

Open letter and urgent plea to the Honourable Katrine Conroy, Shane Simpson, Adrian Dix and Rob Fleming on behalf of British Columbians with a Disability and their families.

March 20, 2020

Dear Ministers,

We write as a coalition of family-based organizations who are deeply worried about access to health care, social supports, disability benefits and other financial support for our family members with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Your Ministry in particular must be aware of the heightened risk this pandemic causes for society's most vulnerable.

We appreciate that you and your colleagues are dealing with a lot. We too have been busy. We have a province-wide network of resource parents and professionals up and running to support individuals and families. We also have a 1-800 number providing tips on staying healthy and connected for vulnerable and isolated people. But we cannot do this without you.

To date, the lack of a direct and coordinated response from Government is putting the lives of our sons, daughters, brothers, sisters and other loved ones – particularly those who have complex medical needs, underlying medical conditions and compromised immune systems – at great risk.

This letter is an urgent plea to the BC government to immediately and specifically address the lives of children and adults with disabilities during this COVID-19 pandemic. **We need you to work with us to keep people with disabilities safe, healthy and supported at home.**

We ask that you do the following:

- (1) Mandate the immediate suspension of group activity. **Despite Dr. Bonnie Henry advising people with disabilities to stay home, they are still being sent to day services. This must stop immediately.** There is no reason why people with disabilities should be treated differently than the general public. This is endangering them, their staff, and their families;
- (2) Reallocate the necessary additional resources to support people with disabilities in their homes and places of residence. In addition, disability benefits must continue, and people with disabilities must be included in the financial relief and stimulus packages that your government is preparing for the upcoming budget;
- (3) Within the next seven days, convene a Task Force to develop a provincial emergency health care strategy for people with disabilities, their families and service providers. This is a particularly high-risk group that absolutely

must avoid infection, continue to receive regular health care and therapies, and not be harmed by potential health care rationing. This strategy should be created with engagement from individuals with disabilities and their families.

We respectfully suggest this should include at a minimum:

- (a) immediate introduction of personal protection and appropriate medical supplies to the homes of children and adults with disabilities;
- (b) utilization of a Public Health Physician with experience working with people who have disabilities to oversee these medical recommendations;
- (c) revision of triage medical protocols to include people with disabilities.

We recognize that these are difficult times, but given the vulnerability of the disabled population, we look forward to your early response. We can be reached by email at rpauls@plan.ca.

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On behalf of Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network (PLAN), Family Support Institute of BC and VELA.

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A copy of this letter has also been sent to:

BC NDP Caucus
BC Liberal Caucus
BC Greens Caucus
Various media outlets