

# Disability and Accessibility

## Creating a province that enables all people with disabilities to live and thrive with dignity

### HOW WE'RE THINKING ABOUT THIS

Creating a safer and more inclusive province requires a holistic approach that addresses multiple facets of accessibility and support so that those in our province with disabilities can live with dignity and financial security.

We recognize that policies on disability and accessibility must be informed by, and led by, people with disabilities.

Our vision focuses on three key areas:

1. **Accessibility:** We will implement policies that ensure people with disabilities can safely access public spaces and fully participate in society.
2. **Financial Support:** We will provide assistance that ensures individuals and families living with disabilities can achieve a livable income and maintain their dignity.
3. **Awareness and Education:** To truly transform society's understanding of disability, we must shift the perception and eliminate ableism. This requires both cultural and political change—and the government must lead by amplifying the voices of the disability movement.

### PROBLEM DEFINITION

Ableism continues to persist, both in our province and across Canada. Too often, the design of spaces, events, and structures is centered around the able-bodied. When society and infrastructure are built with able-bodied presumptions like this, it results in large swaths of the population being excluded and left behind. It's essential that we move away from this mindset and work towards a world where all people—regardless of their abilities or disabilities—are able to participate fully in society.

People with disabilities are discriminated against in all areas of society, but this discrimination is particularly dangerous in healthcare settings. Social assistance programs, like Persons With Disabilities assistance, require medical forms from a physician. Due to the lack

of primary healthcare in BC, the process for attaining this is often onerous or nearly impossible. Lack of financial support for people with disabilities can lead to deep poverty and result in devastating outcomes, such as severe harm or death due to a lack of nourishing food, clean water, shelter, or health care.

People can be born with disabilities, become disabled suddenly or develop disabilities slowly over time. The COVID-19 pandemic showed how quickly people can become disabled, at any place and any time. Additionally, Black, Indigenous, People of Colour, Women, LGBTQ+ people, people with lower incomes, and those with other intersecting, marginalized identities can be more at risk of being or becoming disabled. Although progress has been made, the BC government has done an insufficient job of addressing all the barriers that prevent people from accessing support and services. When we discuss improving accessibility and the living conditions for people with disabilities in BC, it is essential to apply an intersectional lens. We must ask the question: who is not being served by our current policies and how can we better meet their needs?

### POLICIES FOR ANNOUNCEMENT

#### **Enhance workplace accessibility grants and raise awareness about accessibility needs to create inclusive environments for all individuals.**

- Increase funding for Small Business BC's Workplace Accessibility Grant from \$450,000 to \$2 million annually. Eligible small businesses will continue to receive up to \$40,000 to make their workplaces more accessible.
- Expand awareness and education campaigns in elementary, secondary and post-secondary institutions. These campaigns will focus on creating safer and more inclusive learning environments for students with disabilities and raising awareness about ableism and its harmful effects.

- In consultation with the Provincial Accessibility Committee, create a comprehensive guidebook for ensuring public events meet all accessibility requirements. Considerations include: sign language interpreters, ramps, automatic doors, scent-free policies, and low-stimulation spaces to ensure events are accessible to all individuals.

**Improve home accessibility for seniors and people with disabilities to promote independent living and enhance safety in emergencies.**

- Increase the scope of the Home Improvement Assistance Program, which provides eligible seniors, people with disabilities, and landlords with rebates of up to \$20,000 per home for modifications that promote accessible, safe and independent living.
- Implement the recommendations from the Coroner's Inquest into the 2022 Winters SRO fire, particularly funding all necessary assistive devices to eliminate barriers to safety for residents with mobility or hearing disabilities.
- Mandate that all residential buildings have emergency evacuation plans that address the needs of residents with mobility or other access requirements to ensure safe evacuations in emergencies.

**Improve the quality and responsiveness of services provided by Community Living BC to ensure that the needs of individuals and caregivers are adequately met.**

- We will conduct an audit of Community Living BC (CLBC) to identify gaps in service delivery. Implement all audit recommendations to ensure that CLBC provides excellent service that meets the needs of those giving and receiving care.

**Ensure public spaces are equipped with clean air measures to protect vulnerable populations from respiratory threats.**

- Ensure public spaces across British Columbia are equipped with air filtration systems to reduce the health impacts of COVID-19, respiratory viruses, and wildfire smoke, especially for people with disabilities and compromised immune systems.

- The Clean Air Act, introduced in Spring 2024, demonstrates a commitment to creating safe, accessible public spaces. This legislation focuses on improving air quality and public health protections for all British Columbians, particularly those most vulnerable.

**Remove barriers to accessing necessary support for individuals with permanent disabilities.**

- Work with the Health and SDPR Ministries, along with the Provincial Accessibility Committee, to evaluate changes to the PWD application process, reducing complexity and eliminating barriers for applicants.
- Ensure individuals with permanent disabilities do not need to repeatedly submit medical forms. Streamline the process by allowing a one-time submission of medical documentation for those with permanent diagnoses, reducing delays and frustration for applicants.

**Ensure that people with neurodiverse conditions, particularly students, receive the support and services they need to thrive in educational settings and beyond.**

- Expand the discussion of accessibility to include neurodiverse individuals, such as those with autism, ADHD, dyspraxia, dyslexia and Tourette's. Create environments that are inclusive of all abilities and accommodate the needs of all individuals, including those with down syndrome.
- Provide additional funding to increase the number of Education Assistants (EAs) in classrooms, provide regulation tools for students, and continue individualized autism funding. Invest in early identification and diagnosis, ensuring neurodiverse students receive appropriate support throughout their education.