



# Invest in Inclusion

**Reducing immediate and long-term costs by supporting independent living for people with disabilities in inclusive communities**

## Report to Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services

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

We are a non-profit federation working with our partners to build community and enhance the lives of children and youth with special needs, adults with intellectual 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 60 member agencies who are working together to build inclusive communities across our province.

Our vision is a world where we all belong.

This submission 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 are not represented in this submission. Instead, we are focusing our requests on the most urgent needs for investment in the 2020 budget year.



# Support for Children & Youth

Inclusion BC supports the rights of children and youth with special 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 special needs face when accessing B.C.'s system of supports and services. The solutions include developing more effective approaches to identifying needs, making it easier for families to access supports, clarifying policy mandates, and effectively targeting available funding to ensure the best outcomes for our vulnerable children and youth.

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.

Research shows that almost 30% of children entering kindergarten in B.C. are facing developmental vulnerabilities compared to the national average of 25%.

There are long waitlists across our province for children who need early intervention and supported child development services. Our member agencies deal with these waitlists every day. Unfortunately, many children wait so long for critical early supports that they do not get it at all. By the time children get to the top of the waitlist they are no longer eligible due to their age. In effect, this delay becomes a denial of service and children do not get the essential supports they need to succeed in school and in life.

Adequate funding for the Supported Child Development Program is vital to the success of universal child care in B.C. If children with special needs are considered as add-ons to the child care program, then the program cannot be considered universal. Supports for children with special needs should be built into the system from the beginning.

*Recognizing the special needs of a disabled child, assistance extended in accordance with paragraph 2 of the present article shall be provided free of charge, whenever possible, taking into account the financial resources of the parents or others caring for the child, and shall be designed to ensure that the disabled child has effective access to and receives education, training, health care services, rehabilitation services, preparation for employment and recreation opportunities in a manner conducive to the child's achieving the fullest possible social integration and individual development, including his or her cultural and spiritual development*

***Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 23, para.3, United Nations***

For youth with special needs over the age of 12 it is even more challenging to get support. Because of the lack of services, funding is prioritized for children under 12. As a result the immediate health and safety needs for youth are often neglected.

It is absolutely imperative that the budget for the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) is increased to meet the urgent demand for time-sensitive support. Otherwise the province is failing to fulfill its responsibilities to provide the support needed for children and their families.

Inclusion BC conducted a survey with our member agencies to determine the costs of eliminating these unfair waitlists. Based on the number of children and youth who are currently unable to get support because of the waitlists, or who have been denied the support because they aged-out, we are asking for a \$30 million increase this year for the province's Supported Child Development Program.

The province's *At Home Program* also requires a significant increase of financial support this year. The government created this program in 1989 to support families who brought their children home from institutions and provided them with the support they needed to live in the community. However, since the start of the program over 30 years ago, there has been little to no investment in the funding structure. As a result, the inequity of the program has now hit a critical point. Some parents are now faced with the bleak choice of putting their children into care so they can receive the support services they need. This failure clearly demonstrates that the *At Home Program* is in desperate need of additional funding.

Earlier this year, BC Parents of Complex Kids (300 plus parents) came together to share their experience and to make recommendations on how to improve the *At Home Program*. Their report clearly details the

challenges they face, the support they need, and their commitment to protecting the rights of their children.

We strongly support their request for an immediate increase of support for the *At Home Program*. 30 years without increase is unreasonable and unfair. Statistics Canada reports that the cost of living has increased by 79% since 1989. We have spoken directly with many parents who are raising children with complex needs, and they report that the financial support received from the province covers less than 20% of the actual costs. We ask the committee to close this gap with an immediate 79% increase of funding in this fiscal year.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Eliminate waitlists for children and youth with a funding increase of \$30 million per year for the Supported Child Development Program.
- Save the *At Home Program* by increasing funding by at least 79% to match actual costs incurred by families supporting their children.

*For the purpose of guaranteeing and promoting the rights set forth in the present Convention, States Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children.*

*Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 18, para. 2, United Nations*

# Re-Imagining Community Inclusion

Inclusion BC participated in a Partnership Table with the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction (SDPR), Community Living BC (CLBC), and many other parties during this past year. The Minister, Honourable Shane Simpson, released his consensus report, *Re-Imagining Community Inclusion* in March, 2019. It is a 10-year road map for building inclusive communities in our province.

In order to address the objectives from the report, Inclusion BC strongly urges the Standing Committee on Finance prioritize its investment and provide much needed, critical financial support in this fiscal year.

- Provide simple and dignified access to supports services
- Provide seamless life transitions throughout a person's lifespan
- Develop flexible housing options for people with disabilities

CLBC's caseload increases by approximately 6% every year. Last year, the provincial budget responded with a \$66 million increase. This was a welcome relief for those on existing requests for service lists or for those providing home share. But it did not meet the needs for youth transitions into adult services.

We are deeply concerned about CLBC's limited financial capacity to meet the needs of youth with intellectual disabilities and their families across B.C. Overall, the average dollar value of support provided to these families has decreased year-after-year. This does not make sense given inflation and the increasing cost of service provision related to aging families. These reductions certainly do not represent efficiency or service quality. To the contrary, these reductions are establishing entrenched funding gaps which agencies and families are forced to absorb in order to continue providing support to young people with intellectual disabilities.

*Persons with disabilities have the opportunity to choose their place of residence and where and with whom they live on an equal basis with others and are not obliged to live in a particular living arrangement;*

*Persons with disabilities have access to a range of in-home, residential and other community support services, including personal assistance necessary to support living and inclusion in the community, and to prevent isolation or segregation from the community;*

*Community services and facilities for the general population are available on an equal basis to persons with disabilities and are responsive to their needs.*

***Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Article 19, para. a, b and c, United Nations***

# Seamless life transition

Families are expected to provide the support for their children's needs. For families with children who have special needs this can be the most exhausting and stressful time of their lives. Once they have learned to navigate one system and request support they have to wait and wait... They wait for service after service; from the time their child is an infant through the school years, and then as they transition into adulthood.

Every day Inclusion BC hears from adults with intellectual disabilities and their families as they wait for support from Community Living BC. They tell us that the Guide for Support Allocation (GSA) tool used by CLBC does not reflect the true support needed to achieve a good life in the community. Currently, the GSA can be used to deny certain supports or to manage individual expectations for support. Consequently, this is creating incorrect data for CLBC. The assessment tool should provide accurate information about a person's actual needs. Inclusion BC encourages the government to review the GSA and to explore supplemental

assessment tools that will enable true person-centered planning.

Increased levels of funding coupled with improved assessment tools are needed to enrich the outcomes for adults with intellectual disabilities in BC who require support to live a fulfilling life in community.

## Recommendations

Address the growing caseload for CLBC supports by:

- Providing support to people backlogged from the 2019 waitlists by providing a 10% increase to CLBC's global budget for 2020.
- Providing timely support to people requesting community living services by budgeting a 6% increase to CLBC's global budget for 2021 and 2022.
- Funding the development of a more comprehensive tool to assess the needs of adults with intellectual disabilities.





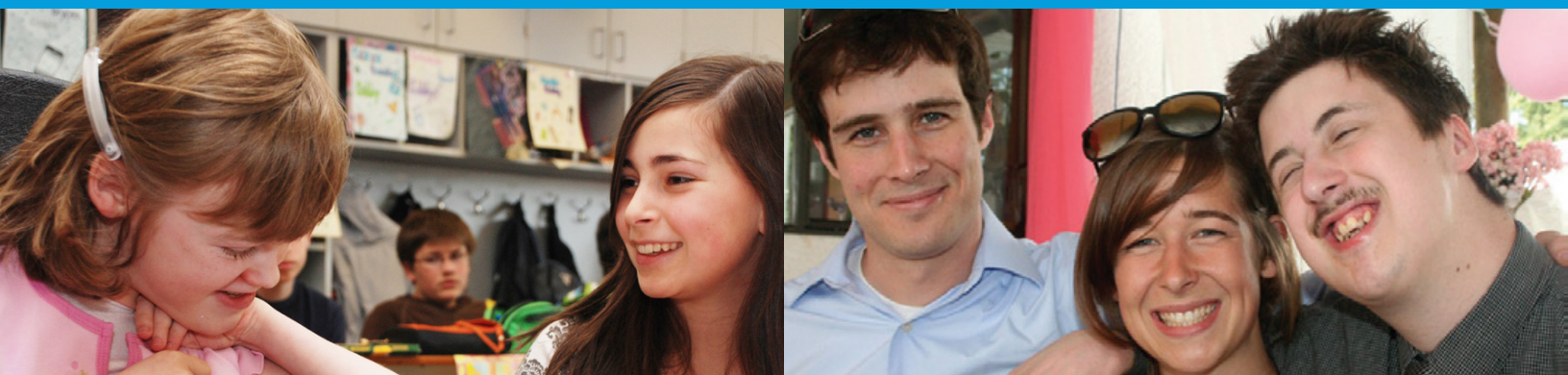
# Develop flexible housing options

People with intellectual disabilities have been hit hard by B.C.'s affordable housing crisis. In 2018, Inclusion BC partnered with CLBC to develop a 3-year plan to address this crisis. We are leveraging our experience and relationships to advance long-term solutions that boost the supply of inclusive housing in B.C. In the short-term, a rental supplement would allow someone with an intellectual disability to access market housing in the community of their choice and within inclusive environments.

Additionally, it is essential that adequate individualized and person-centered support be provided during the life transition of finding a home. This will require a collaborated budgeting and delivery strategy arrangement between the Ministry of Social Development & Poverty Reduction, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, CLBC and BC Housing.

## Recommendations:

- Support CLBC clients who are waiting to move into their own homes by providing \$1 million of funding per year for portable rental supplements from BC Housing.
- Support the move to independent living for 800-1000 people each year by increasing CLBC's supported living budget by \$20 million per year for the next 3 years.



# Recruitment & Retention

The community living service sector is facing an unprecedented recruitment and retention crisis. Difficulty in hiring and keeping support staff makes it increasingly challenging to meet the needs of the people we support every day. All people have the right to live in the community and get the support they need to participate as active members. When this essential support is compromised, it has the potential to profoundly impact people's lives of an already vulnerable population. We must work together to prevent any disruption of services so that everyone can be fully included in their community.

The value we give to people working on the front-line of care – the people who provide the day-to-day support – demonstrates the value we hold for all people with disabilities. We value these dedicated workers who support people to have equitable access to lifelong learning, to employment, to a home, to relationships with neighbours and friends.

Inclusion BC urges the government to support a fair compensation rate for the entire sector. We ask the committee to allocate an additional \$10 million in funding to meet the recruitment and training needs of agencies, and of families supporting people through individualized funding. This support is essential for the economic health and stability of the sector.

## Recommendation:

- **Support employment in the community living service sector by investing an additional \$10 million in funding to develop an equitable recruitment and retention strategy.**



# Persons with Disability (PWD) Benefit Rate

The Minister of Finance announced a small increase of \$50/month (effective April 1, 2019) to Persons with Disabilities (PWD) benefit rates. Inclusion BC was disappointed that last year's budget did not include the investments necessary to make the Poverty Reduction Strategy Act a success. Bringing people with disabilities out of poverty requires a significant investment to increase disability benefit rates to at least \$1500 per month and index rates to the cost of living. We believe that this investment in inclusion is essential for this budget and for the future of this province.

## Recommendation:

- Bring people with disabilities out of poverty by immediately increasing the Persons with Disabilities (PWD) benefit rates to \$1500 a month effective April 1, 2020 with a plan to increase rates to \$1800 by April 1, 2022.

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*Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission. Inclusion BC offers our support to implement all the recommendations as an ally to government and strong community partner*



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