



SUBMISSION: BC BUDGET 2024

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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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ABOUT FIRST CALL

First Call Child and Youth Advocacy Society is a registered charity based in British Columbia. First Call's advocacy is informed by the cross-sectoral expertise and province-wide reach of our diverse network of affiliates who have united their voices to put children and youth first in British Columbia through public education, community mobilization, and public policy advocacy.

Network affiliates work together to make sure all BC's children and youth benefit from the 4 Keys to Success for Children and Youth:

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

INTRODUCTION

First Call Child and Youth Advocacy Society works in partnership with a non-partisan, cross-sectoral network of over 100 affiliate organizations, individuals and local communities who share the belief that children and youth should have "first call" on our province's resources.

Our vision: The rights of BC's children and youth are respected, and they have the opportunities and resources required to grow and thrive.

RECOMMENDATION 1

- Invest in targeted child poverty reduction efforts to help those with higher poverty rates, including children in lone-parent, Indigenous and racialized families, immigrants/refugees, youth leaving care and those living with disabilities, through direct income supports, welfare rate increases, family-supporting wages, increased protections for precariously employed workers, rent controls, and childcare investments.

EXPLANATION

In 2020, the child poverty rate in British Columbia was 13.3% as measured by Statistics Canada's Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM) after income taxes, using taxfiler data, representing 116,500 children.

The child poverty rate for children in lone-parent families was 38.3%. 59% of poor BC children in 2020 lived in lone-parent families, and the \$500 annual single parent supplement to the BC Family Benefit is a welcome improvement.

The average child poverty rate on 59 BC First Nations reserves in 2020 was 29.2%, with at least 3,900 children living in poverty. The median annual income of poor BC families with children ranged from \$11,000 to \$12,000 below the poverty line.

Child poverty rates dropped in 2020 thanks to pandemic income supports. Yet, we know the pandemic disproportionately impacted women's employment, especially single mothers, and other groups with

high poverty rates. As these emergency income supports ended, lower-income families with children are now facing a crisis due to inflation in rent, food, transportation costs and other essentials.

First Call's recommendations are informed by our [2022 BC Child Poverty Report Card](#):

- continue to index the BC Family Benefit to inflation in Budget 2024 and increase BC's social assistance rates significantly;
- tie rent controls to the unit, urgently increase government investments in affordable housing and increase portable rental housing supplements for families living in poverty;
- continuing to raise the minimum wage to respond to inflation will help reduce the depth of working poverty for families with children, as will ensuring they have access to affordable, quality child care;
- ensure all government employees are paid living wages and funded social service organizations are able to do the same;
- ensure parents in precarious jobs have access to health benefits, in addition to child care; and
- address income inequality with tax reform to capture untaxed wealth.

RECOMMENDATION 2

- Ensure the 2024 budget focuses on prevention and early intervention through accelerated investments in quality child care, including a wage grid for early childhood educators, and increased funding for early intervention supports and therapies and SCD Program access, Young Parent Programs and non-barriered family support services throughout BC.

EXPLANATION

HELP data tells us that the percentage of children entering kindergarten with developmental vulnerabilities has grown to 33.4% in BC.

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

A key solution to the child care recruitment and 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, the investments in new spaces will not materialize as real options for parents. Opening more 10aDay child care sites is also crucial, especially for low-income and single-parent families.

Young Parent Programs are highly successful in helping young parents continue their education, get jobs, secure their children's return from government care, and support their children for school entry. These programs need additional investments around the province.

Inequities in provincial funding for supports and services for urban and off-reserve Indigenous children and families have been identified, particularly in child welfare funding, and this discrimination must be remedied. This includes the need for enhanced investments in Aboriginal Infant Development and Supported Child Development Programs.

MCFD's review of service delivery for Children and Youth with Support Needs must commit to increased investments to eliminate waitlists/wait times for time-sensitive interventions for children and ensuring equitable access to necessary supports and services throughout the province.

Increased funding is required for Family Resources Programs to provide barrier-free drop-in programming and combat isolation for families with young children.

RECOMMENDATION 3

- Improve supports for school-age children through increased K-12 public education funding to reduce inequities, increased investments in school-age child care, enhanced funding for mental health services for this age group and funding universal healthy school food programs, especially to meet the nutritional needs of low-income students.

EXPLANATION

K-12 spending continues to be inadequate to address the issues facing public schools, with only 1.7% of BC's GDP spent on public education in 2021, compared to 2.8% in 2001. Inequities between "have" and "have-not" schools and districts remain a problem, as schools are forced to rely on parent fundraising and some districts have more fee-paying international students.

Underfunding means children with diverse learning needs are not appropriately included and many are often sent home from school when supports are insufficient in the school setting. The inequities exacerbated by the COVID19 pandemic require increased investment in both educational supports and mental health supports.

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 extra support and diverse learning needs.

Budget 2024 must accelerate funding for Integrated Child and Youth Teams in more communities. Lack of access to school-age child care means many parents are restricted in their ability to work sufficient hours to earn enough income to afford essential living expenses. Expansion of these before- and after-school child care programs, preferably on school sites, is an urgent poverty reduction measure.

New provincial investments in school food programming are welcome and should be targeted to build capacity and increase readiness for schools to deliver and expand on healthy food programs, including creating a dedicated multi-year funding stream for school food programs to increase students' access to healthy food at school.