



April 30, 2024

VIA E-MAIL

Ref: 287733

BC Disability Collaborative
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To the member organizations and experts of the BC Disability Collaborative:

Thank you for your letter addressed to the Honourable David Eby, Premier, and several cabinet Ministers outlining your concerns about the funding provided in Budget 2024 to support the needs of children and youth with disabilities and complex needs. As the Minister of Children and Family Development, I am pleased to respond.

I want to acknowledge that we have heard the collective concerns of the Collaborative in the context of Budget 2024 and also want to thank each of you for taking the time to share the individual concerns and focus of each of your member organizations in your letter.

I would also like to note that, as we proceed through engagement with parents and guardians, service providers, Indigenous Peoples, and others with lived experience, we are hearing consistency with the broader concerns you have raised beyond the budget.

The call for collaboration between ministries is quite clear, and we are bringing this priority discussion forward with our partners in the Ministries of Health, Education and Child Care, Social Development and Poverty Reduction, and Mental Health and Addictions. We have heard the call to action for a “one system” approach. We also know and have heard that there is an imposed divide between “support needs” and mental health needs, and that these supports are interrelated and must be integrated together. This action to bring our ministries together is an initial step to realizing a one system approach.

We have also heard that timely access to high quality diagnostic services is needed, along with wraparound supports that promote child and family quality of life, including care coordination and navigation, childcare/after school care support, and respite for all families of children and youth with support needs.

I appreciate calls for addressing sustainability in a system of supports, a theme that has emerged throughout engagement over the past year. Particularly in rural and remote areas of the province, we have heard that we need to balance access with sustainability.

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Considering the diverse range of needs, ideas, thoughts and perspectives shared with the Province on services and supports for children and youth with support needs, the ministry is focused on taking action to create a system that improves access for everyone, addresses gaps, reduces silos across ministries and services, and reduces barriers to wraparound integrated care.

With that in mind, we need to make sure all individuals and families have the opportunity for their voices to be heard before making substantive policy changes. As part of our engagement and research to understand how the Province can better support children and youth, we have provided investment to the Collaborative, to other provincial organizations, and directly with First Nations to lead engagements that can further inform our path forward. While that work is underway, we will continue to respond to emergent program issues, including expanding investment in existing programming and responding to individual children, youth, and family needs.

As you acknowledge in your letter, Budget 2024 introduced new investments to strengthen supports to children with dyslexia and related learning difficulties in the school system as well as additional intervention and outreach programs for kindergarten to Grade 12 students. The Ministry of Education and Child Care (ECC) is working to understand how to implement and action these investments in the school system. Expect an announcement from ECC in the coming weeks with details on how they will be implemented.

These investments are in addition to funding committed through Budget 2023 for fiscal year 2024-2025 and fiscal year 2025-2026, which looks to improve access to services for children, youth and their families who have not previously been able to access services and supports in their communities, such as respite and therapy supports.

As you know, children and youth with support needs (CYSN) investments in Budget 2023 also focus on enhancing workforce capacity for Foundational programs, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder Key Workers, and therapy assistants as a means to increase supports for underserved children and youth with support needs. The investment to increase the number of professionals within the CYSN Foundational programs is occurring over two phases. The ministry recently completed the first phase.

I acknowledge your frustration with how this funding is being used and the perception of stagnation during this period of engagement, and I understand that some of you are ready to move on from engagement; however, a commitment was made to engage more deeply because the Province has heard that we had not done enough listening. You can see that themes which have been emerging through other avenues are aligning with your perspective. Engagement will end in 2024 and the Province will use everything we have heard to inform the path forward. Continued dialogue with the Collaborative, other partners, and families will remain integral to making sure all voices are represented in the path forward.

Thank you for your recommendations, feedback, and advocacy for children and youth with support needs.

Sincerely,



Grace Lore

Minister of Children and Family Development

pc: Honourable David Eby