

May 31st, 2024

Dear Premier Eby, Ministers and MLAs,

We are writing to you as a group to acknowledge the investments the provincial government has made since 2017 to improve the lives of people in British Columbia. We are also urging you to continue investing and to increase investments in key services critical to the foundation of our society, people's lives, and the economic health of the province. Sadly, too many children, families, seniors, and individuals continue to fall behind due to chronic underfunding of services and lack of systemic changes.

Putting people first has been a hallmark of this government. In areas such as child care, improved pharmacare and affordable housing, we have seen meaningful progress towards real improvement. But the work British Columbia has begun is incomplete. Our province requires continued leadership with bold vision and transformative measures at this critical time. More needs to be done to address the root causes of the challenges we face today, and improve the lives of people in British Columbia.

As you know, many families are still struggling with the high cost of living, finding quality and affordable child care, or housing. Seniors worry about staying in their homes or finding long-term care. Others struggle to escape poverty. Access to mental health services, eliminating barriers for people with disabilities, escaping gender-based violence or receiving necessary health care remain challenges for too many people in British Columbia. The stress resulting from these conditions could also lead to depression, addiction, and chronic health issues later in life.

British Columbia is a wealthy and economically vibrant province. We know that our economy has benefited from investments in people and will continue to do so - when people are put first. While our province is growing and its economy is thriving with the second lowest GDP to debt ratio of any province in Canada, children, families, seniors and people who need the services now cannot wait.

The investments we make now will also generate economic benefits for communities and our economy as a whole. Putting people first means that we must do the best we can now.

For that reason, we have decided to approach you together. We are united in our request that the government increase its investment in prevention and services to our children, our families, our communities, and our economy, including but not limited to:

- Child care and early learning
- Children, youth, and adults with disabilities
- Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act
- Environment
- Families from diverse backgrounds
- Gender-based violence
- Health care
- Housing

- K-12 education
- Mental health & addictions
- Post-Secondary education
- Poverty reduction
- Seniors
- Workers' rights
- Youth in care

Attached are real stories from people about how they are falling behind, and the impacts bold investments by our government could have to help them achieve their potential. We ask that you review these recommendations, and take bold actions.

We would appreciate the opportunity to continue collaborating with you to meet the needs of people and families. We need real solutions that will improve the quality of people's lives in British Columbia.

Yours in hope,

ADHD Advocacy Society of BC
 Battered Women's Support Services
 BC ACORN
 BC Disability Collaborative
 BCEdAccess
 Burnaby Association for Community Inclusion
 Burnaby Family Life Institute
 Butterfly Run
 Centre for Family Equity

Children's Hearing & Speech Centre of BC
 Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC
 Contract Worker Justice at SFU
 Co-operative Housing Federation of BC
 Dixon Transition Society
 Early Childhood Educators of BC
 Graduate Student Society at SFU
 Network to Eliminate Violence in Relationships
 SRO Collaborative Society

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Attachment: Stores from BC families

BC Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN)

Arun Joy Mulackal is with Surrey ACORN and he lives with his wife and five year old daughter in an apartment in North Surrey, within walking distance of transit and his daughters school. Arun's landlord has applied to demolish the building, leaving over fifty families to face the possibility of being forced out of their homes and priced out of their neighbourhood. Tenants in the building expect to see their rents double or triple when forced to pay market rates, leaving safe accessible housing out of reach for many.

Thousands of Surrey tenants will face a similar dire situation in the coming years, as more and more of the aging purpose-built rental housing stock is demolished to make way for development. Without anti-displacement tenant protections, many families like Arun's and other low-income tenants will be forced to leave their affordable, transit-accessible neighbourhoods or be forced out of stable housing altogether.

Asks:

- *Provincial legislation to ensure that municipalities must have rental replacement, tenant relocation assistance, and rent stabilisation policies in place to prevent tenant displacement.*

BCEdAccess

BCEdAccess is a grassroots organization of parents and caregivers advocating so that K-12 education is equitable for children with disabilities. We are parents like Kay, whose child did not have access to qualified EA (education assistant) support in grade 4. An untrained school employee used physical restraint on the student, causing the student to become suicidal and develop PTSD. The school incident also affected parental mental health and contributed to a breakdown of the marriage. Now, as a high school student, they are still being denied the assistance needed to complete the classes for their Dogwood, while also struggling with the continued effects of school trauma. With the normalisation of academic underperformance, the entire family continues to be negatively impacted.

Asks:

- *A way to recognize and support complexity for learners with multiple disabilities based on their needs, rather than just funding categories.*
- *EA standards of practice to ensure that employee training matches the complexities of the needs of students. Also more competitive wages and hours for the job.*
- *Timely access to assessments like psych ed, occupational therapy, speech therapy and counselling, provided and funded by the education system.*

Burnaby Family Life Institute:

Mandy is excited to find an available childcare space with a not-for-profit organization within her community and sees that this provider has three other facilities listed as \$10 a Day ChildCareBC Centre. For several years she accessed childcare at high fees, and determines that taking the available spot is the right decision for her child and family. Inquiring about the process to become a \$10 a Day ChildCareBC Centre, she learns it will take a year before this operator's fourth centre is eligible and is met with ambiguous time frames from the provider. This uncertainty of fees impacts her household's ability to financially plan. Mandy struggles to find hope as she is faced with the increased cost of living and higher fees, while she waits for the approval of the fee reduction.

Asks:

- *A BC-wide wage grid to ensure pay equity across a publicly funded system of \$10-a-day childcare at all licensed providers of childcare/childminding.*
- *A coordinated and efficient system that is working together in prioritizing the implementation of \$10-a-day childcare centres to address BC's affordability crisis in childcare.*

Butterfly Run:

Each year in BC there are approximately 15,000 miscarriages, 500 babies lost to stillbirth, and 200 babies that die between 01-12 months. The mental health implications of these types of loss is immeasurable, and effects not just the birthing person but their partners and family members.

Evidence suggests that psychological counseling is effective in supporting bereaved parents through grief and navigating life after loss (Endo et al., 2015). Despite this evidence, a major gap exists in services to support bereaved parents in BC. Despite the large numbers of people experiencing infertility, pregnancy loss, and infant loss in BC, health care services and support for families are sparse to non-existent.

Asks:

- *Provincial legislation to ensure that the mental health needs are met by all British Columbians, specifically those experiencing the grief and heartache of pregnancy loss, infant loss or infertility.*
- *Public funding from the Ministry of Mental Health and addictions to support online and in-person grief programs, Registered Clinical Counsellors to provide individual counselling and group support sessions tailored to the unique needs of this population.*

Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC:

A mum with two children in \$10aDay programs says her family is saving close to \$8,000/year. The care they receive is priceless she says and she is so grateful for the savings, plans she only dreamt about now seem to be more within reach. But another mum who is a fourth year plumber and cannot find before-school care at any price for her son, is in danger of losing her home because she can't work full-time. These are the disparate realities of child care in BC.

Asks:

- *A \$10aDay child care system for all current operators with accountability for public funds.*
- *A publicly funded wage grid for early childhood educators of at least \$30-\$40/hour with benefits and a pension.*
- *Publicly-planned expansion of quality child care facilities with school districts, local governments, non-profit organizations, and Indigenous partners.*

Dixon Transition Society:

Research conducted by CBC News revealed that in November 2019, an average of 620 women and children a day were turned away from domestic violence shelters across Canada. This study gathered data from over 300 women's shelters and uncovered that in more than 80% of the cases, women and children were turned away because the shelter was full. Similarly, in the past year, Dixon Transition Society received 2,927 calls for space, out of which 2,005 women were turned away due to a lack of space. Not only is this number extremely high, but data collected by Statistics Canada shows that it has increased by 69% in the last five years.

Furthermore, research indicates that domestic violence is often cited as the leading cause of homelessness for women. A 2003 study that examined housing problems and homelessness after separation in a sample of 110 women who had experienced domestic violence, found that, of the sample, 38% reported homelessness.

Asks:

- *Affordable Housing (building another Transition Home, more housing units for Second Stage for women and their children fleeing violence).*
- *Trauma-Informed Daycare for women and their children fleeing violence.*
- *More counselling sessions and a PEACE Program for women and their children fleeing violence.*

Network to Eliminate Violence in Relationships (NEVR):

Alan who had an alcoholic father and witnessed his mother being abused ended up as a drug user. He did not always have food on the table. At one point, he thought they were going to be homeless because his father drank away the rent funds because he was fired from his job for being drunk. Research in neurodevelopment tells us how traumatic stressors early in life impact the emotional brain circuits that lead to depression and anxiety and many chronic health challenges later in life.

Asks:

- *Programs both emotional and physical (employment skills & education) prior to pregnancy.*
- *Parenting programs for all parents both online and in person (started in the hospital and carried into the community).*
- *Expansion of Strong Start programs to make them available for all children.*
- *For example if we use neurodevelopment and stress research and work on creating resilience and minimizing or preventing adverse childhood experiences, the economy benefits. Prevention is 10% of the money required for services and is badly needed to keep our population. We need to address the determinants of health or our service needs will get only worse over the years.*