

February 26, 2024



## RE: February 22, 2024 Announcement of Budget 2024

Dear Premier Eby and Ministers Lore, Singh, Dix, Whiteside, Beare, and Dean,



We are members of the BC Disability Collaborative (BCDC), a group of provincial organizations with experience supporting tens of thousands of children and youth with disabilities and complex needs. The BCDC is a diverse group that includes family members, neurodivergent adults, and professionals whose purpose is “to unify disparate voices in the disability community, in order to ensure that government policies honour and respect the protected rights of disabled citizens, and address systemic inequities and advocate for tailored support needs for disabled children and youth” (BCDC Terms of Reference, 2024).



As a collective, the BCDC is deeply concerned and profoundly disappointed with the funding provided in Budget 2024 for disabled British Columbians. In November, 2023, Premier Eby committed to “New investments...as [a] new system is being developed to support children with disabilities and support needs that are currently underserved, including fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (known as FASD), Down syndrome, and other neuro-cognitive developmental disabilities.” Budget 2024 does not include the promised “new investments,” nor does it in any way address the enormous service delivery gaps that currently confront families of individuals with support needs and leave them vulnerable. Rather, a significant amount of the funding that was announced will go toward addressing high caseloads and negotiated wage increases, rather than service enhancements. Representatives of BCDC member organizations offered these comments about the budget:



### Family Support Institute of BC:

“The budget release offered little for families with children, youth, and adults with disabilities in BC and the services they need most. Despite the province's rhetoric on aiding the most vulnerable, the budget exemplifies a stark disparity between words and actions. While promises of caseload lifts for ministries supporting the vulnerable were made, the harsh reality is that our most vulnerable citizens are in crisis, left without essential services and support. Once again, individuals with disabilities find themselves overlooked in budgetary considerations. It is glaringly evident that our province can and should strive for far better – this budgetary decision was a deeply disheartening and indefensible one.



### Down Syndrome BC:

“The 2024 BC Budget sends a clear message that government does not value individuals with Down syndrome, their families, or the people who support them. It is exhausting to share our stories, frustrations, and tears in never-ending



"engagement" with government - yet our community is repeatedly overlooked. This government knows exactly what children and families need. To continue to ignore us is to discriminate against those with Down syndrome."

**Autism Support Network of BC:**

The *Parents and Professionals Plan* reflects evidence-based service transformation informed by lived experience, yet BC Budget 2024 disappoints with no new disability funding for the urgent needs of BC's vulnerable children and youth with support needs."

**Dyslexia BC:**

"Dyslexia was one of the few disabilities addressed during the budget announcement on February 22, 2024. Unfortunately, the government's efforts fall short in fostering a sense of inclusion among individuals with disabilities. Dyslexia BC is cautiously optimistic about the allocation of \$30 million for literacy screening over the next 3 years, as well as the introduction of "new literacy supports" for 9,000 students annually. Proper screening represents a significant advancement, spotlighting children in need of assistance. However, the support extended to 9,000 students—merely 6% of the evaluated population—is significantly insufficient. Given that dyslexia affects up to 20% of the population, this approach could leave approximately 21,000 students who might be identified with dyslexia without the necessary new literacy supports. Additionally, details regarding the deployment of new outreach teams remain unclear, including whether they are private or public entities and the methodologies they will employ to deliver effective literacy support."

**BC Complex Kids Society:**

"Budget 2024 lacked critical investment in disability related support for children and their families. Families will continue to face scarce funding and long waitlists for Early Intervention Therapy, Inclusive Child Care, and Respite supports. This budget maintains the status quo of ableist funding models that do not respect children's rights to equitable access to support in all areas of their lives. We call on this government to use previously announced provincial investments, along with the targeted federal health and child care transfers, to make direct and immediate investments in the programs that make a tangible difference for children with disabilities in BC."

**AutismBC:**

"We do not believe the budget reflects adequate support of the wraparound conversation of poverty reduction, education, and health to begin moving us towards sustainability. One-time monetary injections are important; however, an increase in disability assistance is needed; and diagnostic assessment support for developmental disabilities comes at a high cost to families who also needed to ensure accessible supports are injected to guide their children throughout their lifespan. This is a healthcare, educational, social development and poverty reduction conversation that ties into child development and how one can successfully transition into adulthood in a meaningful way in efforts to lead towards

agency. We call on a deeper evaluation for funding in each area to lift up the both the community and conversation to create greater sustainability as whole, paying special attention to the Northern Region of the province.”

**BC Association for Behaviour Analysis:**

“BC-ABA is committed to advocating for evidence-based supports for all children and youth with disabilities. We are profoundly disappointed that the budget ignores the urgent need for supports for individuals with Down syndrome, FASD, ADHD, and mental health conditions, in particular. We call upon government to fulfill Premier Eby’s promise in November 2023 that “Every child in BC should have the supports they need to thrive.”

**ACT-Autism Community Training:**

“The budget ignores significant challenges faced by families in British Columbia who have children, youth, and adults with support needs. Key issues include lengthy wait times for assessments, inadequate support in preschool and K-12 education, and a lack of inclusivity leading to student exclusion from school, as well as limited options for adults with disabilities. The budget merely maintains existing service standards rather than addressing these pressing needs. I believe there is a strong public desire for improvement and predict disappointment with the budget announcement, while anticipating far-reaching consequences.”

**Deaf Children’s Society of BC:**

“We are very disappointed that Budget 2024 does not address critical capacity shortages for infant development and early intervention programs or for school-age therapies, especially in rural and remote areas. Loan forgiveness programs must be reinstated for professionals in areas of critical shortage, especially targeting children and youth who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing, Deafblind, and require Orientation & Mobility services. Government has not yet provided salary increases to match salaries mandated in newly ratified union agreements, causing significant reductions in staffing for many agencies supporting disabled children and youth.”

**ADHD Society of BC:**

“Historically, ADHD has faced systemic neglect from all systems, and disappointingly, this new budget does nothing to address that. We stand firm, united in our advocacy for equitable access to supports for those with ADHD. It's time for our government to recognize the serious impact of this neurodevelopmental disorder and commit to comprehensive supports. Let us not ignore the voices of those in crisis or on the brink, but instead, let us build a world that embraces neurodiversity and ensures inclusion for all.”

As evidenced by these statements, it is clear that thousands of children and youth with disabilities are suffering because funding for essential home, school, and community supports is sorely lacking. **This is not a single-Ministry issue; rather, it is a challenge that requires deliberate and extensive cross-ministry collaboration and planning.** We

call upon government to provide interim funding to meet the identified needs in the short term, while planning substantial investment infusions in the Ministries of Children and Family Development, Education and Child Care, Health, Mental Health and Addictions, and Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills on a permanent basis. **Children and youth with support needs and their families cannot wait any longer.**

Respectfully,

<b>Pat Mirenda, Ph.D.</b> Chair BC Disability Collaborative	<b>Angela Clancy</b> Executive Director Family Support Institute of BC	<b>Cathy McMillan</b> Chair of the Board Dyslexia BC
<b>Suzanne Perreault</b> Executive Director Autism BC	<b>Brenda Lenahan</b> Chair, Board of Directors BC Complex Kids Society	<b>Chantelle Morvay-Adams</b> Chair ADHD Advocacy Society of BC
<b>Louise Witt</b> Director Autism Support Network	<b>Lisa Meneian</b> Representative Deaf Children's Society of BC	<b>Michelle Schmidt, Ph.D.</b> Executive Director ACT-Autism Community Training
<b>Sarah Pastrana, Ph.D.</b> President BC Association for Behaviour Analysis	<b>Renie D'Aquila</b> Executive Director Reach Child and Youth Development Society	<b>Bonnie McBride</b> Chair of the Board Inspire Kids FASD Support Society of BC
	<b>Rebecca Rubenstein</b> Vice President Down Syndrome BC	

cc: Deputy Minister David Galbraith, MCFD  
MLA Karin Kirkpatrick, Shadow Minister for Housing, Childcare, Autism &  
Accessibility, Gender Equity & Inclusion  
MLA Elenore Sturko, Shadow Minister for Mental Health, Addiction, Recovery and  
Education  
MLA Kevin Falcon, BC United Party  
MLA Sonia Furstenu, BC Green Party  
MLA John Rustad, BC Conservative Party  
MLA Adam Walker, Independent  
Dr. Jennifer Charlesworth, Representative for Children and Youth  
Kasari Govender, BC Human Rights Commissioner  
Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth