



Thank you for the opportunity to present to the Legislative Assembly Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services. I'm here today to represent the BC Association of Child Development and Intervention, or BCACDI.

Who We Are

BCACDI member agencies, commonly referred to as Child Development Centres, are recognized leaders in innovation and collaboration who deliver services to children and youth with special needs to help them reach their full potential. We're skilled at delivering these essential services in the most cost-effective way. Our member agencies and their employees deliver services to 15,000 children, youth and their families across B.C. to help them manage health, developmental and social barriers. We're there, changing the future for them. Child development centres have been building stronger futures for British Columbians for more than four decades. Our non-profit organizations are community-based and accountable to committed volunteer boards.

Programs and services our member agencies deliver include Early Intervention Therapies to assist with mobility, daily function, and communication challenges (Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Speech-Language Pathology), Infant Development Program to provide support and advice to families during the critical first few years of life, and Supported Child Development Program to provide the support for children and youth with special needs to participate in community child care settings and preschools.

Current Challenges

After nearly a decade of frozen base contract funding for the foundational programs our agencies deliver, Government is now directing new resources to the sector through MCFD's Multi Year Action Plan. BCACDI appreciates the new resources being directed towards early intervention, as for the past decade families in BC trying to access these programs have faced lengthy wait times and low intensity of service. New resources will allow agencies to better support their communities, increase family capacity, and facilitate the development of children and youth to their full potential. As new resources are just being rolled out halfway through this fiscal year, it will be a challenge to determine the full impact of this funding in the short term.

1. Future Funding for Foundational Programs

Local BCACDI agencies are well in tune with the specific needs of their communities, and the programs and services requiring significant new investment. Through collaboration with agency leaders and a transparent resource allocation process, BCACDI member agencies can help ensure children and families facing the most significant wait for service and with the most significant need are reached first through the new funding.

Government's approach to childcare over the past decade has been a good example of what happens without adequate input from stakeholders such as BCACDI. The Supported Child Development Program provides the expertise and support

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to help children and youth with special needs participate in child care and preschool settings. A decade long lack of investment has resulted in lengthy wait times for children and youth with special needs and their families requiring access to this program. For the last several years Government has prioritized increasing the number of child care spaces in the Province without a concurrent increase to Supported Child Development budgets. Thus, new spaces created in BC are not equally accessible to all children and youth.

Solution:

Specific to Supported Child Development, Government and the sector need to implement a strategy that looks at the specific child care needs of each community, examines existing access issues for families that would benefit from Supported Child Development, and the implications of increasing a community's number of child care spaces.

Specific to all foundational programs for children and youth with special needs, we look forward to continuing to work with Government to identify the programs and communities still in need of resources. Further, we recommend a long-term commitment to consistent base contract funding increases to match the increased expenses associated with operating an agency and the increasing demand for services.

2. Resources for capital projects

As demand for service increases and infrastructure ages, there is a need for capital funding to support the ability for agencies to improve their facilities to effectively and safely deliver service. Agencies currently rely exclusively on fund raising to meet these demands, which places agencies in rural and remote areas without access to corporate support at a distinct disadvantage.

Solution:

A consistent and equitable process for contracted agencies to apply for Government funding for capital projects.

3. Early Intervention Therapies and School Age Therapies – Service Equity

The majority of our member agencies employ Physiotherapists, Occupational Therapists, and Speech Language Pathologists for delivery of programs such as Early Intervention Therapies and School Age Therapies. These programs are accessible by children and youth demonstrating developmental delay, regardless of a diagnosis, and families can self-refer. Several years ago BC created an Individualized Funding program for children and youth diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. This program provides public dollars for families with children with ASD to access to purchase services for their child, including therapy services. In many communities, this has created a burgeoning private therapies sector and is impacting public sector recruitment and retention. In addition, families able to access this Individualized Funding typically have less of a wait time for service. This has created two systems of service that are not equitable in terms of access, and in many cases also has significant differences in intensity levels.

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BCACDI
The BC Association for Child Development and Intervention

Solution:

This challenge requires broad stakeholder discussion. We look forward to working with Government to explore strategies to help make access to therapy services equitable for all children and youth in BC, regardless of what their diagnosis may be and irrespective of the service delivery model they choose.

Positive Impact on Society

For more than 40 years Child Development Centres have provided the Government early intervention services that help kids reach their full developmental potential. These kids then enter the school system better equipped to manage the trials and tribulations of their education years, requiring less supports and assistance. These young adults then transition to adulthood having acquired skills and strategies to help them participate in society and lead adult lives requiring fewer supports and services. A well-resourced team of early intervention professionals supports and builds capacity in some of our highest need families and children. This helps keep children at home longer, potentially inhibiting the need and/or intensity of residential services (i.e. – children in care). We look forward to continued collaboration with our Government partners and effective investment of public dollars to help build capacity in the communities we serve.

We trust our submission has provided rationale for the importance of investing in early childhood development, and we look forward to continuing to work with our government partners to meet the needs of BC's children and youth. If you have any questions regarding this presentation please don't hesitate to contact Jason Gordon, Provincial Representative for the BC Association of Child Development and Intervention (BCACDI).

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Provincial Advocate, BCACDI

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