

FIRST CALL

MAY 9, 2017 BRITISH COLUMBIA ELECTION TOOLKIT

FIRST CALL: BC CHILD AND YOUTH ADVOCACY COALITION is a non-partisan, province-wide coalition of 98 provincial and regional organizations, engaged communities, and numerous individuals who believe all children and youth in British Columbia should have first call on society's resources.

Since 1992, 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**:



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KEYS TO SUCCESS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

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

LET'S GET BC'S CHILDREN AND YOUTH ON THE POLITICAL AGENDA!



May 9, 2017

Election day in the province of British Columbia. On that day, eligible voters can exercise their right to vote for one of the candidates in their riding to represent them in the provincial legislature. To register and find more information, go to elections.bc.ca

The purpose of this toolkit is to support individuals and community groups in their advocacy for legislation, policy and practice that benefit children and youth and their families in the lead-up to the **May 2017 provincial election**. First Call member organizations with expertise in different areas contributed many of the facts, ideas and recommendations in the kit.

The toolkit is structured around First Call's **4 Keys to Success** for children and youth. Each section highlights some of the current issues facing children, youth and families in BC and suggests solutions our provincial government can act on, in the form of questions to candidates.

BC'S CHILD AND YOUTH POPULATION BY AGE		% of total
0-4: 225,866		23%
5-9: 233,915		24%
10-14: 231,746		24%
15-19: 272,558		29%
TOTAL: 964,085		

Source: BC Stats

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WHAT YOU CAN DO

Community groups, organizations and individuals can all play a role in putting child and youth issues on the election agenda by taking action. You are encouraged to:

- Share First Call's election toolkit and materials.
- Contact local candidates and seek support for child and youth issues.
- Assist others to learn about the election process and exercise their right to vote.
- Provide feedback to First Call on meetings with candidates and local coverage about child and youth issues.
- Build working relationships with other community organizations through information exchange and joint activities.
- Vote and remind your friends and family to vote!

**Remember: It's all about priorities.
Tell BC's policymakers: This May 9,
it's time to put the future first.**

**Let's get BC's children
and youth on the
political agenda!**

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Key 1: A strong commitment to early childhood development

Early childhood is a crucial, time-limited period of human development, and data from BC's Early Development Instrument shows 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 young children and their families should be able to access the ECD supports and services that they need. We know what will help and are looking for political commitment.

INCREASING VULNERABILITY, INCREASING SOCIAL COSTS

- 32% of BC children now enter kindergarten vulnerable in at least one area of development—social, emotional, cognitive, communications or physical, an increase of 2.3 percentage points in the past decade.
- BC under-invests in early childhood compared to international norms, spending just 0.29% of GDP on early care and learning versus the 0.7% average spending by other developed countries. Children who do not benefit from proper supports in their early years are at risk of life-long health issues (physical and mental), poor learning outcomes, difficulty with employment, criminality and other vulnerabilities. There are enormous social and economic costs associated with this under-investment in BC's young children.

WAITING FOR HELP AND INCLUSION

- Funding for early childhood intervention programs hasn't increased since 2006, and yet agencies are being asked to

respond to a broader range of growing and increasingly complex child and family needs.

- In BC, an estimated 5,000 preschoolers with special needs are on wait-lists for urgently needed therapies and services that support early development. Many children "age out" before ever accessing early childhood intervention services.
- Waiting for needed services causes unnecessary stress for families and permanent impairments to affected children, and service providers are stretched past their limits.

Q: If elected, will your party commit to support an immediate provincial investment to end wait lists for early intervention therapies and supports for all children with special needs and their families?

THE CHILD CARE CRISIS

- The key area of early childhood care and education has suffered from public policy neglect for decades. Families are faced with a lack of access to quality care, unaffordable high fees and the risk of putting their children in unlicensed and unsafe care arrangements.
- BC continues to have regulated child care spaces for fewer than one in five children under the age of 12. Families put their unborn children on wait lists for infant-toddler care and then watch their children age out of eligibility before they receive

a space. School-age child care is also unaffordable and in short supply for many families.

- The median monthly rate for full-time licensed group child care in Vancouver is \$1,325—more than the average cost of a one-bedroom apartment.
- Of the 64,900 workers who reported working part time due to child care responsibilities in 2015, more than 94 per cent were women.
- Lack of access to affordable child care is a barrier for women with children who try to leave abusive relationships.
- First Call, along with hundreds of groups and individuals around BC, has endorsed the **\$10aDay Child Care Plan**—the *Community Plan for a Public System of Integrated Early Care & Learning* proposed by the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC and the Early Childhood Educators of BC.

Q: If elected, will your party implement the \$10aDay Child Care Plan to begin addressing the child care crisis facing BC families with young children?



Questions help candidates understand what matters to voters. You can ask them at all candidates meetings, in person, by mail, email or through social media.

UNSTABLE FUNDING FOR EARLY YEARS SERVICES

- BC lacks a comprehensive early years plan that ensures a full range of supports and services for all young families and their children.
- Early childhood development programs have been greatly impacted by funding insecurity in BC over several decades. Programs have either had no increase in funding for a decade or had their funding cut and then partially reinstated.

Q: If elected, will your party commit to establishing an entitlement for all BC families to a full range of early years supports and services, such as family support programs, early intervention services, and quality, affordable child care supported by a multi-year, stable funding base?

EARLY CHILDHOOD RESOURCES

- Make BC's Young Children and Families a Priority: A Call to Action: firstcallbc.org
- The \$10aDay Child Care campaign: 10aday.ca
- Human Early Learning Partnership: earlylearning.ubc.ca
- Success by Six: successby6bc.ca
- Community Action Toward Children's Health: catchcoalition.ca
- BC Association of Pregnancy Outreach Programs: bcapop.ca
- BC Aboriginal Child Care Society: acc-society.bc.ca
- Sea to Sky Putting Children First: seatoskykids.ca
- BC Association of Family Resource Programs: frpbc.ca
- BC Council for Families: bccf.ca
- BC Association for Child Development and Intervention: bcacdi.org
- Kootenay Kids Society: kootenaykids.ca

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Key 2: Support in transitions from childhood to youth to adulthood

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. Dealing with a mental illness, being new to Canada or coming to terms with a minority sexual or gender orientation are other examples of circumstances and transitions that require extra support.

BC's youth need a strong safety net of universal and targeted programs and services to be there for them when times get tough.

YOUTH IN/FROM CARE

- As of March 2015 there were more than 7,860 children and youth in care in BC, and approximately 1,000 youth “age out” each year.
- Some youth are more likely to experience government care than others, including Indigenous youth (who comprise 60 per cent of youth in foster care in BC), young people with a disability and those who identify as LGBTQ.
- Multiple moves for children and youth in foster care remain a serious concern. When youth have a stable home, they have the opportunity to build connections with their school, community and peers. BC research shows youth with foster care experience reported better health if they had moved less than three times in the past year.

- Numerous reports on the deaths of young people in and recently leaving care point to a systemic failure to provide them with the emotional supports, permanency, cultural connections and mental health services they desperately needed.
- As of 2016, more BC youth who transition out of care at age 19 are eligible for financial assistance for post-secondary school. This is a good but limited program, and there are still gaps in support with limited eligibility and budgets for many youth who are on their own without support.

Q: What will your party do to **improve permanency, such as a stable homes, adoption or sustained family or community relationships, for children and youth in care?**

Q: Because **youth transitioning out of foster care don't have the family support other young people can rely on, they often need extra support in establishing a home of their own, finding employment and pursuing further education. Will your government increase funding beyond current levels for youth aging out of foster care so they can get consistent financial support, create long-term relationships with caring, dependable adults, and build stronger community connections?**

Numerous reports on the deaths of young people in care point to a systemic failure to provide them with the emotional supports and services they desperately needed.

PUBLIC SCHOOL FUNDING

- More than a decade of hollowing out the public education system through budget cuts has had acute consequences for BC children and is especially harmful for low-income children who most rely on public resources.
- Increased numbers of students with special needs haven't been given the supports they need in school, school libraries have closed and class sizes have grown.
- Reliance on parent-paid fees and fundraising has created have- and have-not schools and increased inequality within the public education system. For low-income students, the result is often exclusion from full participation in school activities.
- Funding cuts for BC public schools since 2002 have created an annual shortfall of \$300 million, while funding for private schools has increased at more than three times the rate of public schools over the past 10 years.
- The recent Supreme Court of Canada decision about the stripping of the teachers' contract has now required government to begin restoring some of this funding. Still unaddressed are the inadequacy of the per-pupil funding model and the resulting underfunding of non-teaching support staff, facility maintenance, seismic safety upgrading, new classroom needs, school transportation and many other real costs.




Q: If elected, will you restore public education funding to a level that fully funds all educational programs (including fine arts in elementary), provides sufficient funds for school facilities and classrooms that are safe, well-maintained and appropriate learning environments, and restores operating funding for necessary educational resources and equipment to provide a quality education in all areas of the BC curriculum?

Q: If elected, will you reverse the current policy supporting segregated special education schools and ensure appropriate expertise is developed instead within inclusive public schools?

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

- As a result of federal and provincial cuts to post-secondary education, average annual tuition fees in BC have more than quadrupled between 1990 and 2017, rising from \$1,271 to \$5,534.
- Students are facing unprecedented levels of debt to finance their education. Average student loan debt in British Columbia reached \$35,000 in 2016.
- Students from low-income backgrounds and youth who age out of foster care are less than half as likely to participate in university as those from high-income families, and graduation rates among youth from care are one-sixth or less than that of the general population.
- With the cancellation of the student grant program in 2004, BC became, and in 2017 remains, the only province to not provide grants on the basis of financial need.



The rate at which young British Columbians aged 15 to 19 sought help from hospitals for mental health and substance use jumped 75 per cent between 2009 and 2013.

Q: If elected, will your party **remove the financial barriers for low-income students and lower student debt levels through tuition fee reductions, student grants instead of loans, and interest-free student loans?**

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS

- BC's Representative for Children and Youth could find only 24 publicly funded residential treatment beds in the province in 2016, and the Ministry of Children and Family Development estimates there are 68,000 BC youth aged 15 to 24 with a substance use disorder.
- Hospitals are sending away families and children who are having mental health crises. The rate at which young British Columbians aged 15 to 19 sought help from hospitals for mental health and substance use jumped 75 per cent between 2009 and 2013.
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death for BC youth aged 12 to 18 and Indigenous youth are five to six times more likely to commit suicide than non-Indigenous youth. Sexual minorities (gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, queer youth) are seven times more likely to attempt or commit suicide than straight youth.

- There are severe shortages of addiction treatment facilities for young people, and, unlike other health services, addiction treatment is largely a user-pay system. The only publicly funded long-term residential treatment facility for teens in BC has been closed since 2015.

Q: If elected, will you commit to increasing the availability of and **funding for mental health and addiction services for children and youth both in school and in the community?**

YOUTH TRANSITIONS RESOURCES

- McCreary Centre Society: mcs.bc.ca
- Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks: fbcyicn.ca/programs/transitions/
- BC Teachers' Federation: bctf.ca
- Parent Advocacy Network for Public Education: panvancouver.ca
- BC Federation of Students: wearebcstudents.ca
- Inclusion BC: inclusionbc.org
- Canadian Mental Health Association-BC Division: b4stage4.ca
- Fostering Change: fosteringchange.ca



Key 3: Increased economic equality

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 lifelong ill effects on health and reduce opportunities for individuals to realize their full potential. Growing income inequality in BC is recognized as a threat to the health of both individuals and our society.

CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY

- One in five BC children live in poverty as do a shocking one in two of all children living in lone-parent families. BC also has the most unequal distribution of income between rich and poor families of any province.
- There are also significantly higher poverty rates for children of recent immigrants, Indigenous children, children in racialized families and children affected by a disability. National Household Survey data shows that urban Indigenous families experience more than double the poverty rate of non-Indigenous urban families (e.g., 45 per cent vs. 19 per cent in Surrey).
- BC is the only province that doesn't have a poverty reduction plan.
- There are serious negative impacts from living in poverty, even for one or two years, on young children's health and development.
- BC's Early Childhood Tax Benefit is small and inadequate in comparison to other provinces' child benefits. Benefits in other provinces apply to children under 18, as opposed to under six. Alberta, Ontario and Quebec's benefits are two to four times the monthly amount of BC's \$55 maximum.

Q: If elected, will your government adopt a comprehensive provincial poverty reduction plan with legislated targets and timelines and a goal of reducing BC's child poverty rate to 7 per cent or lower by 2020?

Q: If elected, will your government support redesigning the Early Childhood Tax Benefit into a BC Child Benefit covering children up to the age of 18 and double the maximum benefit to \$1,320 per child per year?

LOW-WAGE FAMILY POVERTY

- Most poor children in BC live with parents in the paid work force, some working full time, full year, yet they are still poor because their wages are too low.
- In Metro Vancouver family incomes rose 10 per cent between 2007 and 2014, while basic family costs rose 18 per cent.
- In 2014, 50.6 per cent of poor children in BC (82,540 children) lived in couple families, and poor couple families in BC that year had a median after-tax income of \$18,340, or \$11,961 below the \$30,301 poverty line for couple families.
- The current minimum wage of \$10.85/hour still leaves a single parent with one child who works full time, full year thousands of dollars below the poverty line.
- Half a million workers in BC are earning less than \$15 per hour. Eighty-one per cent are 20 or older. Three in five are women.

- Families need to be able to earn living wages to raise themselves and their children out of the stress of chronic financial crisis. A living wage is calculated annually based on what a family needs to earn in order to meet their basic living expenses.
- The provincial government has a responsibility to avoid contributing to the problem of low-wage poverty by paying their employees and contractors a living wage.

Q: If elected, will your party raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hour?

Q: If elected, will your party establish and implement a living wage policy across the provincial government for all direct and contract service staff as called for by the [Living Wage for Families Campaign](#)?

RAISE THE RATES/ ACCESSIBLE TRANSIT

- There was an average of 33,536 children in families on social assistance in BC in 2014, many of them lead by lone-parents and females.
- Income and disability assistance rates are not indexed to inflation. Income assistance rates have not been increased since 2007, and disability assistance rates are just going up by an insulting \$50 per month as of April 1, 2017.
- In 2014, a BC two-parent family on social assistance with two children received a total income of \$21,924. That's \$13,724 below the Statistics Canada poverty line for a family of four. A BC lone-parent family with one child aged two received \$17,277, which is \$7,677 below the poverty line.
- Families on social assistance are frequently forced to rely on food banks and other sources of charity to feed and clothe their



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children. They cannot afford public transit passes, leaving them isolated and denied their right to access school and their communities.

- Refugees welcomed into Canada often find themselves trapped in poverty on low income assistance rates because of barriers such as inadequate and unaffordable public transit and wait lists for English language classes. These barriers make it harder for them to find employment and to access educational programs, medical appointments, and other necessary community services to assist them in the settlement process.

Q: If elected, will your party increase social assistance rates to the Market Basket Measure poverty line and index them annually?

Q: If elected, will your party provide free public transit passes to all minors?

Q: If elected, will your party provide free public transit passes (or equivalent cash in regions without public transit) to all individuals on social assistance?



Over 10,000 children in BC are being raised by a grandparent or relative—more than the number in our foster care system. Keeping families together leads to the best long-term positive outcomes for children.

KINSHIP CARE

- Over 10,000 children in BC are being raised by a grandparent or relative—more than the number in our foster care system. Most kinship caregivers are single women, and many live near or beneath the poverty line. This includes those over 65 who are ineligible for income assistance—and who have no wish to become involved with the child protection system.
- Despite an overall increase in the number of kinship families since 2010, significantly fewer families (as many as 1,500) receive financial assistance through kinship benefits today.
- Keeping families together leads to the best long-term positive outcomes for children. Supporting kinship care providers helps to secure those outcomes and can be the best and the most cost-effective support for these children and families over the long term.

Q: If elected, will your party ensure the immediate return of a **financial benefit for kinship caregivers that reflects the unique and complex realities of kinship families, regardless of guardianship orders, and supports these families throughout the child's development?**

ECONOMIC EQUALITY RESOURCES

- First Call's *2016 BC Child Poverty Report Card*: stillin5.ca
- Living Wage for Families Campaign: livingwageforfamilies.ca
- CCPA-BC Poverty Reduction Plan: policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/poverty-reduction-plan-bc
- SPARC BC: sparc.bc.ca/resources-and-publications/category/43/poverty
- Campaign 2000 National Child Poverty Report Card: campaign2000.ca
- BC Poverty Reduction Coalition: bcpovertyreduction.ca
- Raise the Rates Coalition: raisetherates.org
- Parent Support Services Society of BC, Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: parentsupportbc.ca/grandparents_raising_grandchildren
- We Can't Afford Poverty: nopovertybc.ca
- BC Teachers' Federation: bctf.ca/povertyresearch

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Key 4: Safe and caring communities

Families should be able to rely on provincial (and federal) legislation to provide minimum standards for keeping children and youth safe in all aspects of community life. This includes employment standards if they enter the workforce and protective legislation to keep the physical environment clean and healthy for growing bodies.

All provincial legislation and policy should prioritize the immediate and long-term best interests of BC's children and youth based on the research evidence of potential harms and hazards. Child and youth rights and well-being should not be an afterthought or subordinate to powerful economic interests.

Protecting children and youth in the workforce

- In 2003 the BC government amended the *Employment Standards Act* to lower the BC work-start age to 12 and removed the role of the Employment Standards Branch in issuing work permits for children 12 to 14.
- WorkSafe BC's data showed a tenfold increase in accepted injury claims for 12 to 14 year olds over a four-year period after the change in legislation.
- BC is the only Canadian province that does not set out in law or regulation the occupations, tasks or time of day (other than during school hours) for the employment of children.

Q: If elected, will your party raise BC's work-start age up to 16 in compliance with international standards and improve legislative protections and enforcement for children in the workforce?

COSMETIC PESTICIDE BAN

- More than 100 studies have linked pesticide exposure to both adult and childhood cancers.
- Children are especially vulnerable to the effects of pesticides because they are closer to the ground, they are more likely to put things in their mouths and their bodies are still developing.

Q: If elected, will your party bring in a complete province-wide ban on the sale and use of cosmetic pesticides?

MARKETING JUNK FOOD TO CHILDREN AND YOUTH

- New figures show the combined rate of overweight and obesity among three to 19 year olds was at 27 per cent in 2013.
- More than 90 per cent of food and beverage ads viewed by youth online and on TV are for unhealthy products, most of them processed and high in fat, salt or sugar.
- Health organizations like the BC Healthy Living Alliance are calling for governments to tax sugar-sweetened beverages because research shows youth are big consumers of sugary drinks and increased taxes on them will reduce consumption.

New figures show the combined rate of overweight and obesity among three to 19 year olds was at 27 per cent in 2013.

Candidates are listening. Let's get BC's children and youth on the political agenda!



- BC children should be protected from the marketing of products that jeopardize their health. Since 1980, Quebec's *Consumer Protection Act* has prohibited commercial advertising intended for persons under 13 years of age. BC could do this, too.

Q: Are you in favour of an additional provincial excise tax on sugar-sweetened beverage products?

Q: Are you in favour of amending BC's *Business Practices and Consumer Protection Act* to prohibit commercial advertising directed at children under 13 years of age?

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, YOUTH AND CHILDREN

Violence against women, youth and children in BC is an ongoing public health and safety crisis that remains a devastating daily reality for many. This violence affects people of all social, economic and cultural backgrounds, can result in lifelong impacts and creates an overwhelming health, social and economic burden mostly borne by women and their children.

- Every year, more than 18,000 women and children access transition and safe houses to escape violence.
- The limited capacity of transition houses and the lack of options following a stay means women and children who have left violence are at risk of homelessness,

couch-surfing, living in vehicles or other unsafe and substandard accommodation or returning to the abuser.

Q: What will your party do to make housing affordable and available specifically for women and their children who are experiencing violence?

Q: There is no provincial program that addresses the prevention of violence against women and their children in BC schools. How will your party take initiative to prevent violence against women and children?

Q: How will your party reduce the disproportionate number of Indigenous women and girls being murdered and going missing?

SAFE AND CARING COMMUNITIES RESOURCES

- Child Labour in BC: firstcallbc.org/child-labour-in-bc
- BC Employment Standards Coalition: bcemploymentstandardscoalition.com
- Pesticide Free BC: pesticidefreebc.org
- *The kids are not alright*: heartandstroke.ca/what-we-do/media-centre/report-on-health
- BC Healthy Living Alliance: bchealthyliving.ca/makebchealthier4kids
- BC Society of Transition Houses: bcsth.ca/blog/2017-election-toolkit/