

BCDC Presentation to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services: Annual Budget Consultation
Date: June 2th, 2026

Introduction

Honourable Chair and members of the committee, thank you for your time today. My name is Pat Mirenda, and I am here as Chair of the BC Disability Collaborative (BCDC), a group of 20 provincial organizations with experience supporting tens of thousands of disabled children, youth, and adults. Today, I'll be presenting three recommendations related to the needs of this population of BC citizens and their families.

Recommendation 1

Additional disability funding is needed for the Ministries of Education/Child Care and Children and Family Development. Many disabled children and youth continue to be excluded from early intervention supports, childcare, and school because of budget shortfalls. In a 2024 report entitled *Too Many Left Behind*, the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth estimated that at least 100,000 children and youth under the age of 18 in BC have a disability or support need. Two years later, many disabled children and youth continue to be excluded from child care settings and/or schools because of shortages of staff with sufficient expertise. In addition, despite an allotment of an additional \$475 million over 3 years in the MCFD budget for 2026, many disabled children and youth will still not receive much needed out-of-school supports. They include autistic individuals without intellectual disability, many children and youth with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and individuals with sensory impairments,

among others. They also include disabled children and youth who require short-term, intensive supports to resolve challenges that, if left unresolved, will end up costing the system much more in the long run. It is critical to provide adequate funding so that supports can be made available in a timely manner, rather than waiting until problems escalate and place children, youth, and their families at risk.

Recommendation 2

Additional funding to the Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills is required to support workforce recruitment, training, and retention of professionals who provide supports to disabled children, youth, and adults. In a 2023 survey by the Office of the RCY, the top out-of-school priority identified by families of disabled children and youth under age 12 was access to speech-language, occupational, and physiotherapists, behaviour analysts, sign language interpreters, and deafblind Intervenors. These professionals are in high demand but in short supply. In a 2024 report from the Office of the RCY, 77% of BC social workers said that they did not have timely access to the necessary range of community support resources to effectively meet the needs of children, youth and families on their caseloads. A substantial allocation of funding for additional faculty at BC colleges and universities is required to enable the admission of additional applicants to programs that prepare professionals in these key resource occupations.

Recommendation 3

Our final recommendation is to provide increased funding through the Ministry of Health for neurodiversity-informed counselling and other mental health supports. In the 2023 RCY survey, the top out-of-school priority identified by families of disabled children and youth between ages 13-18 was mental health counselling supports. In addition, mental health supports for caregivers and family members was identified as a top priority across the age range from 0-18. Such supports must be provided by professionals who understand disability and are able to deliver disability-competent, neurodiversity-affirming treatments. None of the publicly-funded mental health supports in BC currently meet this standard.

Thank you very much for considering these recommendations.