with disabilities the flexible options and supports they need to live where and how they want?

The B.C. Greens will certainly work with the CLBC to determine the best steps moving forward to support fair and autonomous living for those with disabilities in our province.

5.1: If elected, will you reinstatement the Provincial Medical Consultant Services for adults with an intellectual disability?

We commit to working with stakeholders and industry experts to review the historical Provincial Medical Consultant Service and determine the best actionable steps to support those with intellectual disabilities in our medical system, ensuring that we have the right expertise on the health challenges for people with intellectual disabilities.

6.1: If elected, will you develop and implement a comprehensive mental health strategy to support people with intellectual disabilities?

Yes, the B.C. Greens have committed to a comprehensive mental health strategy to support all British Columbians, including ensuring it meets the needs of people with intellectual disabilities. For many patients, even just a few appointments with a mental health professional can significantly improve mental and physical health. We need to invest in mental health services at every stage of British Columbians’ lives so that they can be supported to live healthy, fulfilling lives.

As outlined above, we have committed to improving mental health initiatives for students through a \$24 million investment in our education system through the hiring of more counsellors immediately. We have allocated a further \$1.0 billion over a four-year cycle to address mental health care within the medical services plan. Funding should be provided for a comprehensive suite of initiatives including: establishing accessible mental health treatment options for all those struggling with anxiety or depression; early intervention, youth mental health initiatives, integrated primary care specific to youth and mental health enabling families to easily navigate resources in a supportive environment; community based options for responding to those who need mental healthcare and their families such as Clubhouse International; and, enhanced counselling outreach services to work with the homeless community. We will allocate \$200 million per year to invest in facilities to provide mental healthcare services and community-based centres for mental health and rehabilitation; and, accelerate capital plans for the construction of tertiary care facilities and detoxification beds.

7.1: If elected, will you ensure there is a thorough review of the Nursing Support Services Program to ensure that every child in British Columbia who needs the care of a registered nurse has access to that level of care?

Yes, we commit to ensuring that every child in British Columbia has access to the appropriate level of care to support their health and wellbeing. Our plan to transition the focus of our medical system from acute care to preventative care will assist in the ability for all those who need it to access our healthcare system in a timely manner. Further to this overarching commitment, we will work with the BC Nurses Union and other healthcare professionals to ensure that this level of care is available.

7.2: If elected, will you take meaningful action to eliminate barriers to access, add transparency to the process, and ensure that contracted agencies actually fulfill the hours of care that a child or youth with complex medical needs requires to live an active healthy life?

The B.C.Greens are committed to ensuring that those who receive care in our province are being fully and safely supported. We've seen through the impacts of COVID-19 on our seniors care that we need to ensure that the companies that are contracted to provide care in our province are meeting the standards required for adequate care. And we know this isn't an issue specific only to seniors. There is far too little accountability about how public funds are being used in our contracted care system, and we would work to ensure more transparency of reporting and confidence around how public funding is being used in the system, to ensure our standards are being met.