

Submission to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services for the 2023 Budget

Inclusion BC — June 2022



Start with Inclusion

Territorial & Land Acknowledgment

Inclusion BC would like to acknowledge that our head office is located in the traditional, ancestral, and unceded lands of the QayQayt First Nation, and that our staff and board members live and work in the unceded lands of Indigenous Nations across the province. We recognize and support the inherent 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 British Columbian Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act.

About Inclusion BC

We are a non-profit federation working with our partners to build community and enhance the lives of children, youth, and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and their families. We do this by supporting people's abilities, promoting positive action, and advocating for rights, responsibilities, and social justice. We are supported by a membership of individuals, families, and 63-member organizations who are working together to build inclusive communities across our province.

Our vision is a world where everybody belongs.

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

The consultation process changed this year in that participants were restricted to only three recommendations within a limited number of words. Inclusion BC made the best use of the allocated space and in this brief, we provide more fulsome explanation of the recommendations put forward which will continue to guide our efforts. You can refer to Appendix 1 for our Submission Form for Budget 2023.

This brief identifies the most critical funding gaps currently preventing the full inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities and their families in B.C. The full scope of funding needs is not represented in this submission. Instead, we are focusing our requests on the most urgent needs for investment in the 2023 budget year.

Disability Specific Data Collection

As a province, we have mostly decentralized this responsibility to regional bodies. People across all levels of our systems - from the early years to their senior years - spend years of their lives waiting for essential supports and services without much notice, attention, or accountability. Accurate data collection and its use for the adequate review of policies and the corresponding allocation of resources are critically needed. This is the second time we are emphasizing this point and we will continue to do so until there is better transparency and accountability built into the network of supports for people with disabilities in our province. Canada and all its provinces have accepted this responsibility by adopting the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, specifically Article 31 – Statistics and Data Collection.

Recommendation:

- 1. We recommend the Province of BC invest in a coordinated approach to collecting provincial-level data (particularly within the funding Ministries of Children and Family, Education and Child Care, Social Development and Poverty Reduction, Health, and the Ministry responsible for Housing) and disseminate statistics to help assess if people's support needs are being met in our province and to guide sufficient investment.**

In alignment with our first overarching recommendation, each section references areas where appropriate data collection is needed.

Support for Children & Youth

Inclusion BC supports the rights of children and youth with support needs in B.C. We have built a robust and community-based foundation for collaborative, evidence-based solutions. We want to work in partnership with the provincial government to address the systemic challenges that children and youth with support needs face when accessing B.C.'s system of supports and services.

As the province rolls out the Family Connection Centres through the Ministry of Children and Family (MCFD) there will be a need for more effective approaches to supporting families, clarifying policy mandates, working collaboratively across mandates, and effectively targeting available funding to ensure the best outcomes for our children and youth with disabilities.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Canada ratified in 1991, specifically addresses the responsibilities of governments to support the needs of children with disabilities. In its Wave 7 provincial report, the Early Development Instrument showed a worrisome increase in vulnerability of children in BC where 33.4% of children entering kindergarten are facing developmental vulnerabilities in one or more scales compared to the national average of 25%.¹ There are long waitlists across our province for children who need early intervention therapies and supported child development services. One of our greatest concerns is that without targeted investment our collective efforts to create needs-based equity and access for children and youth with disabilities across our systems will not be realized in the new model.

Strong, resilient families need timely, universal access everywhere in BC to a core suite of early intervention therapies, family respite, childcare, and other child and youth inclusion supports, such as more funding to allow youth with disabilities to have equitable access and be included in childcare centres and after-school programs.

Over the next two years, there will be a need to increase the investment in MCFD funded services to ensure the transition to Family Connections Centre does not leave children, youth and their families behind and fracture the social service sector.

¹ Human Early Learning Partnership. EDI BC. Early Development Instrument British Columbia, 2016-2019 Wave 7 provincial report. Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia, Faculty of Medicine, School of Population and Public Health; 2019 Nov. Available from: http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/media/edibc_wave7_2019_provincialreport.pdf

Access to Childcare

It is encouraging the level of consensus that has been reached at the national and provincial levels on the importance of access to childcare for children, families, and our economy. The federal and provincial investments have raised the hopes of families to access and afford childcare for their children. Nevertheless, families with children with disabilities and various additional support needs remain doubtful that this benefit includes them and their children.

These critical investments need to be disability-inclusive and explicit on how they will also support this group of families. There are long waitlists across our province for children who need Supported Child Development services and we are 'doing our best' is no longer an acceptable response. The theme of Accessibility Week 2022 was *Inclusion for the Start* and it is time to put action to those words and ensure access to universal childcare for ALL.

Recommendations:

2. Eliminating waitlists to Supported Child Development Program in our province and create a reporting mechanism to track progress.

3. Continue investing in foundational training for childcare centres to be disability-inclusive in their practice and operation from the start.

Nursing Support Services

This is a key area where better cross-ministry collaboration is vital, and targeted investment is needed to enhance the integrity of this essential support. Nursing support for children with complex health needs is an area that often gets overlooked as the number of people accessing these services is relatively small. All attempts, to date, to address the huge gap have not harvested an improvement in the families' ability to receive ongoing and reliable nursing support. One of the key barriers seems to be a provincial shortage of nurses with the necessary training to support this complex and vulnerable population combined with a shift in the policy approach for the provision of these services.

The practice of rationing and restricting access to this essential support violates the UN Convention on the Right of the Child. All state parties have an obligation, “to ensure the provision of necessary medical assistance and health care to all children with an emphasis on the development of primary health care.”² Equally concerning is not fulfilling the hours assessed as required for a child due to the inability to find nurses. Additionally, the limitations and restrictions imposed on the provision of services is impacting the children’s right to an education. Our advocates journey alongside many families that are simply left to assume the full responsibility of being their child’s parent and primary care provider and nurse.

Recommendations:

4. Through targeted investment create an advanced education strategy to build the essential workforce required in our province to ensure children and youth have access to the in-home nursing support.

5. Through targeted investment create positions within each health authority to support better coordination and enhanced accountability for Nursing Support Services for children with complex health related needs.

Respite Supports

In Budget 2019, there was a \$6.3-million boost to the province’s respite program. Five million dollars was used to provide respite services for families who had previously been on the waiting list. The remaining \$1.3 million was use to increase the base annual funding amount each family could receive from \$2,800 to \$3,080, marking the first increase in respite funding since 1989.

Since that time flexibility within the program has been offered to better meet the needs of families, but there has not been meaningful investment despite the strain the pandemic has had on the families of children and youth with disabilities.

Respite is repeatedly referenced as vital in the discussions about the CYSN Framework, yet, there is little evidence of investment or action to ensure the service is made available to all eligible families or is positioned as foundational support in the new model. Increasing the funding allocation to respite services and collecting data to have an accurate notion of the

² Article 24, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, E/CN.4/RES/1990/74

number of families on the waitlist are necessary to respond to families' needs. Additionally, it has been increasingly difficult to recruit respite providers given the level of compensation approved by the Ministry of Children and Family Development. The compensation rates for respite providers need to be competitive and, in many cases, respond to the skill level required to support complex children.

The importance of respite to prevent crises is constantly emphasized, however, access to it is driven by crisis. Only when families are at a breaking point is when they are being able to get some funds in the short term; no sustained services are available. All eligible families should have access to respite and they must not face another year of waiting.

Recommendation:

- 6. \$12,000,000 in targeted funds to support families supported by the MCFD to eliminate waitlist and increase the base annual funding amount for respite services.**

Access to Education

Education continues to be the main topic that families contact our Advocacy Line for support at 41% of our calls. This includes access to education and navigating the school system to ensure their children have the supports they need from qualified professionals. While our knowledgeable advocates work alongside students, families, and caregivers, we continue to be concerned by the number of students with disabilities who are excluded from full participation in their neighbourhood schools and the continued horrific practice of using physical restraints and seclusion on children. An emerging concern is the lack of emphasis on the standards of education for students with disabilities. A recent interpretation of an appeal to a school district being schools are not held accountable for the 'quality' of the educational program for students with disabilities, but rather simply that 'a' program is offered. This leaves parents/caregivers with no recourse for review if a school district decides that one hour per day of schooling is enough for an educational program.

Inclusion BC was disappointed to see inclusive education was not included in the Ministry of Education's mandate letter despite the backslide of inclusion in our schools. As we continue to wait for the updated Inclusive Education Policy and its manual, we are concerned this lack of accountability for disability inclusion in our schools will negatively impact the future of many children, the successful implementation of the Family Connection Centres being introduced by MCFD, and exclude many more vulnerable students from full participation in childcare settings being led by school districts. There must be a collaborative approach to disability support,

education, and childcare that centers students with disabilities to the community. We need to stop 'othering' our children and label them as the problem and commit to evolving our education system to educate all students.

Despite challenges, our schools want to honour BC's unfulfilled commitment to inclusive education. When we fail to provide the necessary leadership and resources to help schools and districts remove barriers and support all learners, students are denied equitable access to learning and a safe school environment. For students with disabilities, these failures have been disproportionate, discriminatory, and inconsistent with BC's commitments to human rights and equal opportunity.

Recommendations:

7. \$6,000,000 in targeted funding for professional development to equip school administrators, teachers, and educational assistance and support staff with tools for safe, disability-inclusive learning to better support the entire student population to experience a quality education in our BC schools.

8. \$10,000,000 in targeted investment to create positions within each school district to support better coordination of disability related supports and learning outcomes for students with disabilities that are supported through other government funded services such as MCFD's Family Connection Centres, Nursing Support Services, Mental Health Services and Childcare.

Disability Supports for Transitioning Youth

Inclusion BC receives ongoing complaints from families across the province that CLBC has denied their support requests for dependent adult children, citing insufficient budgets to fund the supports they need. Proactive early supports are more effective and fiscally responsible than funding crisis-based solutions. Year after year, we ask for incremental increase attached to increased caseload for CLBC, and this continues to be need. This year we would like to reposition our ask with targeted funding specifically for those transitioning into adult services. Inclusion BC strongly believes supporting people from a place of abundance and growth at time of transition is not only fiscally responsible, it changes the trajectory of people's live. It brings people into community versus away from community, which is what Community Living BC was created to achieve.

Recommendation:

9. **\$10,000,000 in targeted investment to support youth transition into CLBC funded services to access employment, skill development and post-secondary learning, community connection, and network development.**

10. **\$10,000,000 in targeted investment to support community living organization to develop innovative and community-centred solutions to better meet the needs of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.**

Income Security and Housing

The average income for working age people with an intellectual disability is less than half of that of Canadians without a disability. Nearly half of working-age people with an intellectual disability are on provincial social assistance as their primary source of income as people with an intellectual disability are discriminated against with respect to paid employment options.

People with an intellectual disability must have the income and resources they need to secure a good quality of life and fully participate in all aspects of their communities. People with an intellectual disability must have the means to live life with dignity. Despite the incremental

increases over the past few years, we have not kept pace with the cost of living and inflation rates in our province.

Inclusion BC is encouraged the National Disability Benefit is moving forward and expected to be rolled out within the next three years, however people need a livable income now to ensure their basic human needs are met. We can't emphasize enough how important this investment is needed and strongly urge you to make this a top priority in the 2023 budget and do not leave people waiting three more years for a liveable income.

Recommendation:

11. Raise the rate for Persons with Disabilities (PWD) benefit to \$2200 per month.

Like other vulnerable populations, people with intellectual disabilities have been hit especially hard by BC's affordable housing crisis. Many are on waitlists for social housing and independent living supports, forced to live in unsafe and unhealthy living environments and unable to access independent living supports until they are in crisis.

Inclusion BC is leveraging our community living experience and relationships and working to advance long-term solutions to the limited supply of inclusive housing in British Columbia. However, additional targeted funding is needed to provide immediate relief and help British Columbians living on PWD benefits to access inclusive, affordable housing in their communities.

Portable rental supplements would address the significant gaps between the shelter portion of PWD benefits and current market rents for BC communities, allowing British Columbians with intellectual disabilities to access safe, inclusive housing in the community of their choice.

Recommendation:

12. \$3,400,000 in new annualized funding for an additional 400 portable rental housing supplements to ensure that people with intellectual disabilities who rely on PWD benefits can access safe, accessible, and inclusive market housing anywhere in the province.

Access to Mental Health Supports

Research is currently under way to further understand the negative consequences of COVID-19 on the mental health of parents/caregivers of children and youth with support needs in B.C. However, what has already been well established are the disproportionate impact the pandemic has had on families with children with disabilities who before the pandemic were already struggling to access the basic supports they need. During the pandemic, their already limited services and supports disappeared throwing them into further crisis. Like in other areas of life, when it comes to mental health and well-being, it is fundamental to understand families' experiences and realities to offer meaningful solutions. Families need mental health services and supports that fit their already complex situations and their voices need to be centred to guide the responses. Many organizations raised up to the circumstances and pivoted to offer solutions that made a positive impact on families' mental health and well-being. These efforts need to be expanded and specific resources need to be allocated so they can reach further.

Youth and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families face other forms of discrimination (ableism) when trying to access mental health supports. On one side, the assumptions about their disabilities close the door to community-based mental health services without even an attempt at understanding what they need. On the other side, there is also a serious shortage of professionals knowledgeable on supporting the mental health of people with intellectual disabilities causing long waitlists to access services and a greater challenge by not being able to increase the capacity of community-based resources. The province's mental health strategy *Pathway to Hope* needs to be disability-inclusive if we are to create a response that is based on wellness promotion, prevention, and early intervention that legitimately includes all citizens.

Recommendation:

- 13. \$1,000,000 in targeted funding to develop Mental Health strategies that acknowledges the unique mental health supports for child, youth, and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.**

Summary of Recommendations:

1. We recommend the Province of BC invest in a coordinated approach to collecting provincial-level data (particularly within the funding Ministries of Children and Family, Education and Child Care, Social Development and Poverty Reduction, Health, and the Ministry responsible for Housing) and disseminate statistics to help assess if people's support needs are being met in our province and to guide sufficient investment.
2. Eliminating waitlists to Supported Child Development Program in our province and create a reporting mechanism to track progress.
3. Continue investing in foundational training for childcare centres to be disability-inclusive in their practice and operation from the start.
4. Through targeted investment create an advanced education strategy to build the essential workforce required in our province to ensure children and youth have access to the in-home nursing support.
5. Through targeted investment create positions within each health authority to support better coordination and enhanced accountability for Nursing Support Services for children with complex health related needs.
6. \$12,000,000 in targeted funds to support families supported by the MCFD to eliminate waitlist and increase the base annual funding amount for respite services.
7. \$6,000,000 in targeted funding for professional development to equip school administrators, teachers, and educational assistance and support staff with tools for safe, disability-inclusive learning to better support the entire student population to experience a quality education in our BC schools.
8. \$10,000,000 in targeted investment to create positions within each school district to support better coordination of disability related supports and learning outcomes for students with disabilities that are supported through other government funded services such as MCFD's Family Connection Centres, Nursing Support Services, Mental Health Services and Childcare.
9. \$10,000,000 in targeted investment to support youth transition into CLBC funded services to access employment, skill development and post-secondary learning, community connection, and network development.
10. \$10,000,000 in targeted investment to support community living organization to develop innovative and community-centred solutions to better meet the needs of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

- 11.** Raise the rate for Persons with Disabilities (PWD) benefit to \$2200 per month.
- 12.** \$3,400,000 in new annualized funding for an additional 400 portable rental housing supplements to ensure that people with intellectual disabilities who rely on PWD benefits can access safe, accessible, and inclusive market housing anywhere in the province.
- 13.** \$1,000,000 in targeted funding to develop Mental Health strategies that acknowledges the unique mental health supports for child, youth, and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Appendix 1

Budget 2023 Consultation Written Submission Template

As participation in the budget consultation continues to increase each year, the Committee has looked at ways to simplify and standardize the consultation process to ensure everyone has the opportunity to participate effectively. This includes the creation of a form for written input and information in support of a presentation. Please note that the preferred method to provide the Committee with a submission is through our online submission form, available through a link on our [website](#).

The Committee thanks all British Columbians for their continued participation in the annual budget consultation.

Instructions:

Please provide your comments by filling out this submission form.

You may provide up to three recommendations (maximum 50 words each) along with your explanation for each recommendation (maximum 300 words each). Should you submit more than three recommendations, additional recommendations will not be considered part of your formal submission and may only be reviewed for informational purposes.

Please note, the order of recommendations does not reflect priority.

Please ensure that your recommendations and explanation are captured within the body of the submission. Information provided through links will not be considered to form part of the submission and may only be reviewed for further interest.

If you require assistance or support to make a submission, please contact the Parliamentary Committees Office at 250-356-2933 or 1-877-428-8337 (toll-free in BC).

Submission Form

Introduction (100-word limit)

Indicate who the submission is from, i.e., whether from you in a personal capacity or sent on behalf of an organization, and any relevant background information.

Inclusion BC is a non-profit federation working with our partners to build community and enhance the lives of children, youth, and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and their families. We do this by supporting people's abilities, promoting positive action, and advocating for rights, responsibilities, and social justice. We are supported by a membership of individuals, families, and 63-member organizations who are working together to build inclusive communities across our province.

Our vision is a world where everybody belongs.

Recommendation 1 (50-word limit)

Eliminate waitlists to Supported Child Development Program and create a reporting mechanism; target investment to create an advanced education strategy to grow the workforce for nursing support services for children; and target \$12,000,000 for families supported by the MCFD to eliminate waitlist and increase the base annual funding amount for respite services.

Recommendation 1 Explanation (300-word limit)

The percentage of children entering kindergarten with developmental vulnerabilities grew to 33.4% in BC. As the province rolls out the Family Connection Centres through the Ministry of Children and Family (MCFD) there will be a need for more effective approaches to supporting families, clarifying policy mandates, working collaboratively across mandates, and effectively targeting funding to ensure the best outcomes for our children and youth with disabilities.

Strong, resilient families need timely, universal access everywhere in BC to a core suite of early intervention therapies, family respite, childcare, and other inclusion supports, such as more funding to allow youth with disabilities to have equitable access and be included in childcare centres and after-school programs. Investments in child care need to be disability-inclusive. There are long waitlists across our province for Supported Child Development services and 'doing our best' is no longer an acceptable response.

Nursing support for children with complex health needs is often overlooked as the number of people accessing these services is relatively small. There has been no improvement in the families' ability to receive ongoing and reliable nursing support. One of the key barriers seems to be a provincial shortage of nurses to support this complex and vulnerable population combined with a shift in the policy approach for the provision of these services.

The importance of respite to prevent crises is constantly emphasized, however, access to it is driven by crisis. Only when families are at a breaking point is when they are being able to get some funds in the short term; no sustained services are available. All eligible families should have access to respite and they must not face another year of waiting.

Recommendation 2 (50-word limit)

Targeted investments of \$6,000,000 for professional development to equip all levels of school staff with tools for safe, disability-inclusive learning to support quality education for all students; and \$10,000,000 to support youth transition into Community Living of BC services to access employment, skill development and post-secondary learning, community connection, and network development.

Recommendation 2 Explanation (300-word limit)

Education continues to be the main topic that families contact our Advocacy Line for support at 41% of our calls (access to education and navigating the school system to access the supports needed). We continue to be concerned by the number of students with disabilities who are excluded from full participation in their neighbourhood schools and the continued horrific practice of using restraints and seclusion. An emerging concern is the lack of emphasis on the standards of education for students with disabilities. A recent interpretation of an appeal to a school district being schools are not held accountable for the 'quality' of the educational program for students with disabilities, but rather simply that 'a' program is offered. School districts can decide that one hour per day of schooling is enough for an educational program.

As we continue to wait for the updated Inclusive Education Policy, we are concerned this lack of accountability for disability inclusion in our schools will negatively impact the future of many children. There must be a collaborative approach to disability support, education, and childcare that centers students with disabilities to the community. We need to stop 'othering' our children and label them as the problem and commit to evolving our education system to educate all students.

Inclusion BC receives ongoing complaints from families across the province that CLBC has denied their support requests for transitioning young adults, citing insufficient budgets to fund the supports they need. Proactive early supports are more effective and fiscally responsible than funding crisis-based solutions. We strongly believe supporting people from a place of abundance and growth at time of transition is fiscally responsible and changes their trajectories.

Recommendation 3 (50-word limit)

Raise the rate for Persons with Disabilities (PWD) benefit to \$2200 per month and add \$3,400,000 in new annualized funding for 400 additional portable rental housing supplements to ensure that people with intellectual disabilities who rely on PWD benefits can access safe, accessible, and inclusive market housing anywhere in BC.

Recommendation 3 Explanation (300-word limit)

The average income for working age people with an intellectual disability is less than half of that of Canadians without a disability. Nearly half of working-age people with an intellectual disability are on provincial social assistance as their primary source of income as people with an intellectual disability are discriminated against with respect to paid employment options.

People must have the income and resources they need to secure a good quality of life and fully participate in all aspects of their communities. People must have the means to live life with dignity. Despite the incremental increases over the past few years, we have not kept pace with the cost of living and inflation rates in our province. People need a livable income now to ensure their basic human needs are met.

Like other vulnerable populations, people with intellectual disabilities have been hit especially hard by BC's affordable housing crisis. Many are on waitlists for social housing and independent living supports, forced to live in unsafe and unhealthy living environments and unable to access independent living supports until they are in crisis.

Inclusion BC is leveraging our experience and working to advance long-term solutions to the limited supply. However, additional targeted funding is needed to provide immediate relief and help British Columbians living on PWD benefits to access inclusive, affordable housing in their communities.

Portable rental supplements would address the significant gaps between the shelter portion of PWD benefits and current market rents for BC communities, allowing British Columbians with intellectual disabilities to access safe, inclusive housing in the community of their choice.

In order to process your completed submission, this form should be emailed to: financecommittee@leg.bc.ca with your name, organization (if submitting on behalf of an organization); mailing address and phone number.

As well, we require your acknowledgement that you have read our [privacy policy](#) (required in order to formally receive your submission). We also seek your permission to post your submission on the Committee's website following the release of the Budget 2023 Consultation Report (please note that we only post submissions where consent has been received).

- ✓ I have read and agreed to the Privacy Policy of the Parliamentary Committees Office.
- ✓ I consent to having my submission posted on the Legislative Assembly website.



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