



April 13, 2023

Hon. David Eby, Premier  
Via email only: premier@gov.bc.ca



Hon. Mitzi Dean, Minister of Children and Family  
Development  
Via email only: MCF.Minister@gov.bc.ca

**RE: BC Disability Collaborative on Children & Youth with  
Support Needs (CYSN): Response to the 2023 Budget**



Dear Premier Eby and Minister Dean,

Last fall, the BC Disability Collaborative<sup>1</sup> applauded Premier Eby and MCFD Minister Dean's [announcement](#) maintaining individualized funding for some children and youth while committing to engage in deeper consultation on a new service model. We were encouraged to hear that interim investments would be made and eagerly anticipated the release of Budget 2023, expecting to see this pledge fulfilled.



Disappointingly, while the budget included a few important investments, they fall far short of what is needed and there are significant deficiencies that have been left unaddressed. Though Premier Eby stated in November 2022 that "every child in BC should have the supports they need to thrive," Budget 2023 ensures that a substantial number of children, youth, and families remain completely unsupported, while others continue to be left without adequate support.



Premier Eby also said, "We are focused on listening to families of children and youth with support needs. We will work collaboratively with all partners to make sure our services work for every child."



We appreciate this commitment, and it is in this spirit that we present our concerns and recommendations.

**Wait Times**

Families are waiting for services in regions all over BC. They are often left without services and supports for months and sometimes for years. Many times, this wait

---

<sup>1</sup> The BC Disability Collaborative consists of 16 organizations representing over 30,000 children and youth with disabilities in BC, along with their families. Please refer to the list of signatories at the end of this letter.



leaves families in a position to lose employment, experience marriage breakdowns, and endure insurmountable financial challenges. For many families, mental health deteriorates and leads to crises wherein they can no longer support their child or youth at home. The wait time issue needs to be resolved in order for families to manage their lives. Wait times for services need to be reduced in order for children to get timely access to critical supports. With this in mind, we recommend the following:

- Early Intervention Programs: reduce wait times to a provincial maximum of 3 months and provide funding support for outreach to travel to remote and rural communities
- Supported Child Development Program: reduce wait times to a provincial maximum of 3 months
- Direct Funded & Agency Coordinated Respite: reduce wait times to a provincial maximum of 3 months
- At Home Program (AHP): ensure all families have access to the base amount of respite immediately upon eligibility to the program

### Direct Funding

Not all families are created equal. Accordingly, there needs to be flexibility built into the system to enable a unique approach to be person- and family-centred to meet the unique needs of each circumstance. As such, we recommend that:

- Direct funding be made available as an option to every family, in a similar manner to the autism program, to ensure that, if families choose, they can purchase their own services to meet their own unique needs
- Children eligible for the AHP be given access to SAET style funding upon entry to the program rather than waiting until they are 5-years-old
- Barriers be reduced, and flexibility and consistency increased, with regards to how Autism/individualized funding is administered

### Assessments

Assessments are a critical part of understanding a child's strengths and needs. Assessment outcomes help to guide support planning and are necessary from both a medical

and social perspective. Families can also use the information to apply for the Disability Tax Credit, which, if approved, opens the door to receiving the federal Child Disability Benefit which is a small but important financial support for many families.

We recommend the following:

- Reduce the provincial maximum wait time to 3 months for assessments and provide funding to families for travel costs to the urban diagnostic centres of expertise
- Routinely screen Kindergarten students to identify those at risk for learning challenges warranting early intervention

### Underserved/Unserved Populations

There are many children in BC that have gone unsupported for too long, including but not limited to those diagnosed with Down syndrome, FASD, and ADHD. The newly announced investments do nothing to help those who are not currently qualified for supports. This lack of support is detrimental to these children's development; it creates an uneven playing field between different disabilities, and marginalizes children and their families. As short-term measures, we suggest the following:

- Down syndrome: Create a provision to allow a Down syndrome diagnosis to equate to automatic eligibility for the At Home Program (AHP)
- Medical Complexity: Allow children eligible for the At Home Program to access School-Aged Extended Therapy (SAET) style funding upon entry to the program
- FASD and ADHD: Immediately qualify all children and youth with these lifelong neurodevelopmental disorders for community-based contracted services and respite
- Learning Disabilities and Dyslexia: Make evidence-based screening available through both the MCFD and Education systems to promote early intervention; full diagnosis should be available under MSP so anyone at any time can get a diagnosis, and funding should be available for early intervention within the MCFD system

## Childcare

Inclusive childcare opportunities are scarce in BC, and many CYSN families are desperate for support in this area. Every family needs access to inclusive, accessible, and affordable childcare from the early years to age 19. We recommend:

- Investment in the Supported Child Development and Aboriginal Supported Child Development Programs so all families have equitable access to the childcare they need
- Creation of a robust plan to support a variety of flexible childcare opportunities including community group childcare, before and after school care, and direct-funded child and youth care support so families can hire support where resources and options are limited

## Respite

Adequate respite support plays an essential role in supporting parents to meet their child's care needs, while taking a break from their caregiving responsibilities. We therefore recommend:

- An immediate investment to ensure that every family has access to increased and flexible respite funding as an essential service
- Increasing the types of respite that are available so that families have the ability to choose either direct-funded respite or agency-hosted respite, depending on their individual needs and circumstances
- Creation of a mechanism for delivering respite funding equitably

## Mental Health - for Children and Youth with a Dual Diagnosis

Many children with disabilities and support needs have co-occurring anxiety, depression, and other mental health related concerns. Accessing mental health supports through MCFD is fraught with barriers and wait times, exacerbating mental health conditions and family stressors. The current mental health system is heavily siloed and requires:

- Immediate investment to streamline access to child/youth mental health services as well as family counselling

## Mental Health - for Parents and Siblings

Raising a child with a disability can place a great deal of financial, physical, and emotional pressure on families. These factors include financial instability, isolation, traumatic medical experiences, and the systemic and societal ableism that have them in a constant fight or flight mode. Investing in mental health supports for families is critical and foundational to keeping families strong. We recommend:

- Immediate investments in funding for family mental health services

## Workforce

Children and youth with support needs require the support of specialists, including language translation and interpretation to access those specialists. The need is especially urgent in rural and remote areas, particularly with regard to Indigenous workforce training. To ensure that we have a robust workforce in the future system, we suggest increasing training opportunities while also improving recruitment and retention for:

- ASL Interpreters
- Deaf Interpreters
- Teachers of the Deaf or Hard of Hearing
- Occupational Therapists
- Speech Language Pathologists
- Physiotherapists
- Therapy Assistants
- Behaviour Analysts
- Behaviour Interventionists

Implementation of these recommendations will greatly reduce barriers to accessing essential support for thousands of BC children and youth, and will represent a major step towards Minister Dean's vision of "a province where services are provided that meet the unique needs of all children and youth."

Respectfully,

**Julia Boyle**  
Executive Director  
AutismBC

**Dr. Pat  
Miranda**  
Ph.D., BCBA-D,  
Professor Emerita  
University of British  
Columbia

**Bonnie  
McBride**  
Board Chair  
FASD Support  
Society of BC

**Wayne Leslie**  
Chief Executive  
Officer  
Down Syndrome  
Resource Foundation

**Angela Clancy**  
Executive Director  
Family Support  
Institute

**Dr. Sarah Pastrana**  
President  
BC-ABA

**Cathy McMillan**  
Founding Director  
Dyslexia BC

**Rebecca Rubenstein**  
Vice-President Down  
Syndrome BC

**Tracy Humphreys**  
Executive Director  
BCedAccess

**Renie D'Aquila**  
Executive Director  
Reach Child and  
Youth Development  
Society

**Chantelle  
Morvay-Adams**  
Chair  
ADHD Advocacy  
Society of BC

**Louise Witt**  
Director  
Autism Support  
Network

**Brenda Lenahan**  
Founder and Director  
BC Complex Kids

**Michelle Schmidt,  
PhD**  
Executive Director  
ACT—Autism  
Community Training  
Society

**Lisa Meneian**  
Deaf Children's  
Society of BC

**Lisa Marsh**  
BC Aboriginal Child  
Care Society-  
Jordan's Principle  
Enhanced  
Coordination Hub  
for BC

**For more information, please contact:**

Angela Clancy  
Executive Director  
Family Support Institute

(604) 540-8374 ext. 524

[aclancy@fsibc.com](mailto:aclancy@fsibc.com)

Cc: Ms. Allison Bond, Deputy Minister, MCFD:  
[Allison.bond@gov.bc.ca](mailto:Allison.bond@gov.bc.ca)

Ms. Carolyn Kamper, Assistant Deputy Minister, MCFD:  
[Carolyn.Kamper@gov.bc.ca](mailto:Carolyn.Kamper@gov.bc.ca)

Ms. Danielle Smith, Executive Director, MCFD:  
[Danielle.Smith@gov.bc.ca](mailto:Danielle.Smith@gov.bc.ca)

Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth:  
[ChildrenandYouthCommittee@leg.bc.ca](mailto:ChildrenandYouthCommittee@leg.bc.ca)