



## Submission to the National Housing Council Review Panel on the Lack of Accessible Housing in Canada

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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 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 B.C.

We are committed to achieving the following 4 Keys to Success for B.C.'s 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

## **Submission to the National Housing Council review panel on the lack of accessible housing in Canada**

As a youth and child advocacy network in BC, we have heard from many parents about the lack of accessible housing in Canada and how it is affecting families.

Our vision is that the right to safe, appropriate, accessible housing for all children in Canada is respected in practice, as committed to in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child:<sup>1</sup>

### Article 23

1. States Parties recognize that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community.

### Article 27

1. States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.

3. States Parties, in accordance with national conditions and within their means, shall take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.

Our 2023 report, *[A Failure to Protect, The Denial of Children's Right to Housing in British Columbia](#)*, examined housing rights for children and youth through the experiences of families who faced challenges securing housing. 31% of parent survey respondents (64 parents) had a family member with a disability (parent, child or both).

### *Affordability*

The high price of housing, including the rents that are out of reach for many middle- and low-income families, make it extremely challenging for many families raising children with disabilities to secure safe, appropriate housing. We regularly hear from families raising children with disabilities and know that caregiving responsibilities often limit the ability of parents to work full-time, part-time or at all.

The recommendations for policy reform in our research report include increasing shelter allowance and disability assistance rates for families on BC's social assistance program,

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations. (1989, November 20). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

so families with children do not end up with insufficient income to buy groceries and other necessities after paying rent.

We also call on our governments to provide improved financial assistance to families raising children with disabilities and complex medical conditions to accommodate their housing needs, including upfront grants for accessibility and safety renovations.

### *Discrimination*

In our research, 53%, or 34 of 64 families affected by disabilities, reported that they'd experienced discrimination in accessing housing ([see graphs on pages 20, 21 and 22](#)). Families living with disabilities told us in our listening circles and survey responses that they experienced discrimination because they cannot work, and some landlords refuse to rent to people on social assistance.

Our BC Human Rights Tribunal case law review for this project found one instance where a father filed a tenancy discrimination complaint on behalf of his 10-year-old disabled son under section 10 of the BC Human Rights Code and won. Making a claim of discrimination to the BC Human Rights Tribunal is an impractical solution to the denial of the right to housing for most families because it has long wait times, historically has offered limited compensation for successful claims, and has barriers to access, especially for families who are already in crisis or financial distress as they try to secure housing.

### *Child Apprehensions*

When parents taking our survey were asked if they were concerned that their child or children might be taken into care because of their housing situation, families with disabilities were much more likely to have this fear; 69% of parents with a disability said apprehension was a concern, while only 10% of parents with no disabilities shared this concern.

As well, five of the six parents who said that housing was a barrier to getting their child out of government care had a disability.

### *Waiting for availability*

Our research found that families with disabilities wait a lot longer for appropriate housing than families with no disability, and many were still waiting.

### *Homelessness*

The number of parents who said they have experienced homelessness before was also much higher for those with disabilities at 65%, compared to those without disabilities at 13%.

We hope these findings from our research report into children’s right to housing in BC help inform the national review of housing rights for people with disabilities more generally and serve as a reminder of Canada’s obligations to uphold children’s rights and well-being.