BCDC BRITISH COLUMBIA DISABILITY COLLABORATIVE

Response to the Ministry's Claims and Facts Document
June 24, 2026

Introduction

The BC Disability Collaborative (BCDC) welcomes the Province's commitment to improving supports for children and youth with disabilities. We congratulate the Province for making the largest single investment in decades to support Children and Youth with Support Needs (CYSN) -- $475 million in new funding over 3 years. We are also pleased with a recent announcement of the cross-ministerial Child and Youth Well-Being Action Plan that is aimed at improving outcomes for BC children, youth, and families over the next 5 years.

We agree that reform is needed. For many years, families, self-advocates, clinicians, educators, researchers, and community organizations have highlighted inequities in access to services, lengthy waitlists, insufficient supports, and the reality that many children receive little or no assistance despite significant needs. The BCDC participated in consultation processes because we believe that meaningful change is both necessary and possible.

Our concerns are not about whether change should occur. Rather, they relate to whether the proposed CYSN service framework will achieve the outcomes that children and families have been promised.

The Central Question: Will Children Receive the Right Support at the Right Time?

The Ministry's *Claims and Facts* document of June 18, 2026 (https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/family-and-social-supports/children-teens-with-support-needs/fact_sheet_cysn_redesign.pdf) repeatedly emphasizes that no disability group is automatically excluded, that more families will receive some form of support, and that significant new funding is being invested. However, these statements do not fully address the central concern raised by families and disability organizations. The question is not whether support exists somewhere within the redesigned system. **The question is whether all children will receive the right support at the right time—before developmental opportunities are lost, needs escalate, and/or families reach a crisis point. This distinction is fundamental.**

Early Intervention and Prevention Matter

The BCDC has never argued that support needs should not be assessed; we agree that public programs require fair and transparent processes for determining eligibility and allocating resources. The concern is whether the proposed eligibility criteria may establish a threshold that prevents some children with significant support needs from accessing direct funding until those needs become more severe or visible.

This concern is particularly important because children with all types of disabilities benefit most from early intervention and prevention. A Deaf child may require sign language supports to prevent language deprivation. An autistic child may require communication, behavioural, social, and mental health supports before difficulties become entrenched. Children with developmental disabilities, mental health challenges, or emerging support needs often achieve better outcomes when intervention occurs early rather than after significant difficulties have escalated and substantial impairment has developed. Simply put, a child’s optimal developmental window is too narrow to be subjected to systemic rationing. It is well established that denying children timely supports can contribute to school disengagement, severe burnout, and significant mental health challenges later in life. Families are therefore asking a simple question: **Does the proposed eligibility framework sufficiently recognize the importance of early intervention and prevention?**

Recognizing Less Visible Support Needs

Families are equally concerned about children whose needs are less visible. Minister Wickens herself has previously observed that academic success or apparent "high functioning" should not be interpreted as evidence that a child requires less support. She has acknowledged that a child who appears to be coping may nevertheless have substantial developmental, therapeutic, and support needs. **Again, we agree.**

Many children who appear to be successful are doing so because of substantial and often invisible supports provided by families, caregivers, educators and other professionals. The absence of a visible crisis should not be interpreted as the absence of significant support needs. Families are concerned that children whose challenges are less immediately apparent—but are nonetheless substantial—may not be adequately identified within the proposed framework. As a result, opportunities for early intervention may be missed, increasing the risk of **burnout, school disengagement, mental health challenges, and/or family strain, and the need for more intensive services later.**

Needs Change Over Time

Families are also concerned that support needs are not static. A child's needs at age 4 may be very different from their needs at age 8, 12, or 16. Developmental expectations increase, educational demands become more complex, mental health challenges may emerge, and family circumstances can change significantly over time. Many children who appear to be managing well in early childhood encounter substantial difficulties later as social expectations increase, academic demands intensify, and supports become less readily available.

This concern is particularly important because children who qualify for the Disability Benefit and/or Disability Supplement are expected to remain eligible until age 19. However, families continue to ask what happens to children who *do not initially meet* the eligibility threshold for one or both of these types of support but whose needs increase over time. A child with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder who appears to be coping in elementary school may experience burnout, school refusal, anxiety, depression, or other mental health challenges during adolescence. A child with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder whose needs are manageable at one stage of development may require additional supports as academic and social demands increase. A blind child may encounter new barriers as educational, vocational, and community expectations become more complex.

Families need assurance that the system will not simply identify children with the highest needs at a single point in time, but will remain responsive to children whose needs evolve throughout childhood and adolescence. A needs-based system should not only be able to identify children who require support today; it must also ensure timely access to support when needs emerge, intensify, or change in the future. **Without clear pathways for reassessment and access to services, there is a risk that children whose needs increase over time will not receive support until significant difficulties have already developed.**

Support Must Be Sufficient, Not Merely Available

The Ministry has emphasized that children who do not qualify for the Disability Benefit may still receive support through the Disability Supplement and/or expanded community-based services. We agree that these are important components of the redesign. However, families are not simply asking whether some support **exists.** They are asking whether the support that is available will be **sufficient, timely, flexible, and responsive** to their children's individual needs. This is a crucial distinction. The Ministry's response focuses primarily on access. **Families are concerned about adequacy**. The Ministry states that no child will receive nothing. **Families are asking whether they will receive enough.**

A service may technically be available, yet still fail to meet a child's needs if wait times are excessive, eligibility criteria are restrictive, service intensity is insufficient, or supports are not tailored to the child's circumstances. For many families, the central question is not whether a support can be accessed in theory, but whether it will be available when needed, in the amount needed, and in a form that meaningfully improves outcomes. **Ultimately, the success of a needs-based system should be measured not by the existence of services, but by whether children and families receive the level of support necessary to participate fully in family life, education, and their communities.**

Community Capacity Remains an Unanswered Question

This concern is particularly relevant given the Ministry's own estimate (February 10, 2026) that approximately 107,000 children and youth have support needs. Government also estimated that approximately 12,000 to 15,000 children will receive the Disability Benefit and approximately 33,000 will receive the Disability Supplement. Even allowing for overlap between these groups, the Ministry’s projections indicate that approximately **59,000 children with identified support needs** will rely primarily on community-based services rather than direct funding. **Families need confidence that the community-based service system has sufficient capacity to meet both current and future demands.**

Community service organizations throughout British Columbia have long reported therapist shortages, recruitment and retention challenges, service gaps, and extensive waitlists. Service providers have consistently identified significant unmet needs within the existing system. These challenges are often more acute in rural and remote communities, as well as in Indigenous communities, where access to specialized and culturally relevant services is limited. Given these realities, the question families are asking is not whether government **intends** to provide support. **The question is whether the system will have the capacity to deliver it.**

The ministry has announced $80 million in new funding for community-based supports over three years—approximately $27 million annually. **Families are seeking reassurance that this investment will be sufficient to expand service capacity, eliminate current waitlists, recruit and retain qualified professionals, and meet the needs of the larger number of children who are expected to depend primarily on community-based services.** Without clear information about workforce planning, service expansion targets, regional service availability, and anticipated wait times, families cannot assess whether the proposed system will be able to deliver timely and effective support at the scale required. **Access to services depends not only on policy commitments, but also on the practical capacity of the system to respond when children and families need help.**

The Continuing Importance of Direct Funding

This concern is heightened by Minister Wickens' previous observations regarding the value of direct/individualized funding and the limitations of relying exclusively on centralized service systems. She has recognized that direct funding can provide flexibility, responsiveness, and stability for families, while also noting that centralized systems may face challenges related to workplace shortages, service bottlenecks, and access to specialized supports.

Families are asking whether those observations remain relevant today. Direct funding allows families to tailor supports to their child's unique strengths, needs, and circumstances. It provides a degree of flexibility and responsiveness that is not always available through standardized, community-based service models. Rather, families are seeking assurance that **direct supports will remain available when community services are unavailable, insufficient, or unable to meet a child's particular needs.**

Equity Is About Outcomes, Not Just Eligibility

The Ministry has stated that no disability group is automatically excluded from the proposed framework. We acknowledge that the criteria do not explicitly exclude any diagnosis. However, families are not asking whether a diagnosis is excluded on paper. They are asking whether children with a wide range of disabilities and support needs will be fairly recognized in practice and whether the assessment criteria adequately capture the diverse ways disabilities affect functioning, participation, and quality of life.

A framework can apply equally to everyone while still producing inequitable outcomes if important support needs are not fully recognized. The question is not whether the criteria are diagnosis-neutral. **The question is whether they result in equitable access to support across different disability groups, geographic regions, cultural communities, and levels of need**.

Reducing Bureaucratic Burdens on Families

Minister Wickens has also spoken in the past about the burden families face when navigating complex government systems. She has recognized that effective public policy should provide coherent, accessible support rather than requiring families to repeatedly advocate for services or navigate multiple layers of administrative bureaucracy.

Families share that concern today. They want a system that recognizes needs early, prevents crises before they occur, respects family expertise, minimizes administrative burdens, and provides meaningful timely access to appropriate supports. **Families should not have to wait until difficulties escalate, repeatedly document their child's challenges, or navigate complex processes in order to ask for help.**

Measuring Success

Ultimately, the success of this redesign must not be measured solely by the amount invested or by the number of families who receive some form of support. It should be measured by whether:

- Children receive meaningful support when it can make the greatest difference;
- Families can access culturally relevant services without unnecessary barriers or delays;
- Hidden, emerging, and changing support needs are recognized and addressed;
- Community-based services have the capacity to deliver timely and effective support;
- Early intervention opportunities are preserved and expanded;
- Individualized supports remain available when needed;
- Families experience less administrative burden and greater confidence in the system; and
- The system prevents crises and promotes long-term well-being rather than responding only after significant challenges have developed.

These are the outcomes that will ultimately determine whether the redesign succeeds in improving the lives of children, youth, and families across British Columbia.

Accountability and Measuring Outcomes

Families want to understand how the Province will evaluate the success of the redesigned system. Commitments to increased access and expanded services are important, but **meaningful accountability requires clear performance measures and public reporting.** Families will benefit from understanding how government intends to **measure**:

- Wait times for services, especially those that are community-based;
- Access to specialized, culturally relevant supports across regions;
- Family satisfaction with services received;
- The effectiveness of early intervention efforts across disability groups;
- Whether children are receiving support before crises occur;
- Equity of access across disability groups, geographic regions, and cultural communities; and
- Changes in child and family outcomes over time; and
- The extent to which unmet needs are being reduced.

Without clear outcome measures and regular public reporting, it will be impossible for families and other stakeholders to assess whether the redesigned system is achieving its stated goals.

Conclusion

The Premier has stated that every child in British Columbia should have the supports they need to thrive. **We agree.**

The questions being raised by families are ultimately about how that commitment will be realized in practice. These questions are *not* a rejection of reform. Rather, they reflect a desire for reassurance that the redesigned system will uphold the principles that have long guided disability policy and advocacy in British Columbia: early intervention, prevention, individualized support, equitable access, meaningful family choice, and timely access to services.

Families are not only asking how the system will support children who qualify today. They are asking how it will respond to children whose needs emerge, intensify, or change over time. For families making decisions today about therapies, communication supports, respite, mental health services, and educational planning, these questions are not theoretical. They affect children's development, family well-being, and long-term outcomes.

Families have experienced service gaps, lengthy waitlists, and unmet needs under previous and existing systems. Thus, **it is not sufficient to ask families to simply trust that they will meet their needs. The questions they are raising deserve thoughtful consideration, transparent answers, and ongoing dialogue.**

The BCDC believes that these questions should remain at the centre of this discussion. We welcome the opportunity to work collaboratively with government, families, self-advocates, service providers, and community partners to ensure that the redesigned system delivers on its promises and improves outcomes for children and youth with support needs across British Columbia.