



ELECTION DAY IS OCTOBER 17TH, 2026 IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

2026 MUNICIPAL ELECTION TOOLKIT

First Call Child and Youth Advocacy Society works with a non-partisan, cross-sectoral network of affiliate organizations to put BC children and youth first in public awareness and public policy. We conduct research and analysis on child and 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 BC.

First Call has built a broad provincial consensus around the need to ensure all British Columbian children and youth benefit from the **4 Keys to Success for Children and Youth**.

LET'S GET BC'S CHILDREN & YOUTH ON THE MUNICIPAL AGENDA!



October 17th 2026 is Election Day

in municipalities across the province.

On that day, eligible voters exercise their right to vote for mayors, councilors, school board trustees, regional representatives (and, in Vancouver, park board commissioners).

The purpose of this toolkit is to support individuals and community groups in their advocacy for legislation, policy and practice at the municipal level that benefit children and youth and their families.

The toolkit is structured around the **4 Keys to Success**. Each section highlights current problems, outlines the role of the municipal government or school board, and suggests questions for candidates.



4 Keys To Success

- A strong commitment to **early childhood** development
- Support in **youth transitions** from childhood to adulthood
- Increased **economic equality**
- **Safe and caring** communities

Use our ***Advocacy Guide*** at the back of this Toolkit for ideas on how to reach out to candidates in your area.

What You Can Do

Elections are the perfect time to speak up for children and youth.

Here are some ways you can contribute to positive change for youth and children in your community during an election campaign:

- **YOU CAN VOTE** if you're 18 or older, have lived in BC for at least 6 months and are a resident of the municipality or electoral area on the day you register to vote.
- Discuss the issues in this toolkit with friends, neighbours and family.
- Attend or organize an all-candidates meeting, and ask the questions included in this toolkit.
- Write to your local newspaper or call-in to a radio show.
- Contact candidates and tell them you want them to support children and youth. Use the information and questions in this toolkit for speaking points.
- Hold a public forum. It could be as simple as gathering friends to talk about the issues over coffee. Or, hold a larger event and invite candidates to attend. Include youth and families with children in the planning and organizing.
- Join a local advocacy group that focuses on a child and youth issue of concern to you.
- Encourage any group of which you're a member, such as faith or cultural groups, to promote child and youth well-being in the pre-election campaign period.

Use Social Media!

Publicize your conversations with candidates:

Tag us @FirstCallBC
#BCed #BCPoli #endchildpoverty

Follow Us:  [LinkedIn](#)  [X.com](#)

KEY 1

A Strong Commitment To Early Childhood Development

Early childhood is a crucial, time-limited period of human development.

Data from UBC's Early Development Instrument is showing increasing risks of less than optimal development among young children. Without supportive public policy and needed services, young families are stressed by the demands of caring and earning. All families should be able to access early childhood development supports and services that they need in their communities.

Problem 1:

Young Children's Vulnerabilities Are Increasing

The Challenges

- Nearly one third of BC's poor children, or 42,880 children, are under the age of six. Young children had a [poverty rate](#) of 16.4% in 2023.
- Over one third (37.3%) of [BC children entering Kindergarten](#) are vulnerable or behind in at least one area of their development – social, emotional, cognitive, communications or physical, the highest provincial vulnerability rate in BC to date.
- Transitions into Kindergarten for children with disabilities are often less than optimal if schools and parents don't work closely together and plan ahead. Every primary classroom should have at least one Education Assistant or support worker.





What Municipal Government and School Boards Can Do

- Cities are often able to offer financial and in-kind support for local services like neighbourhood houses, child care spaces, family drop-in centres, recreational programming and community events that focus on supporting families with young children. School boards offer StrongStart early learning programs for preschoolers.
- Mayors, city councillors and school trustees can proactively work with senior levels of government to advocate for increased investments in supports and services for families with young children.
- Schools should have their inclusion policies and practices published on their websites so that families of children with disabilities can connect with the necessary school supports for their child upon school entry.



Questions You Can Ask

Q:

If elected, what will you do to help families with young children in our community find and access the supports and services they need?

Q:

If elected, how will you ensure transitions into Kindergarten for children with disabilities are well-supported?

Q:

If elected, will you support making sure every primary classroom has an Education Assistant or support worker?



KEY 1

A Strong Commitment To Early Childhood Development

⚠ Problem 2:

The Child Care Crisis

🔍 The Challenges

- Access to child care in BC is highly unequal. In some school districts, there are only enough spaces for about 1 in 10 children age 0 through Grade 7, while in other districts there are spaces for closer to half of young children.
- Additionally, access to \$10aDay spaces is inequitably distributed across BC and within communities. For too many families, fees are still too high and there are too few licensed spaces.
- Due to the high cost and lack of child care spaces, many mothers cannot return to work when they are ready to.





What Municipal Government and School Boards Can Do

- Municipal governments and school boards can be strong advocates for expanding access to quality, affordable, inclusive child care in their communities, including through their local regulations, such as development zoning, and can require that child care spaces be included in new buildings.
- Local governments can develop child care plans based on local needs assessments.
- The provincial government has announced \$5 million in new funding for child care on school grounds. Locally elected school trustees have a direct role in how this gets implemented.



Questions You Can Ask

Q:

Affordable and high-quality child care encourages children's healthy development, allows mothers to enter and remain in the work force, enables families to move out of poverty and benefits the economy by reducing social costs and increasing tax revenues. If elected, what will you do to increase access to affordable, inclusive quality child care in our community?

Q:

If elected, will you prioritize developing a child care plan for our municipality, community or school district and advocate for provincial funding to support its implementation?

Q:

If elected, will you support expanding before- and after-school child care programs to every school in our district?

Transitions are times of increased vulnerability when children and youth may need extra support to navigate them safely.

Developmental transitions include moving into adolescence and into the expectations of adult life. Other stressful transitions include changes in family, such as when parents separate or divorce or are unable to keep their children safe.

**Problem 1:****Public School Funding, Community Use and Student Safety****The Challenges**

- Public schools are under-resourced, with insufficient funds for inclusive educational supports in classrooms, student counsellors, textbooks, music programming, healthy school meal programs and many other critical educational needs.
- Students with diverse learning needs and disabilities are being sent home or put on restricted school schedules because of the lack of supports for inclusive education.
- Parents are still being asked to fundraise for school essentials, creating inequities between schools with lower and higher income demographics.
- Access to school facilities is constrained by underfunding or restrictive use policies.
- Schools are challenged in their responsibility to keep all students safe and to create a sense of belonging for all.
- Research shows that children and youth learning and mental health are being negatively impacted by smartphone use, particularly early social media access.



What Municipal Government and School Boards Can Do

- School boards and city councils can be strong advocates for increased funding for public education, speaking up to call for sufficient resources to support students with vulnerabilities and better supports for classroom teachers.
- School boards can ensure their policies and student support systems prioritize student safety and well-being, including policies addressing racism, sexualized violence, and other forms of discrimination.
- Cities can subsidize and increase accessibility to after-school programs offering sports and arts activities and homework clubs.
- School boards and local councils can ensure that children and youth have access to counsellors and youth workers to talk about anything from sexual health to family problems to employment.



Questions You Can Ask

Q: If elected, what will be your priorities for increased public school funding?

Q: If elected, will you support the use of school facilities as community hubs, through the community school model or partnerships with non-profit organizations?

Q: If elected, what will you do to address bullying, violence and discrimination in schools?

Q: If elected, would you support restricting smartphone usage by students during the school day?

KEY 2

Support In Transitions From Childhood to Youth To Adulthood

Problem 2:

Better Supports for Vulnerable Youth

The Challenges

- Poor mental health is a rising concern for children and youth in BC.
- While many families support their children well into their 20s with a range of financial and emotional assistance, youth who age out of foster care in BC are too often left to fend for themselves.
- Youth who have had experience in government care have a heightened risk of experiencing homelessness than youth without care experience.





What Municipal Government and School Boards Can Do

- Civic leaders can ensure there are youth-friendly spaces in areas such as parks, community centres, schools and libraries, and cities and towns can create more safe and free spaces where youth can meet.
- School boards and city councils can organize youth forums so that young people can gather and discuss issues and provide valuable perspective to municipal leaders.
- School boards and city councils can advocate to senior levels of government for increased funding for affordable housing with supports for youth who lack family support.



Questions You Can Ask

Q: If elected, what would you do to create more public youth-friendly spaces?

Q: If elected, what would you do to ensure that youth voices are represented in decision-making?

Q: If elected, what would be your priority for enhanced youth services in our community?

Research has long demonstrated that poverty is toxic to children's health and development.

From poor nutrition to family stress to exclusion from social participation, there are many ways poverty is known to raise the risk of life-long ill effects on health and reduce opportunities for children to realize their full potential. Growing income inequality in BC is recognized as a threat to the health of both individual children, youth and families, as well as to communities as a whole.



Problem 1:

Child and Family Poverty

The Challenges

- BC's child poverty rate is 16.7%, or 1 in 6 children, and the rate for children in lone-parent families is a scandalous 45%.
- Child and family poverty is an issue in every region of the province. While approximately 87% of BC's poor children live in the 26 urban areas, rural child poverty rates can be much worse. To find the child poverty rate in your community see our [census tract maps on our website](#).
- The depth of family poverty is growing. Poor BC families with children had incomes between \$15,000–\$17,000 below the poverty line in 2023.
- Inequality in BC is growing. In 2023, the richest 10% of families with children received 26% of the total income of all families with children, with the poorest 10% shared only 1% of the total income pie.
- For families with children, low wages mean they often have to take on multiple jobs and work more than full time to earn enough to support their families. This leaves them little time to spend with their children or to participate in community life outside of work.



What Municipal Government and School Boards Can Do

- Elected municipal and school board officials can demand that provincial and federal government poverty reduction strategies address poverty and growing income and wealth inequality through tax reform and increased social policy investments. Cities can also develop their own poverty reduction plans.
- Cities and boards of education can pay their employees a living wage and can agree to only contract for services with companies that pay a living wage.



Questions You Can Ask

Q:

If elected, will you endorse and/or advocate for evidence-based poverty reduction strategies for BC, including better income supports for families living in poverty?

Q:

The majority of poor children live in families with parents who work in the paid labour force. Municipal governments have a responsibility to avoid contributing to the problem of low-wage poverty. If elected, will you commit to adopting a policy requiring the municipality or school district to pay a living wage to both its employees and contract staff?

KEY 3

Increased Economic Equality

Problem 2:

The Affordable Housing Crisis For Families

The Challenges

- Many families' earnings have not kept up with the cost of living resulting in an inability to afford adequate housing.
- In BC in 2021, over 70% of low-income families with children were spending 30% or more of their income on shelter costs.
- Many of these families struggle to feed their children nutritious food after paying rent.
- Thousands of BC families with children are on waitlists for subsidized housing, while living in crowded and substandard rental units. One of the reasons is the inadequate supply of larger units.
- There is a significant shortage of safe housing for women, children and youth fleeing violence.





What Municipal Government and School Boards Can Do

- Cities can stop low-income housing from being demolished, develop eviction prevention regulations and programs and require that new rental housing developments include units with rents that low income families and youth can afford, including at income assistance rates.
- Municipalities can contribute to developing new affordable, safe and adequate housing for families and youth in collaboration with senior levels of government, non-profit groups and other investors.
- Elected municipal and school board officials can advocate to senior levels of government for increased financial support to help low income families and youth pay for housing.



Questions You Can Ask

Q:

If elected, will you commit to prioritizing efforts to maintain and increase the availability of affordable housing in our community? What are your ideas for achieving these goals?

Q:

For transparency, will you monitor and report on the number of new housing units created that are affordable to households with low and low-to-moderate incomes?

Q:

If elected, how will you make sure women, children and youth fleeing violence can access emergency housing and long term safe and affordable housing in our community?

⚠ Problem 3:**The Health Effects Of Poverty****🔍 The Challenges**

- Living in poverty, even for one or two years, can have serious negative impacts on children's health and development. These impacts include longer-term effects such as increased risks of chronic disease, school failure, and vulnerability to criminal involvement.
- Health inequities are associated with higher costs for our health and social service systems, and social costs to our communities.
- In 2023, one third of BC's children, an alarming 288,000 children, lived in food insecure households. The food insecurity rate for lone-parent families was even higher at 52%.





What Municipal Government and School Boards Can Do

- Municipalities can provide free or discounted recreational services and access to programs for low-income children, youth and families.
- Municipalities can support community gardens, community kitchens and schools can provide healthy meals and nutritional information to students.
- Public schools can reduce or eliminate fees that act as barriers to inclusion and participation for low-income students.



Questions You Can Ask

Q:

Recreation program fees are a significant barrier to low-income families. If elected, how will you ensure that children, youth and families have equal access to community programs?

Q:

If elected, will you advocate for the reduction of public school fees that act as barriers for low-income students?



Families should be able to raise their children in communities that are safe and supportive.

This includes physical safety, safe places for play, and an environment that is clean and healthy for growing bodies.

! Problem 1:

Protecting Children's Rights to Play and Freedom from Violence

The Challenges

- Too much screen time is robbing children and youth of active playtime and engagement with people in real life. In 2026, only 39% of children and youth (5 to 17 years of age) in Canada met the recommendation of 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity per day. Only 31% of girls, compared to 57% of boys, met this recommendation.
- Family income plays a role. Children 5 to 11 years of age in the lowest-income households were less likely to meet this physical activity guideline than children in the highest-income households.
- Access barriers to recreational programs and facilities for children with disabilities are depriving them of crucial developmental experiences.
- Concerns about neighbourhood or community safety affect children's and youth's freedom to play and move about independently.
- Children's right to freedom from violence is threatened by child abuse and sexual exploitation, online and in person.



What Municipal Government and School Boards Can Do

- Cities can create green spaces and parks accessible to all residents, and schools can make sure they have safe playground equipment and sports resources for children and youth.
- Cities are responsible for zoning and for designing the physical environment, and can require and protect green spaces, child- and youth-friendly spaces, and more bike and walking routes.
- School boards can support inclusive physical education programming.
- Cities can ensure all children have access to swimming lessons and other sports and recreation activities for safety and health promotion.
- School boards can ensure students receive age-appropriate information about how to keep themselves safe from violence online and in-person and work with parents on school and online safety protocols and procedures.



Questions You Can Ask

Q:

Recreation and parks play an important role in keeping children healthy, particularly those from low-income families. If elected, how will you ensure that all children have access to safe places to play?

Q:

If elected, what will you do to address safety concerns for families in relation to transportation and public spaces?

Q:

If elected, will you work to increase access to school-based preventative programming related to safety and sexual violence for children and youth in both online and in-person environments?

**Thank You for reading and using the
2026 Municipal Toolkit.**

**Please send it on to friends, family
organizations you belong to. Together,
we can help BC's children, youth and
families thrive!**

With thanks to all First Call Affiliate Members and
supporters who provided ideas and recommendations
through our Municipal Toolkit Survey.



#328 – 3381 Cambie Street, Vancouver BC V5Z 4R3 | 604-288-8102

www.firstcallbc.org | info@firstcallbc.org

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Advocacy Outreach Tools

A Guide to Making Your Voice Heard



Here are some best practice tips for reaching out to candidates at the municipal, provincial and federal levels, along with practical suggestions for supporting and amplifying your concerns.



✉ Write to the candidates

You can send an email through a candidate's website (if an elected incumbent, they already have an easily accessible email). New candidates may not have their websites operable for a while. Check back.

Local Elections: Your municipality or towns' websites will usually list all council and school board candidates with some contact information. Elections BC also lists local election candidates as they register, but contact information is limited.

Provincial Elections: Once the writ is dropped, the [BC Elections website](#) will list all candidates by riding and party affiliation.

Federal Elections: The [Elections Canada website](#) publishes a list of candidates in every riding once the writ is dropped. You can phone the office number listed for each candidate for contact information.

Candidates will usually note who has taken the time to contact them. They or a staffer may get back to you (not answering is also an answer!). If you have time, email all the candidates in your riding whose opinion you want to note.

- Keep your email simple.
 - ▶ You may discuss one or two priority issues from one of our toolkits that are important to you. Copy and paste the priority and questions we have developed here, to your email.
 - ▶ Or, you may want to have them answer multiple concerns that we have raised—we suggest you just copy and paste the questions if that is the case.
- Avoid abbreviations.
- Be courteous, of course.

Remind the candidate that you are a constituent of the riding and are a First Call affiliate/child and youth care service provider/or concerned citizen.





Talk to candidates at your door, or as they ‘main-street’

Seeing a candidate ‘in the wild’ is a great way to get some face-to-face answers in real time. Being prepared with questions really captures their attention.

If a candidate comes to your door, you have an opportunity to really engage. Approaching a busy candidate in public can feel a little more intimidating, but if you’re prepared, that ‘in the moment’ engagement can also yield good results. {Be aware that if there is a lineup, or it’s very busy, you may want to email them instead.}

- **Plan ahead.** Use the educational priorities and questions in our toolkits to brainstorm what you’ll say. Use a sample script, if you like.
- **Identify yourself.** State your name and make it clear that you are a constituent/voter in the riding.
- **Stay on topic.** Use the talking points in our toolkits to guide you.
- **Ask for a written response** if the candidate doesn’t have an answer to your questions. Leave your contact information with a staffer who is accompanying the candidate.



SAMPLE 'TALK TO THE CANDIDATES' SCRIPT:

Introduce Yourself:

"Hello, my name is _____ and I am a concerned citizen in this riding."

1. {Add one question about a concern about children and youth in BC}
2. {Provide two to three sentences about the specific issue you want them to know more about}

Finished Example:

"I'd like to know where you stand on the issue of housing security for children, youth and families?"

Market rental rates for families with children are completely unaffordable for many families.

We are seeing the results in rising homelessness, including among youth and families with children, as well as landlords who take advantage of the situation."

3. {Develop questions you can ask}

Finished Example Questions:

Q:

If elected, will you support accelerating the building of affordable and safe social housing for low-income children and their families?

Q:

If elected, will you support tying rent control to the unit in the private rental market?

Use Social Media!

Publicize your conversations with candidates:

Tag us @FirstCallBC #BCed #BCPol #endchildpoverty

Follow Us:  [LinkedIn](#)  [X.com](#)