



## Submission: BC Budget 2027

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*Note to reader: the following submission was provided to government using an online form.  
This version has been edited for readability.*

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## **Introduction**

First Call Child and Youth Advocacy Society is a registered charity in British Columbia that works with a non-partisan, cross-sectoral network of affiliate organizations to put children & youth first in public awareness and public policy. We conduct research and analysis on child & youth rights and well-being, offer education and training events, and make policy recommendations to promote, strengthen and defend the rights of children and youth in B.C. We are committed to achieving a strong commitment to early childhood development, support in transitions from childhood to adulthood, increased economic equality, and safe & caring communities.

## **Recommendation 1:**

Invest in targeted child poverty reduction efforts for those with higher poverty rates, including lone-parent families, youth leaving care, Indigenous & newcomer families and families affected by disabilities, through direct income supports, higher minimum wages, rent controls, and childcare.

## **Explanation:**

In 2023, the child poverty rate in British Columbia was 16.7% as measured by Statistics Canada's Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM) after income taxes, using taxfiler data, representing 149,370 children. The average child poverty rate on 64 BC First Nations reserves in 2023 was 33%, with at least 4,500 children living in poverty. The median annual income of poor BC families with children ranged from \$14,000 to \$17,000 below the poverty line.

Increased direct income supports for low-income families with children can be accomplished through the BC Family Benefit by raising the upper net annual income threshold for receipt of the maximum benefit amount from \$29,526 to \$45,000 and increasing the maximum benefit.

The child poverty rate for children in lone-parent families was 45.1% in 2023. More than half of poor BC children were in lone-parent families. Therefore doubling the \$500 annual supplement in the BC Family Benefit for the poorest single parents to \$1,000 is a key solution to reduce the depth of their poverty. Access to affordable quality child care is also essential to reducing the poverty of single parents and their children.

Direct income supports must also be raised for families with children on income and disability assistance by bringing total welfare incomes up to the CFLIM after-tax poverty thresholds and indexing them to inflation.

Direct income supports through SAJE for youth leaving government care also can be increased, and government should revisit the eligibility requirements that exclude youth who left government care before the age of 12, e.g., through adoption or kinship care agreements.

As food and other essential living expenses escalate, low-income families need relief from high rents. We call on government to reverse the deferral of affordable housing investments and make sure affordable rental housing includes units with rents geared to income for very low-income families.

**Recommendation 2:**

Using data, Budget 2027 must prioritize increased investments in prevention and early intervention supports for families raising young children, including expanded access to quality, inclusive child care, early supports and therapies, and non-barriered family support programs throughout BC.

**Explanation:**

First Call remains alarmed at the lack of a comprehensive, family-friendly system of supports in BC for our youngest children and their parents/caregivers.

HELP-UBC Early Development monitoring data and reports from our BC-wide network tells us that the percentage of children entering kindergarten with developmental vulnerabilities continues to grow. Early childhood educators & teachers report higher mental health and behaviour concerns among young children in their programs. Parents are seeking support for how to handle their children's challenging behaviours.

Families raising young children across BC need timely, universal access to a core suite of perinatal & parenting supports, early intervention therapies & assessments, and high-quality inclusive child care. In many communities there are long wait times and financial barriers for access to these necessary supports & programs that are crucial to helping all children achieve their full potential.

The promised funding increase to expand services to more families through Child Development Centres must be monitored for sufficiency to provide timely, quality services based on need.

A key solution to the child care recruitment & retention crisis is establishing a competitive wage grid for Early Childhood Educators (ECEs). Investments in subsidized training for new ECEs are an important strategy and need to be continued. Without these initiatives investments in new spaces will not materialize as real options for parents. Too many low-income & single-parent families are still waiting for access to a \$10aDay child care program that will allow them to re-enter the workforce.

Early childhood supports and services in rural & remote areas, many serving Indigenous families, are underfunded. Ensuring equitable access for all BC children must inform public investments.

Barrier-free family resource, Strong Start and similar programs need increased funding to meet increased demand and play their valuable role in family support.

**Recommendation 3:**

Ensure K-12 public education funding is enhanced to allow school districts to hire more teachers, education assistants, counsellors, psychologists, specialist teachers and other support staff, and to ensure the appropriate inclusion of students with diverse learning needs.

**Explanation:**

K-12 spending continues to be inadequate to address the issues facing public schools.

Schools need more hands on deck in classrooms and programs to deal with the increased needs among their students. Children with extra support and diverse learning needs are still being sent

home from school when supports are insufficient in the school setting, denying them their right to an education. Others are waiting years for an assessment of their learning needs.

Schools are one of the key sites for marshalling the resources to remediate and support school-age children who suffered deprivation, isolation, and loss of learning during the pandemic. School staff need additional support and professional development to deal with the increased needs among their students, including students with mental health challenges. Every school should have a counsellor and every primary classroom should have at least one Education Assistant.

We strongly support investments in the expansion of school-age child care on school sites. This will support many families who need to work full-time and is an effective poverty reduction measure.

Many children come to school hungry and therefore are not able to concentrate and learn. Continued provincial investments in school food programming are necessary to build capacity and increase readiness for schools to deliver and expand on healthy food programs to increase students' access to healthy nutrition to support their learning.