

Media Release

For immediate release

June 17, 2020

BC Children Falling Through the Cracks During COVID-19

Child advocates, physicians, researchers and health care professionals have come together to voice their alarm about the harmful impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on children, and to demand urgent action for children's health and wellbeing in BC.

Over 200 individuals and organisations – including over 100 physicians, the BC Teacher's Federation and the BC Association of Social Workers – have signed an open letter to Premier Horgan and eight BC cabinet ministers, with copies to Dr. Bonnie Henry, and BC's Representative for Children and Youth, calling on the BC Government to act now to create a BC Children's Safety and Wellness Task Force, that will build resilience and support planning for a healthy recovery for children from the pandemic.

Many children are under stress, as most of the adults in children's lives – parents, teachers, and caregivers – are carrying an additional burden of stress related to isolation, loss of access to services and supports, and financial strain.

Urgent action must be taken to address parallel epidemics of domestic violence and substance use, and dramatic increases in mental health concerns, as parents and caregivers struggle under real fears and pressures during the pandemic.

"The mental health and developmental impacts of isolation and stress on children can be devastating, especially for the 1 in 5 children living in poverty in BC. We need an equity-oriented strategy to help kids recover. Children's health should not be less important than adults' health during the pandemic," said Dr. Vanessa Brcic, community-based researcher, family physician, and co-founder of Basics for Health Society.

"It is important to consider the many changes to children's lives that have resulted from the pandemic. Not only can these changes influence kids' well-being right now, but research has shown these types of changes can actually get under the skin to leave a vestige in a child's biology and affect their health and well-being for years to come," said Dr. Michael Kobor, Canada Research Chair in Social Epigenetics.

"It may take 20 years to measure the impacts on kids of our response - or failure to respond - to the COVID-19 pandemic. We need to act now. By exposing and addressing the inequities arising from poverty, exclusion, racism, classism, colonialism, and xenophobia, BC will be on the road to eliminating the health disparities magnified by COVID-19," said Dr. Christine Loock, Developmental Pediatrician and Co-founder of the UBC RICHER Social Pediatrics initiative.

The letter recommends six priorities for the task force to create resilient environments for children and the adults who care for them, including:

- prioritizing funding for crisis supports and programs to support the mental and emotional health of children and families;
- addressing poverty, food and housing insecurity, and systemic racism;
- enhancing equitable opportunities for outdoor play, learning and connection.

“Children with complex needs, disabilities and those marginalized by the structural violence of poverty and racism are among those at highest risk during this crisis. Their unique needs require an urgent response to support their well-being during the pandemic recovery and prevent short-term and long-term harm,” commented Adrienne Montani, Provincial Coordinator for First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition.

[Read the full letter and list of signatories here.](#)

Individuals and organizations can [add their signatures to the letter here.](#)

Basics for Health [Website](#)

First Call BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition [Website](#)

-30-

Contacts:

Dr. Vanessa Brcic MD CCFP, Family Physician, Registered Therapeutic Counselor; UBC Clinical Assistant Professor; CCPA-BC Research Associate, Co-founder & Vice-Chair, Basics for Health Society | 604-313-7237 (cell)

Dr. Michael Kobor PhD, UBC Professor; Canada Research Chair Tier 1 in Social Epigenetics; Theme Lead, Healthy Starts Theme, BC Children's Hospital Research Institute | 778-889-6997 (cell)

Dr. Christine Loock MD FRCPC DABP, Developmental Pediatrician; Associate Professor, UBC Pediatrics; Co-founder, Canadian Social Pediatrics Interest Group and UBC RICHER Social Pediatrics Program, a Community-University partnership with Pediatrics, Nursing, Public Health, and Vancouver's Inner City schools & neighbourhoods | 604-992-1696 (cell)

Helesia Luke, Communications and Development Coordinator, First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition | helesia@firstcallbc.org | 778-858-0553